Inside and Outside:
An Investigation of Social Media Use by Australian Defence Force Partners

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Abstract

Those who love and marry serving members are impacted by their military service. Partners experience the effects of deployment and relocation differently to serving members, but still profoundly, with impacts on their emotional, physical and mental well-being. Partners, in their support of the member, play a critical role in military capability. Partners directly impact the availability of the member for deployment and partners who are resilient and cope well with the significant demands of military life are more capable of supporting the member's ongoing enlistment.

Studies which focus on the needs of Australian Defence Force (ADF) partners are limited, despite previous research indicating the importance of partners to Defence capability. Studies of ADF partners conducted since 2009 by the Department of Defence and Defence Families of Australia indicate a shift in support-seeking and interaction; away from ADF-associated support organisations like the Defence Community Organisation (DCO) to informal support sources, including groups on social media sites. These Facebook groups, created by ADF partners and designed to connect the ADF family community, appeared to be offering partners access to information and support. This thesis is the first to investigate the communication, information and community needs of ADF partners, with a focus on social media use.

This study collected qualitative data about ADF partners, providing insight into this highly influential yet under-studied group. This study investigated four research questions, all of which sought to understand the role online support communities perform in the life of ADF partners. This study used a digital (social media) ethnographic and sociological framework, collecting the insights and experiences of 35 partners through semi-structured interviews and focus groups. 34 of the participants were female, with one male participant. Transcripts of the interviews and focus groups were thematically analysed to generate five main findings, each which focuses on one aspect of ADF partner use of social media; community, networks, trust, identity and security. These five themes are explored individually in dedicated chapters. Also, this study uniquely contributes an insider researcher approach to understanding the issue.

Through the application of Anthony Giddens' theory of late-modernity, this thesis found ADF partners, who operate in this late-modernity society, do not have their social and

informational needs met by the modernist ADF organisation. This is evident through the interactions with virtual communities, as well by partners having reduced trust in the ADF. This study demonstrates ADF partners use social media as a network for navigating their inherently risky lives. Social media and informal support networks fill gaps in ADF-affiliated services in a way that best aligns with their ideology. This study argues the ADF is an abstract organisation and military-provided supports operate as access points to that system. Partners' interactions on social media provide evidence of their interaction within that system. The study offers recommendations to the ADF and affiliated support organisations. These recommendations include aligning ADF support systems with partner values through changes to the DCO model and online security training. These findings are critical for those who work with and support ADF families to perform their essential role alongside serving military members.

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I have drafted this section many times in my mind over the last three years, especially in moments when it seemed like the end would never arrive. I can hardly believe that it has finally come time to put these thoughts to paper.

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Finally, I am thankful for ADF Partners, who stand silently and steadfastly alongside. Your persistence, strength and patience are inspiring to me, and I thank you for permitting me to represent your voices. I hope most of all that I have done you justice.

Declaration of Authorship and Originality

I, the undersigned author, declare that all of the research and discussion presented in this thesis is original work performed by the author. No content of this thesis has been submitted or considered either in whole or in part, at any tertiary institute or university for a degree or any other category of award. I also declare that any material presented in this thesis performed by another person or institute has been referenced and listed in the reference section.

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List of Publications and Declarations of Co-Authorship

List of Publications Arising from the Thesis

Johnson, A, Lawson, C, Ames, K (2018), 'Use your common sense, don't be an idiot: Australian Defence Force partners attitudes towards social media security', *Security Challenges Journal,* vol. 14, issue 1, p. 53-64.

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Johnson, A (accepted), 'ForceNet vs Facebook: Why ForceNet won't win the battle with ADF families', *Australian Defence Force Journal.*

Johnson, A (under review), 'I get by with a little help from my friends: friendship and focus groups', *Insider Research*. Book chapter following 2015 CQU Education and the Arts Symposium.

Conference Presentations

Johnson, A and Ames, K, (2018), 'Drawing on weak ties: Defence Force family use of social media networks to negotiate community, organisation and information', paper presented at Digital Society: New Frontiers in Sociological Research Symposium, Canberra ACT.

Johnson, A, Lawson, C, Ames, K (2018), 'Are you really one of us? : Exploring ethics, risk and insider research in a private Facebook community', paper presented at the International Conference on Social Media and Society (SMSociety), Copenhagen Denmark.

Johnson, A (2017), 'Can anyone recommend a good hairdresser? Reflections on the Australian Defence Force, social media and gender', paper presented at the WACCM Gender and the Everyday Conference, Perth WA.

Johnson, A (2017), 'It's what you signed up for: a review into Australian Defence Force partners and identity', paper presented at Beyond Combat Conference, Canberra ACT.

Johnson, A (2016), 'Giddens, Military Families and the Fifth Estate', abstract presented at ANZCA Annual Conference, Newcastle NSW.

Johnson, A (2016), 'Conducting Research Online: The challenges and ethics of online ethnography, paper presented at CQU Education and the Arts Symposium, Brisbane QLD.

Johnson, A (2015), 'I get by with a little help from my friends: Friendship and Focus Groups', paper presented at CQU Education and the Arts Symposium, Brisbane QLD.

List of Publications Contributed to During Candidature

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DECLARATION OF CO-AUTHORSHIP AND CONTRIBUTION
For papers appearing in this thesis

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Amy Johnson (90%)
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Data collection
Data analysis and interpretation
Drafting the article
Critical revision of the article
Final approval of the version to be published

Nature of all Co-Authors' Contributions, including percentage of total

Celeste Lawson (5%) and Kate Ames (5%)
Critical revision of the article
Final approval of the version to be published

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Abbreviations

ADF   Australian Defence Force

DCO   Defence Community Organisation

DFA   Defence Families of Australia

DHA   Defence Housing Australia

DoD   Department of Defence

OPSEC   Operational Security

PERSEC   Personal Security

VVCS   Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service

Chapter 1.
Introduction

It is a scenario as old as time. A uniformed soldier, sailor or airperson, standing at the ready, heading off to serve and protect the interests of their home nation. Their mind is already engaged with the mission ahead, disengaging from the family standing beside them. As they leave, the family waves goodbye, praying for the member's prompt and safe return home. The family returns from the farewell ready to continue the steady forward pace of life; paid employment, volunteering activities, caring for pets, children and ageing family members. As the deployment progresses, the home-based family provides the absent member with links to home and emotional support. The task of the military partner is performed discreetly, attracting only minor attention from both the military and the academic community. Researchers and the broader military network see the necessity of providing a variety of support to members during and after their military service, from lessons on military strategy to logistics and healthcare. Despite the vital role they play alongside the enlisted member, still little is understood about the needs of the family who are left behind.

With over 59,000 people serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) (Australian Government Department of Defence 2016a), the resulting impact on families and loved ones is significant. Understanding the needs of the ADF community is essential, especially given the role the partner plays in enabling the member's ability to serve. Research conducted in 2009 highlighted the role of partners in aiding service retention and combat readiness (Atkins 2009). Strong social and community connections contribute to enhanced well-being for military partners (Cigrang et al. 2014; Greene et al. 2010; Rossetto 2013). In the current technology-driven environment, community connections are being created, maintained and strengthened online. Likewise, ADF partners are active on social media and predominantly use the social networking site Facebook (Brown & Wensing 2016). The methods with which military families communicate with each other and their community have been less researched than other elements of military life. Globally, the impact of social networking sites, including Facebook, have made a significant impact on the way people communicate.

This study used a digital (social media) ethnographic and sociological framework for developing an understanding of how ADF partners interact online. Thirty-five partners of currently serving or recently discharged ADF personnel participated in focus groups and interviews. These interviews were transcribed and thematically analysed to generate five themes which were: community, networks, trust, security, and identity. These themes generated findings which are explored individually in five findings chapters. Through the application of Anthony Giddens' theory of late-modernity, this thesis found ADF partners, who operate in this

late-modern society, do not have their social and informational needs met by the modernist ADF organisation. This is evident through the interactions with virtual communities, as well as by partners having reduced trust in the ADF. This study demonstrates ADF partners use social media as a network for navigating their inherently risky lives. Social media and informal support fill gaps in services in a way that aligns best with their ideology. This study argues that the ADF is an abstract organisation and military-provided supports operate as access points to that system. Partners' interactions on social media provide evidence of their interaction within that system. The study closes by offering recommendations to the ADF and military-provided support organisations. These recommendations include aligning partner values to ADF support systems, through changes to the DCO model and online security training.

This chapter provides an introduction and overview of the study. The first half of this chapter outlines the problem by identifying a gap in communication between ADF partners and the broader ADF organisation. This chapter provides the background literature on ADF partners, identifying the limited research about partners, despite the significant impact military service has on their lives and well-being, and the critically important role partners play in the operational ability of the ADF. This chapter then offers a statement of research reflexivity and declares the insider status of the researcher, as the partner of a currently serving Royal Australian Navy member. The chapter then outlines the significance of the study and the contribution to knowledge made. The second half of this chapter outlines how the study was designed to investigate and solve the problem. It outlines the aims, objectives and research questions which guided the study and gives an overview of the critical findings of the study, as well as the study's limitations. In closing, this chapter provides a complete overview of the thesis and its twelve chapters.

1.1   Background Literature

This section will provide a comprehensive review of the existing literature on ADF families in Australia, exploring what is currently know about ADF families, how ADF families use social media and the importance of communication and support.

The mission of the ADF is to defend Australia and its interests, through the provision of military capabilities (Australian Government Department of Defence 2017). The ADF consists of three main services, the Royal Australian Navy, the Australian Army, and the Royal Australian Air Force, as well as the ADF Reserves and members of the Australian Public

Service (Australian Government Department of Defence n.d.-a). As at June 2017, the ADF had 58,612 permanent members (Australian Government Department of Defence 2017). The number of permanent members is reported to increase to over 62,000 members over the coming years, to support Government investments into Defence (Australian Government Department of Defence 2016b). The majority of permanent members are male (81%), with a median age of 31 years, and most likely to be married (41%) (Australian Government Department of Defence 2015). Senior ranked ADF members were more likely to be married or in dependent relationships than younger members (Australian Government Department of Defence 2015). The ADF recognises several different family structures. These include civilian and ADF couples, dual ADF couples and ADF single parents (Brown & Wensing 2016). There has not yet been an ADF report which generated precise information about the number and demographics of ADF partners.

In 2018, the ADF was active in several operations, both within Australia's borders and internationally (Australian Government Department of Defence n.d.-b). These operations, along with other service-related obligations, require enlisted members to be separated from their homes and families. The 2015 ADF census reported that 30% of permanent members spent 81 to 100 nights away from home on ADF duty that year, with Navy service requiring more time away on average (Australian Government Department of Defence 2015). Further to this, the 2016 ADF Families Report found that 77% of respondents had experienced a deployment. This report also confirmed a higher deployment rate of Navy members, 85% of respondents associated with a Navy member reported experiencing deployment over 75% of respondents associated with the Army and Air Force (Brown & Wensing 2016). However, this report also found that Army families were more likely to experience frequent, shorter absences from home than either of the other services (Brown & Wensing 2016).

The ADF operates from bases located in every state and territory in Australia (Australian Government Department of Defence). Permanent members are posted to these bases and relocate frequently. 51% of permanent ADF members have relocated between one to five times for service related reasons (Australian Government Department of Defence 2015). In a survey of partners the same year, one in ten (11%) respondents stated they had moved at least ten times for service reasons. Most respondents reported their most recent service-related move had been in the previous five years (Brown & Wensing 2016), identifying that military families in Australia relocate frequently.

The ADF has confirmed how important families are to the overall retention and readiness of the Australian Defence Force (Atkins 2009); however, despite the value the families provide to the mission of the ADF, research related to Australian military families is limited. Literature which explores the lives of ADF families and the challenges they face corresponds with what is known about military families globally, where it is recognised that military service, including deployments and relocations, places significant pressure on the family (Biedermann 2017; Elliott & Scott 2001). Partners are at higher risk of depression, anxiety and heightened stress than the broader Australian community (MacDonell, Bhullar & Thorsteinsson 2016), which can be exacerbated by their poorer sleep quality (Quinn 2017). ADF families can encounter additional stressors due to the uniqueness of Australian geography, which Foreman (2001) highlighted in the study of ADF families in rural and regional posting locations, such as Townsville. Foreman suggests the unavailability of extended family support networks and specialist medical or educational support, as well as severe climate conditions, place additional stress on the family unit.

The limited literature available on ADF partners is drawn from quantitative and qualitative research, as well as non-academic sources. The work of doctoral students in this space has been significant, as these theses represent the majority of the limited academic material available. Siebler (2009) developed a framework which demonstrated the challenge and complexity of deployment as faced by ADF families. In developing this framework, Siebler (2009) found that military life permeates every aspect of life for families. More recently, Bakhurst (2015) found relationship education for military couples has to be tailored to account for the unique factors and stressors in their relationships.

One of the earliest and most influential reports regarding ADF families was compiled in 1986, by Sue Hamilton, Assistant Secretary for the Office of the Status of Women. In a report prepared for the Minister for Defence at the time, Hamilton investigated the primary issues faced by families and partners, including employment difficulties, the impact of deployments and relocations, as well as an evaluation of living and support facilities (Hamilton 1986). After speaking with over 4300 people at Australian military bases, as well as accepting written and telephone submissions, Hamilton issued the report based on her impressions from these meetings, rather than conducting a formal qualitative or quantitative investigation. Hamilton's study went on to significantly shape the ADF community. Her recommendations included an immediate commitment to boost family morale, which she considered to be low at the time. Hamilton also recommended the creation of the Australian Defence Families Information and

Liaison Service, which later transitioned into the organisation currently known as the Defence Community Organisation. One aim of the Australian Defence Families Information and Liaison Service was to link families with information and support services, a need that Hamilton identified as significant at the time.

Samantha Atkins conducted the first formal quantitative study on ADF families (2009). Atkins sought to understand the relationship between the demands of military service, family obligations and retention, organisational and family factors which promote family adaptation, and also to evaluate family support programs to promote well-being. This study included the views and opinions of 5749 Defence Force families. The Atkins report identified communication as an essential need for families, especially during deployments. Atkins also identified the association between communication, trust and member retention. Following this report, the Defence Community Organisation and Defence Families of Australia have conducted semi-regular surveys of ADF families. These quantitative reports investigate the impacts of service on the lives of families. The most recent survey of families, conducted as a joint initiative between DCO and DFA and released in 2017, focused specifically on issues of partner employment, childcare and partner wellbeing (Atkins et al. 2017). This report found that levels of awareness of Defence support services are widely varied.

This section has provided a review of the literature relating to ADF families. It identified that research regarding ADF families is limited, despite acknowledgements that ADF partners provide a critical role in supporting the member. ADF families face unique challenges through their association with the ADF

1.1.1 Communication, Social Media and ADF Families

The literature discussed in the previous section identified the gap in communication, where families are reporting they do not receive sufficient communication from the ADF organisation. This section will explore that gap in greater depth, investigating literature regarding ADF families and communication. This section also presents reports that families have turned to social media for meeting their communication needs and reviews the literature regarding ADF families and social media.

Internet use in Australia, in accordance with the rest of the world, has continued to grow (Sensis 2017). 60% of Australians use the internet more than 5 times a day, and the average person owns 3.5 internet enabled devices (Sensis 2018). One of the most popular

activities for individuals accessing the internet is social media. Social media refers to online interactions where people create and share information over digital communities and networks (Rice 2016). In a detailed report into social media use in Australia, 88% of respondents to the 2018 Sensis Social Media Report stated that they had a social media profile. 34% of these people checked their social media accounts more than once per day, where they primarily caught up with friends and family (85%) (Sensis 2018).

Facebook is currently the most accessed social networking site in Australia, 60% of Australians are active Facebook users (Cowling 2018) who spend on average nearly 10 hours a week on the site (Sensis 2018). Facebook began in 2004, when Harvard University student Mark Zuckerberg launched 'The Facebook', an online site which replaced a physical print-out of Harvard student contact details. While initially restricted to those with a university email address, in 2006 the site was made available to anyone with a valid email account (Jenkins 2013). Facebook has since become a publicly trading company and in July 2017 surpassed $500 billion in market value, making Mark Zuckerberg one of the wealthiest people in the world (Wieczner 2018). In a relatively short fourteen years, Facebook has completely changed the way society communicates, conducts business and relationships, accesses news and information, and understands privacy (Elgot 2015).

'Groups' are a popular feature on the social networking platform which facilitate discussion between users based on their shared interests (Park, Kee & Valenzuela 2009). There are currently a large number of private Facebook groups populated by ADF partners. ADF partner groups are commonly created and managed by partners, who act as moderators and carefully screen new members to confirm their association with the ADF community. While some groups have a particular topic focus, such as partner employment or housing, others are more general. Membership of these groups fluctuate according to interest and need; partners are frequently members of more than one group at a time. Some groups have smaller membership numbers, with less than 20 partners engaging, while others attract thousands of members.

A common theme in local and international research about military families relates to the need for families to be connected with information and support services. Communication is an on-going area of concern. Communication is an important coping mechanism for families, as well as being key to enhancing family resiliency (Maguire 2015). Foreman (2001) reported that ADF families were unhappy with communication received during absences, and

highlighted the need for additional and more frequent means of communication. Foreman states 'spouses reported information received from the unit is very important to their ability to manage their family and to understand why their partner needs to be away' (2001, p. 168), identifying that families need reassurance and connection with the absent member, as well as support organisations. Likewise, Orme and Kehoe (2011) found that communication issues were present in a review of support received by ADF families during deployment. Their survey of family members from an Australian Army Reserve unit confirmed that communications with their absent loved one reduced uncertainty and anxiety (Orme & Kehoe 2011). Families are generally unsatisfied with communication from the ADF, especially during times of deployment (Atkins 2009; Defence Families of Australia 2014a; Orme & Kehoe 2011). Participants in the Atkins (2009) study reported they received little to no communication from Defence support organisations during their partner's absence. Kaczmarek and Sibbel (2008) state that the coping ability of families is dependent on the ability of the family to have an active and supportive social network, as well as feeling confident in being able to deal with military-related agencies. Despite the apparent link between family wellbeing and communication (Maguire 2015), as well as demands from ADF families for improved communications, no study to date focuses explicitly on this topic.

In 2014, research conducted by the Defence Families of Australia reported ADF families appeared to be using social media networks to interact with the ADF community. Participants in the study indicated they accessed social media networks for support and information, and the study reported that partner interactions with these unofficial sources might be replacing interactions with official ones (Defence Families of Australia 2014b). Facebook is the primary social network used by ADF families, as reported by the Defence Families of Australia 2014 Annual Survey, which found that almost 40% of the 1832 spouses surveyed used Facebook as a tool for communicating with others in the Defence Community. 610 spouses reported accessing Facebook groups created by other Defence partners (Defence Families of Australia 2014b, p. 11).

Despite the critical role communication performs in connecting families with necessary information and support, and suggestions that social media may be playing an important role in connecting families with that information and support (Defence Families of Australia 2014b), there have not been any comprehensive studies which investigate the interactions of ADF partners on social media. Literature which reflects on social media in the context of the ADF focuses on security and operational impacts, rather than a sociological

perspective (Logue 2016; West 2016), including the use of social media to meet the operational objectives of the ADF, as well as vulnerability issues concerned with social media use. In 2011, George Patterson was commissioned to conduct a review of the ADF's social media footprint. The Patterson report evaluated both official and unofficial social media pages, offering findings and suggestions for improvement in retaining operational security conditions while engaging the broader public. Predominantly focusing on social media use by ADF members, Patterson (2011) briefly discussed the social media activities of ADF families in his report, predominantly in regards to promoting operational security principles for families who interacted online. This report was publicly critiqued by social media influencer and trainer Laurel Papworth, who stated that George's Patterson's close association with traditional media networks and the ADF negatively affected the objectivity of the findings (Crook 2011). Papworth, having previously advised the Singapore Ministry of Defence on matters of social media, indicated that the ADF had failed to consider other candidates for the review appropriately, stating that requesting the traditional media conglomerate to review the ADF's use of social media was akin to 'asking the fox to review and report on the hen house' (Crook 2011, p. 1).

This section demonstrated the gap in literature regarding social media use for communication, information sharing and community building amongst the ADF community.

1.1.2 Definitions of Community and Virtual Community

This section will investigate definitions of community and virtual community in order to frame the findings in this study. Defining community is challenging, though most sociologists agree on the standard features of community, which is that communities are places where people with shared commonalities connect. Tonnies (1957) definition of the term is built from a historical basis, arguing the instinct to connect is a biological drive and uses the translation from the original German, where community means 'living thing', or 'essence'. This chapter adopts a definition of community from previous theorists in the field. The first is from Norlin and Chess who define community as 'an inclusive form of social organisation that is territorially based and through which people satisfy their common needs and desires, seek means to advance their well-being, and relate to their society' (1997, p. 55). Hardina (2002) acknowledges critique of Norlin and Chess (1997), which is that it is too focused on geographical location. Durkheim (1956) agrees that communities do not need to be geographically restrained; suggesting modern communities typically develop around specialities, occupations and interests rather than shared physical location. Hardina (2002) then

offers a second definition from Fellin who states that community is 'constituted when a group of people form a social unit based on common location, interest, identification, culture or common activities' (1995, p. 114).

McMillan and Chavis (1986)'s landmark work on sense of community also contributed to building a definition of community. They suggest that a 'sense of community is a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another, and to the group, a shared faith that members needs will be met through their connection to one another' (1986, p. 9). More recently, MacQueen et al. conducted a series of qualitative interviews, in which researchers asked participants what community meant to them. Their answers built the following definition, which is 'a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings' (2011, p. 12).

Equally important in this thesis is an understanding of community as it applies to virtual communities. While definitions of virtual community continue to be argued and refined, this thesis adopts the definition offered by Ridings, Gefen and Arinze which is 'groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organised way over the Internet through a common location or mechanism' (2002, p. 273). According to this definition, the interactions of ADF partners online in Facebook groups are those of a community, because partners are communicating over the Internet, in a shared location which is the Defence partner Facebook group. These communications have taken place for an extended duration of time, and the people in the groups meet due to their common interests, which is their shared identities as the partners of ADF members.

This section has reviewed definitions of community and virtual community and argued the interactions of ADF partners online are a community. This section closes the examination of background literature relevant to ADF partners, including existing knowledge about their communication needs, their social media interactions and the lack of literature regarding ADF partners.

1.2   Researcher Reflexivity

This section declares the insider status of the researcher by making a statement of reflexivity. Qualitative research values the subjective position of the researcher, and in doing so, accepts the influence of the researcher's position, experience and background in the study

(Horsburgh 2003). Reflexivity becomes a critically important issue in qualitative research (Davies 1999), but particularly in this study where the researcher is an insider. In recognition of the need for reflexivity, this study begins with a statement regarding the researcher's position as an insider in the community. The researcher is married to a full-time serving member of the Royal Australian Navy. Together, the family has experienced three interstate relocations, three deployments as well as a series of absent from home periods.

The researcher's position may impact the study in three ways, such as accessing field and shaping relationships with participants (Berger 2015). This statement of reflexivity is concerned with acknowledging the impact of the researcher's worldview and background on the way this study was structured, and the lens applied in selecting a methodology and analysing the data. This statement of reflexivity contributes to other sections of this thesis which acknowledges the insider status of the researcher and considers the impact on the research study, which enhances the credibility, robustness and validity of the study.

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1.3   Significance of the Study

This section will explore the significance of the study, particularly in the way the study impacts partner well-being, the operation of the ADF and provides instruction for ADF organisations. The prolonged absences and frequent relocations that come with military life have many well documented negative aspects (Aducci et al. 2011; Atkins 2009; Karney & Crown 2007). Deployments and military service in general places considerable stress on relationships and well-being of both the family and the serving member (Cafferky & Shi 2015; Elliott & Scott 2001; Wexler & McGrath 1991). Australian studies have also established a link between family well-being and Defence capability and readiness, in the way that families provide support to the serving member (Atkins 2009; Karney & Crown 2007).

Existing research suggests increased communication between the military member and their partner during times of separation, in addition to the spouse having a more established connection with their community, offsets some of these negatives, and generally increases the health and well-being of military families (Cigrang et al. 2014; Greene et al. 2010; Rossetto 2013). In consideration of recent findings which indicate ADF partners may be utilising social media networks for support (Defence Families of Australia 2014b), this study provides necessary information about the needs and lives of ADF partners. Research regarding

Australian families is critical due to the link between support, and partner well-being. Resilient families are skilled communicators, who engage in communicative processes to get support, solve problems and access information (Maguire 2015), therefore having a deep understanding of the communication needs based on the results from this study will assist in building resiliency in ADF families.

The findings in this study are significant because they give direction to ADF organisations, like the Defence Community Organisation, about the needs of modern partners. This has a resulting impact on funding, and the development of resources directed to ADF partners. Also, due to the established link between ADF partners, service retention and operational readiness (Atkins 2009), the findings of this study have the potential to impact the general mission of the ADF.

1.4   Contribution to Knowledge

This section continues the discussion of the significance of the study by outlining the study's contribution to knowledge.

In considering the interactions of ADF partners online, this thesis contributes knowledge to a limited field of study globally. In Australia, research about military partners and families is limited. This is the first study which has performed a comprehensive review of the ADF partner social media interaction, and the first study to consider the communication and community needs of partners in Australia. Through the investigation of ADF partner online interactions, this research contributes to literature regarding the role of ethnography as used in a digital context. This research also contributes to modern understandings of sociological theory, which includes Anthony Giddens theories of trust and late modernity. Sociological reviews of the military typically consider concepts of power and gender. This research contrasts existing studies by offering a sociological view of the military. In particular, this research investigates the way that the military, a modernist organisation, operates in an increasingly late modern environment. This thesis also deepens understanding of ADF families through a qualitative approach, building on existing research to generate new findings.

This section has outlined this study's contribution to knowledge and closes the first half of this chapter, which has identified the gap in the literature, and the communication gap between ADF partners and the wider ADF organisation. (Defence Families of Australia 2014b)

1.5   Aims and Objectives

The second half of this chapter outlines how this study operates to fill this gap. This section outlines the aims and objectives of the study.

This research aimed to investigate social media use by ADF partners to learn more about the needs and behaviours of this community. Research regarding ADF partners is vital due to the essential role partners perform in the wider ADF organisation, including enhancing member retention and operational preparedness (Atkins 2009). Partner well-being and resiliency is therefore critical, and recent research has indicated partners are interacting online to receive information and support (Defence Families of Australia 2014b). The following objectives are designed to achieve the research aim.

This research will:

- Collect qualitative data about social media use from ADF partners in different locations around Australia

- Transcribe this data and perform a qualitative thematic analysis, extracting themes to generate findings which answer the research questions

- From these findings, develop recommendations for the Australian Defence Force, Department of Defence and associated support organisations on the needs of ADF partners.

This section has outlined the aims and objectives of the current study, which is to collect qualitative data which investigates the social media interactions of ADF partners.

1.6   Research Questions

This section continues to establish the research by outlining the research questions. These research questions were developed to meet the aim of the study, which seeks to understand the interactions of ADF partners online. These questions impacted on the structure of the study, including the methods that were chosen to generate responses to these questions. There are four questions.

1. How do partners interact online in Facebook groups?

2. What, if any, services and support do online interactions provide partners, and how does interacting on Facebook impact relationships with ADF-sponsored support providers?

3. What can be learnt about the ADF community from the interactions of ADF partners online?

4. What recommendations can be made to ADF-sponsored support networks, like the Defence Community Organisation, regarding the interactions of ADF partners on social media?

This section has outlined the research questions which guide the current study.

1.7   Limitations

This section concerns itself with disclosing the limitations of the study. These limitations were a social desirability bias in the methods, concerns regarding participant demographics as well as the changing social media environment. The disclosure of these limitations enhances the robustness of the findings.

One perceived limitation of this study is the use of self-reporting data. Data was collected by focus group and interview methods, both of which are subject to social desirability bias. It has been established participants tend to give answers which they perceive as being socially acceptable, or which may endear themselves to the researcher (Weerakkody 2009). Edwards (1957) created the term social desirability in his initial study of the phenomenon. Researchers found participants gave information that they feel might please the interviewer, along with information which presents themselves in the best light, perhaps as they wish to be seen rather than as they are (Dahlgren & Hansen 2015). Careful planning of interview questions as well as creating a non-judgmental atmosphere where participants feel comfortable and safe can overcome the disadvantages of social desirability bias.

Another perceived bias in this study relates to the demographic makeup of the participants, including their gender, educational background and relationship type. Despite the apparent bias present in collecting the insights of women predominantly, this reflects the homogenous makeup of the ADF population. The Defence community is homogenous, as Elizabeth Thomson stated in her 2014 study of Defence language and culture. Thomson states 'Compared to the wider community, Defence is an Anglo-Australian, male-dominated organisations' (Thomson 2014, p. 1). Predominantly, ADF partners are civilian women, married to male serving members. While this study has small numbers of representations from men, non-tertiary educated people and people in same-gendered relationships, it is also typical of the community under study and thus representative.

The views represented in this study are developed primarily from female participants. This study only interviewed one male participant, who was a civilian in a relationship with a female serving partner. Also, there was only one participant in a same-gendered relationship, a

female serving member in a Defence recognised relationship with another female serving member. Increased participation from people in these demographic groups would potentially enhance understanding. The influence of gender and gender orientation within interactions in the ADF community is a potential area for further study.

Many participants held or were currently completing tertiary qualifications. Participants mentioned their tertiary qualifications or current study either during the interview itself or after the interview during casual discussions with the researcher. Information regarding participant education was evident in the researcher's field notes and journal entries. While research which increases participation from civilian men, couples in same-gendered relationships and participants without tertiary qualifications would hold value, this study is a reflection of the community.

The frequently changing nature of social media is another limitation. Online platforms, including Facebook, continually revise and implement new features which change the way users interact with the platform. Changes to attitudes in society, such as privacy concerns, also impact the use of social media networks. As such, this study can only claim to represent the snapshot of the time in which the research was conducted.

The current section has engaged in a discussion regarding the study limitations. It identified potential limitations related to social desirability bias, the demographics of participants, and the frequently changing landscape of online platforms and the way people interact with them. Identifying these limitations enhances the reliability of the findings. These findings are discussed in the following section.

1.8   Key Findings of the Research

This section moves on to discuss the key findings of the research. These findings are discussed in greater depth in chapter ten; this section is intended to be a brief overview of that chapter.

These findings resulted from the thematic analysis of focus group and interview transcripts. Some of these findings confirmed existing knowledge, where some offered new insight and observations. This thesis found that ADF partners interacting online are considered a community and partners also use social media for maintaining a network.

In regards to addressing the gap in communication identified earlier in this chapter, this study found the gap is related to the position of partners in a late-modernity society, interacting with the modernist ADF organisation. ADF Partners use social media communities and networks due to gaps in services and support from traditional support providers. This is an identity gap and is present through the observation of ADF partners' online interactions. This gap has several significant impacts. One of these is the link between partner identity and support-seeking behaviour. Another is finding partner trust in the ADF is low. This study identifies the ADF as an abstract system, as theorised by Anthony Giddens, and suggests organisations like DCO are access points to that system. Partners' interactions on social media provide evidence of their interaction within that system. This study also offers recommendations for the ADF and ADF-sponsored organisations regarding the needs of ADF partners. These recommendations align with the findings which indicate the ADF does not relate to partners who operate in a late-modern society.

This section has outlined critical findings of the current study. It gave a brief overview of these findings, which are explored at length depth later in this thesis, through chapter ten.

1.9 Overview of the Thesis

This thesis investigated ADF partners and social media. The results of this investigation are presented across twelve chapters, inclusive of this introductory chapter and a concluding chapter. The main findings of this research are presented in five chapters: community, networks, trust, security and identity. An overview to each of the chapters is detailed here.

The first chapter provides an overview of the topic and justified the need for research. This chapter reviews the background literature on communication, social media and ADF families and highlights the gap in literature. It also defines community and virtual community. The introductory chapter discusses the insider status of the researcher, identifies the significance of the study and the original contribution to knowledge. It outlines the research aims and objectives, and lists the four research questions which guide the study. It discusses the limitations of the study and outlines the key findings of the research.

The second chapter provides the contextual framework of the study. In consideration of the limited Australian literature available, it uses literature on military families globally to situate the current research. Chapter two discusses the increasing recognition and

acknowledgement of military families within the military organisation. It also outlines the role partners play in enabling the ongoing operation of the military, and how military service impacts the well-being of the ADF partner. Finally, chapter two explores the existing literature related to partner communication and social media engagement. In outlining and evaluating existing literature, this chapter situates the current study in a wider context.

The third chapter outlines the theoretical and methodological underpinning of the study. This chapter set outs and justifies the choice of an interpretivist, qualitative philosophical paradigm. This study applies Giddens' theory of late-modernity and Granovetter's weak-tie theory, and the selection of these theories is explored in chapter three. This chapter also explores the methodology of the study, which was a digital (social media) ethnography. Ethnography is discussed at length in chapter three.

The fourth chapter builds on the methodology discussed in the previous chapter to outline the design of the study. It explores the suitability of case study, survey, content analysis, focus group and interview methods, justifying the adoption or rejection of these methods for the current study. This chapter outlines the process of data collection. It does this by discussing ethical considerations and approvals, and the application of methods. This chapter explores how a social media content analysis was considered, but not applied due to researcher risk. It explains how a focus group method was applied, including discussing the number and location of focus groups held, as well as identifying the participants in these focus groups. It discusses the impact of insider research on focus group methods. It explores how semi-structured interview methods were applied in this study, including describing the participants. This chapter also outlines how the interview and focus group data was transcribed, and justifies the use of thematic analysis in examining the data.

Chapter five is the first of several findings chapters. This chapter discusses the theme of community, which emerged during data collection and analysis. It outlines how participants identified a need for community, and how connections to a community provide them with information and support. This chapter discusses the benefits of a virtual community, including offering partners low-risk social interactions and a useful tool during transitional periods. This chapter discusses disconnection from the ADF community, and explores the situation of those who are not connected to the virtual ADF community.

The sixth chapter discusses the networks theme which emerged during data analysis. This chapter, as the second findings chapter, explores how the participants use social media to

create an online network. This chapter outlines participant comments which indicate the strengths and advantages of this online network, which includes the ability to collate resources and the accessibility of the network and its resources. The network is also advantageous to partners because it is highly individualised. This chapter also discusses participants who were excluded from the network, and discusses the situation and consequences of exclusion.

Chapter seven discusses trust, another theme which emerged during the study. Firstly, this chapter explores the use of the term 'Defence' by the researcher and participants in this study, identifying how the singular term refers to many individuals and resources in the broader ADF system. This chapter discusses participant comments which indicate that partners place trust in social media rather than the ADF. It then outlines factors which influence trust between partners and the ADF, including the accuracy of information, trustworthiness, bias, credibility and risk. This chapter discusses reasons for decreased trust in the ADF. These were related to the inherent nature of military service, inconsistent service delivery, and previous instances where trust had been broken. This chapter concludes by investigating the influence of rank on trust.

The eighth chapter of this thesis investigates the theme of security, as emerged from the data. This chapter uses content from a peer-reviewed paper accepted and in-press with the *Security Challenges* journal. It discusses the background literature relevant to ADF partners and online security, identifying that partners are not directly educated about online security principles. It then explores participant comments relating to sources of security information. It investigates partners' perceptions of security awareness and their resistance to social media restrictions and training or education initiatives. Chapter eight then discusses how partners are motivated to interact safely online in order to protect the member and the mission of the ADF, but are confused about the ADF's own online presence.

Chapter nine is the final findings chapter of this thesis. It outlines the theme of identity, as emerged from the analysis of the focus group and interview data. This chapter explores how participants accepted or rejected a military partner identity. It then analyses participant comments into five identity types, which are the Entitled Whinger, the Suck It Up Sunshiner, the Milspouse, the Helper and the Mean Girls. In the evaluation of each of these identity types, this chapter considers the impact of these identities on the lives of ADF partners.

Chapter ten uses the findings explored in the previous five chapters to generate the three significant findings of this study. The first finding relates Giddens' theory of late-

modernity to the current study to argue that the ADF is an abstract organisation, and as such support networks act as access points. This finding is the strongest original contribution to literature of this study. The second finding is that partners use social media for connecting to support communities and networks, which confirms existing research conducted internationally. The third finding of this study is that partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. This finding significantly impacts the recommendations which are offered to the ADF and affiliated support organisations, which are explored in chapter ten. The recommendations suggest aligning partner programs and communications with the values participants displayed in this study.

The eleventh chapter of this thesis provides a summary of the overall study, and is followed by the final chapter, which lists the references consulted in previous chapters.

This section has provided an overview of the chapters contained in this thesis and concludes this introductory chapter. This chapter has outlined the topic and justified a gap in literature. It has also identified how this study intends to address that gap.

Chapter 2.
Contextual Framework

The previous chapter gave a broad introduction to this study. It provided a background literature review which focused on the experiences of Australian Defence Force families. It demonstrated that research conducted in an Australian context is limited. Due to the limited availability of literature related to Australian Defence families, this chapter examines research which has been conducted internationally to frame the themes of this study in a broader context. It aims to give an overview of the literature to date regarding military families. It examines shifts in the acceptance of families, correlated with changes in broader society and the cessation of conscription, identifies the entanglement of partners in the military organisation and explores the critical role military partners' play in the military's ongoing operation. This chapter examines the mental, physical and social well-being impacts of military service on the partner as well as coping mechanisms, highlighting social support as a valuable coping tool. This chapter moves on to discuss communication and social media research, focusing on the use of technology by military partners.

This chapter includes research findings based on the study of military families located globally, including in the USA (Burrell et al. 2006; Verdeli et al. 2011), the United Kingdom (Dandeker et al. 2006; Higate & Cameron 2004), Canada (Dursun & Sudom 2009) , and smaller countries including the Netherlands (Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003). As with Australian based research, the work of doctoral students and industry has been widely influential, and these studies represent a significant amount of the existing literature discussed in this chapter.

2.1 Recognition of Military Families in the Military Organisation

Military organisations have been increasingly acknowledging partners (Segal & Segal 2003). Over the last 150 years, the military organisation has shifted from denying any responsibility for families to recognising the role families perform (Jessup 2000). These changes correlate with developments in society, including better education and employment opportunities for women (Jessup 2000). The shift to an all-volunteer military had a significant impact, as enlisted members were increasingly likely to be older, and in a serious relationship. By the year 2000, 60% of United States service members were married (Segal & Segal 2003). As the military began competing for personnel in the broader labour market, appealing to families became increasingly important (Segal & Segal 2003). Literature regarding service families grew from the 1980's onwards (Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003) as the military recognised their role in supporting families and sought to understand more about them.

Partners occupy a unique position in the military system. They are not enlisted, but are still subject to the needs and demands of the organisation, owing in part to the totality and masculinity of the military (Jervis 2011). Partners operate in-between civilian and military spaces, wholly accepted in neither. Segal (1986) published her landmark work which studied military families as the intersection of two societal institutions- the family, and the military. They are 'greedy institutions', as both the family and the military make significant demands in regards to commitment, loyalty and energy. Segal's work has since been used by military family researchers to understand the pull between the military and the home. Vuga and Juvan (2013) found that during deployments, the greediness of the military outweighs the family. Some researchers argue the value of partners is intrinsically linked to their ability to keep the member operationally ready (Enloe 2000). Outside of this purpose, the military family is considered invisible (Jervis 2011).

Partners operate in a space that is both inside and outside of the military network, and as such partners feel tension between their military and civilian identities. Shifts in society and within the military impact significantly on partners. Moskos (1981) argues the military in shifting from being an institution to an occupation. This shift is evidenced by several factors, including the financial compensation received by members and their reception in broader society. Also, this shift is evidenced by spouses being further removed from the military community. Where once spouses were an integral part of the military community, they are now distanced in alignment with other professions where partners are considered distinctly separate (Moskos 1981). 'There is increasing reluctance of wives to take part in customary military social functions' states Moskos (2012). This is influenced by the increased likelihood of military partners having independent paid work outside the home (Moskos 2012). The apparent release of military partners from their previous military spouse obligations creates a new type of military spouse Stoddard (1978) states, where the military needs to 'recognise a new kind of military wife who is uniquely independent and who no longer lives in the shadow of her husband's occupational success'(Stoddard 1978, p. 167). Segal (1989) contests the view that spouses are released from their military duties by outlining how military partners are subject to 'spillover hypothesis'. This theory explains how the separation of work and family domains is a myth, and both impact on each other. While the specific demands placed on partners by the ADF community has lessened, such as requirements to be available for entertaining and functions, partners are still significantly impacted by their association with the military, as is

outlined further in this chapter. This contrast places partners in a unique position where they are subjected to both a military and a civilian identity.

Partners have reported that expectations of their role place them under pressure. Garcia compares the military partner role with that of a volunteer, and stated 'Spouses do not wear rank and are consistently reminded they are not in the military but as the Service Member is promoted, so are the expectations of the spouse' (2012, p. 4). Partners are expected to be supportive and caring (Borah & Fina 2017; Garcia 2012; Jessup 2000). In doing so, Jessup (2000) states they serve a military objective. A 2011 study of US military wives found that partners felt they were 'not allowed' to show emotion, dependence, vulnerability, fright and worry (Aducci et al. 2011). Instead, partners felt they were depended on to display values of strength and resilience, and considered these values the recipe for being a good military wife. The promotion of the traditional 'spouse' role persists, enforcing traditional gender roles, as female partners continue to forgo career opportunities to follow the member (Higate & Cameron 2004).

Not all partners are eager to accept a military partner identity (Callan 1984), while some embrace the identity and engage with the institution of the military. The military pleases neither of these partners, as Jervis states, 'Those wives who prefer to lead separate, individual lives cannot do so entirely, while wives who identify with the institution feel their contributions are not acknowledged' (2011, p. 44). Enloe (2000) states partners have become militarised; they are unable to perceive themselves as individuals not associated with the career of the member. In an ethnographic study investigating how partners influence re-enlistment decisions, 61% of participants said their role as a military spouse conflicted with their identity perceptions (Garcia 2012). One research study reported partners felt a loss of identity and described themselves as second-class citizens (Jessup 2000), which correlates with a later study which found partners had a sense they were not considered individuals in their own right (Higate & Cameron 2004).

While there appears to be growing discontent amongst partners, complaints remain few. Research indicates this may be because partners perceive any reports of dissatisfaction will be ignored (Jervis 2011). Nevertheless, partners are increasingly resistant to perceived attempts by the military to control or exert influence over them (Enloe 2000). Changes to the military network have resulting impacts on partners. Moelker and Van Der Kloet (2003) states that as military service transitions to being a job similar to any other, partners have less desire

to integrate into the military community. The demand placed on them to participate in their partners' career reduces, and they are increasingly able to have independent interests and activities. Jessup (2000) argues that for the military to engage with partners, they have to acknowledge the contradictory position of partners. He states that partners desire to be seen as independent, free from obligation to their partner's employer, but also desire to receive support to navigate the foreign military culture, a world where their partner is frequently absent.

This section has explored the recognition of military families by the military organisation. It identified that families are increasingly acknowledged, and changes in broader society have influenced this acknowledgement. This section discussed how military partners occupy a unique position, as they are not enlisted members yet also not entirely civilian. Partners are placed under pressure to perform their military partner roles, as a supportive caregiver. In performing this role, military partners make unique contributions to the ongoing operation of the military, including enabling the member to continue their career and have increased health benefits, as will be explored in the following section.

2.2   Enabling the Ongoing Operation of the Military

This section discusses the significant contribution partners make to the ongoing operation of the military. It outlines how partners enhance mission readiness and contribute to service retention, and explores the impact of the partner on the member's health and well-being. The military is dependent on support from families (Jervis 2011) as the loyalty and support of families is required for their ongoing operation (Vuga & Juvan 2013). As economic pressure increases, retaining enlisted members is a critical issue for modern militaries. Family satisfaction is a key factor in service retention (Jessup 2000; Segal & Segal 2003), and as such, military organisations are obligated to acknowledge their obligations to families, who have significant influence over the member's ongoing enlistment (Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003). Segal and Segal (2003) state there are 'clear economic payoffs to military family satisfaction'. Morale and organisational commitment are higher for those members who perceived their spouse is supportive of their career (Dursun & Sudom 2009).

In addition to enabling service retention, military partners influence the physical and mental well-being of the member. Members who have resilient, supportive family members have an increased ability to be mission-ready (Foreman 2001) and those who return from deployment to a partner who is emotionally and mentally healthy experience a smoother

transition (Tanielian & Jaycox 2008). Stress and depression experienced by the partner have an impact on the well-being of the member (Verdeli et al. 2011) while members in a stable, satisfying relationship are more likely to seek treatment for PTSD (Meis et al. 2010). In one study, more than 75% of members experiencing mental health symptoms reported relationship distress (Sayers et al. 2009).

This section has discussed the role partners perform in supporting the military to meet its aims and objectives. It demonstrated that partners enable the member to retain their career, as well as increase their operational readiness. It identified that partners enable the member's health and well-being.

2.3   Military Service Impacts Partner Well-being

This section examines the impacts of military service on the partner. It discusses the partners increased likelihood of experiencing stress, anxiety and depression as well as other negative mental and physical ailments. It outlines the pressure placed on partners due to increased caregiving responsibilities, as well as discusses the coping mechanisms used by partners, including social support.

Literature conclusively finds that military life inherently places significant pressure on families (Fivek 2017; Karney & Crown 2007). Military service impacts all facets of life for families (Borah & Fina 2017). A significant amount of pressure comes from the deployment cycle, which research has defined into three stages- pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration, each with its stressors (Gewirtz et al. 2011). In addition to deployment, relocations and military posting cycles influence the family profoundly. Military partners are required to navigate their unique lives without consistent support from their partner or extended family networks. A significant challenge which faces military families is uncertainty. Uncertainty in military life includes not only the impact of frequent and sometimes unexpected absences from home but also frequent changes to policy and inconsistent support services leading to family instability (Foreman 2001). Military service can also disconnect them from ordinary civilian life (Jervis 2011).

Explorations of the stressors faced by military families can be categorised into three broad themes, which are: emotional, physical and mental well-being; caregiving responsibilities; and living with uncertainty (Wheeler & Torres Stone 2010). Studies on military families tend to focus on the experience of spouses and partners over other family

relationships (Berck & Webb 2015). Likewise, the lived experiences of same-sex couples, civilian men married to female serving members and dual-serving couples are very limited. One of few studies found that same-sex partners experience additional stress; they perceived support providers rejected them due to their sexual orientation (Gutman 2017).

The stress the military, including the deployment cycle, places on family members is significant (Asbury & Martin 2012) and the emotional and mental well-being of partners has been well documented. Moelker and Van Der Kloet (2003) states that stress is one of the most frequently studied topics in military family literature. While military partners face many of the same stressors as their civilian counterparts, they have the added pressure of deployments and absences (Wolf et al. 2018). Partners in various studies have reported feeling anxious, lonely and overwhelmed (Elliott & Scott 2001). Military service also places significant stress on the marital relationship, which can lead to relationship breakdowns (Karney & Crown 2007; Laser & Stephens 2011). There is existing and emergent research which confirms that during times of separation, military families experience stress symptoms that are similar to Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Wexler & McGrath 1991). Partners in one study were shown to have similar rates of mental health problems as that of members, although partners are more likely to seek care (Eaton et al. 2008).

Deployments frequently impact the partner's physical well-being. Symptoms reported are closely associated with elevated levels of stress and anxiety, including headaches, weight changes, sleep disturbances, and changes to menstrual cycles (Van Vranken et al. 1984). Partners with anxiety disorder symptoms had worse outcomes for overall health (Fields et al. 2012). A pilot study which collected responses from 180 military partners during a Middle East deployment found nearly half the group had experienced insomnia (Wexler & McGrath 1991). This study found demographics had an influence on the physical and stress symptoms of partners; for instance, partners over the age of thirty were more likely to over-eat to handle their stress, whereas partners under the age of thirty tended to restrict their food intake when they were stressed (Wexler & McGrath 1991, p. 516). Additionally, military partners are twice as likely to experience sexual victimisation (Farmer 2017).

During deployment, the partner is required not only to provide care for their dependant's basic needs, which can be exhaustive and stressful, but also to support them in their acceptance of the other parent's deployment. Caregiving responsibilities place additional pressure on the military partner, who needs to monitor not only their well-being, but the well-

being of their dependents (Elliott & Scott 2001). The parent remaining at home provides critical support in promoting resilience and the adoption of healthy coping mechanisms in children. Sutherland (1985) found in the absence of the male parental figure, which increased stress levels in children, the presence of a stable female parental figure alleviated the stress of the child and led to better outcomes for the family. (Elliott & Scott 2001)Additionally, partners shoulder the burden of monitoring finances (Elliott & Scott 2001) and the responsibilities inherent in maintaining the home. Despite, or perhaps because of, the considerable challenges endured by military partners, research states that many military partners are proud of their role in their partner's service (Wexler & McGrath 1991) and have pride in their ability to cope while their partner is away. Partners identify they receive personal development benefits (Jervis 2011).

Discussions about the challenges faced by military families are paired with investigations into how partners cope, and suggestions for building more resilient families. Social support is one of the most commonly used coping tools for military partners (Fivek 2017; Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003). While social support is valuable, the transient nature of the military makes it a challenge for partners to maintain social support (Borah & Fina 2017; Jolly 1992). Participants in research which highlights positive coping strategies also stated they found spirituality, and exercise, helpful (Blank et al. 2012). Families living in on-base communities, often called marital 'patches', can benefit from being intimately connected to other military families, though it also comes with heightened risk for negative community interactions (Jervis 2011). Military support systems have been criticised for encouraging dependence (Jolly 1992). A sense of community is critical to partner well-being, as partners with an enhanced sense of community increasingly perceive support services to be available to them (Brannon 2016).

This section has outlined the implications of military service on partners. It identifies that partners experience significant mental and physical well-being effects, including heightened levels of stress, anxiety and depression. It discusses the increased burden of caregiving responsibilities which are shouldered by partners, as well as the coping mechanisms used by partners.

2.4   Partner Communication and Social Media Engagement

Social support is a popular and effective coping mechanism for partners but is often difficult to access due to relocations associated with military life. This section addresses how partners use communication and social media for navigating aspects of their lives. Although

social media research is limited, the literature demonstrates that social media plays a role in supporting partners.

Research confirms that communication and technology are essential tools for military families, allowing connections with the military member, family and friends (Wheeler & Torres Stone 2010). Communication and technology has a direct impact on their ability to cope, along with general well-being and relationship outcomes. Connecting military partners with peers in similar situations was also listed as an essential coping mechanism (Blank et al. 2012), and social media networks facilitate these connections. Online networks can assist to keep partners connected with social support systems that provide them with necessary and highly valued support, and re-connecting support networks that are fragmented by military relocations (Borah & Fina 2017; Sherman et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2015). The US Armed Forces have recognised the value of online support systems and encourage their military families to create online networks, offering them training and resources to maintain what they consider key support communities (United States Department of Defense n.d).

Cigrang et al. (2014) investigated communications between partners and members during a high-risk deployment. Following analysis of data from 144 Airmen, Cigrang stated there was support for the hypothesis that communications during deployment have both positive and negative impacts on serving members. Cigrang et al. (2014) acknowledged that the study is limited in that it relied on self-reporting data from the serving member, on both their marital satisfaction and their work performance. The issue of communication access between members and families is not a new one. Despite recommendations by researchers regarding the importance of military family communications, research remains limited, particularly on modern communication methods. While social media presents unique opportunities and challenges, the desire for families to connect with members, and military command's concern on the impact on the mission, is well established. A 1948 study analysed interviews from German prisoners of war following World War Two. The study found equally that too much, and too little, communication from families at home reduced cohesion within the military unit (Ender & Segal 1996). A study of the wives of British soldiers serving in Iraq found access to telecommunication facilities during deployment was a critical factor in reducing stress resulting from the deployment (Dandeker 1994). The same study of British military wives found the wives preferred informal social networks for support over formal support networks provided by the military.

The impact of social media on military families is relatively unknown (Matthews-Juarez, Juarez & Faulkner 2013; Sherman et al. 2016). Existing literature tends to reflect on the role of social media in the activities of the military more broadly, as demonstrated in the work of Matthews-Juarez, Juarez and Faulkner (2013), who examined a timeline of social media engagement in the USA, commencing from 2009 when the US Military banned the use of social media networking sites, including Facebook and Twitter. Following this, 'TroopTube' was released, a military-sponsored version of YouTube which allows serving members to share videos with friends and family. Following a social media review in 2010, the Pentagon reversed their decision to ban social media sites, and now US policy encourages the open use of social networking platforms by members, per military security and behaviour codes.

The benefits and challenges of communication for military families highlighted by (Ender & Segal 1996) mirrored those identified in more modern studies, such as the work of Sherman et al. (2016). Sherman conducted a literature review and collated sources about social media and military families. Sherman stated there are three primary motivations for social media use among military families, which are: building relationships and exploring social connections; exchanging social support; and seeking information and communication. Krenzer (2013)'s findings from a study which collected data from ten Facebook pages and analysed this data for themes concur with Sherman's findings. Krenzer found four primary themes: spouses use social media to acquire and provide information; exchange information and seek support; gain emotional support; and discuss upcoming events. These findings correspond with Dessens (2013), which analysed message board content and found 49% of military partners posted seeking informational support, 42% requesting emotional support and 7% seeking social support. In a small online survey of spouses, Elliott (2011) found perceived online social support is positively correlated with Facebook use. These findings correlate with published findings from High et al. (2015), who stated online support groups provide ways for military families to connect with sources of comfort from peers during times of stress, improving feelings of belonging and enabling access to informational support. Rea et al. (2015) identified the strengths and weaknesses of social media use for spouses through ten semi-structured interviews. She stated that social media has a positive impact on family relationships, and encouraged professionals working with military families to embrace social media, including using social media in treatment plans to decrease loneliness; however, the theses are limited by very small sample sizes, and all call for more extensive research on the topic (Rea et al. 2015). Sherman et al. (2016) state that literature identifies six challenges of social media use for

military partners. These are potential harm to relationships, the risk of unhealthy social comparison, exposure to danger, excessive use with adverse consequences on functioning, the risk of leaks of sensitive information, and the spread of rumours.

A study by Karney and Crown (2007) tracked 3,000 military families over three years, investigating how these families handle stress before, during, and after deployments. The findings from this study stated that social media was helpful for families who are resilient and have strong family unity, but social media exacerbated problems for struggling families. Karney and Crown (2007) suggest that increasing Internet and mobile communications allow spouses separated by deployment to remain in close contact. The literature demonstrates there is insufficient knowledge regarding military families and their communication needs, particularly in regards to fast-changing technology and mass communication.

This chapter has provided an overview of the literature to date regarding military families. As a result of limited literature relating to Australian Defence families, this chapter uses research from internationally based militaries, including the USA, UK and Canada. This chapter began by exploring the recognition of partners in the military organisation. It identified there has been increasing acknowledgement of the role partners operate in the military. Partners occupy a unique position, as they are neither wholly military nor wholly civilian. Participants in existing studies identified they felt pressure to perform their military partner roles. This chapter discussed the role partners play in supporting the ongoing mission of the military. Partners do this by increasing service retention and operational readiness, as well as enhancing the well-being of the military member. This chapter also reviewed the impacts of military service on the partner and outlined how service significantly impacts partners. It discussed coping mechanism used by partners, including social support. This chapter then investigated how partners use social media and communication for accessing support and information related to their role as a military partner.

Chapter 3.
Methodology

Having situated this study in a broader context, the following chapter discusses the designated research methodology. It outlines and justifies the use of a digital (social media) ethnography, influenced by the sociological work of Giddens and Granovetter, for investigating the research questions which were outlined in chapter one, as well as exploring the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study.. This chapter also identifies the philosophical paradigm in which this study is situated, and argues these frameworks are the most appropriate for answering the research questions.

Methodology refers to the research project framework. Methodology explores a theoretical basis and outlines a critical framework in which the research results can be framed. A qualitative methodology underpinned this research. Qualitative research is the collection and analysis of narrative-based knowledge (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009), and most commonly is associated with a constructivist worldview (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009) which assigns value to multiple forms of knowledge, and values the subjective position of the researcher (Daymon & Holloway 2011; Denzin & Lincoln 1998). Qualitative research differs from quantitative research, which promotes the objective positioning of the researcher and usually a positivist epistemology. The designated epistemological position of this study demands a methodological framework which supports the use of qualitative methods. This chapter discusses the sociological theories of late modernity and weak-tie theory and justifies the use of these theories in this study. This chapter considers several methodological frameworks and explores their historical backgrounds and critical components, including ethnography, insider and auto-ethnography, digital ethnography and finally social media ethnography.

3.1   Philosophical Paradigm

This study is positioned in a constructive epistemological view, underpinned by an interpretive ontology. Ontology is the study of being, and epistemology is the theory of knowledge. Epistemology questions the ways in which knowledge can be obtained and meanings are constructed. Epistemology outlines the potential ways of gaining knowledge and, with a focus on the knowledge gathering process, aids the researcher in deciding what information is essential, and that which is not (Grix 2010). Together they outline a philosophical worldview. Epistemological views and issues tend to merge closely with ontological ones, and many research projects identify both an ontological and an epistemological position.

Interpretivism and constructivism are closely aligned, sharing many similarities in their beliefs and understandings of the world. An interpretive ontology investigates reality (Howell 2013), and interpretivism seeks to understand the world through the lens of lived experience. They argue meaning is found in the language and actions of social actors and promote the first-person, subjective experience (Schwandt 1998). Alongside constructivism, deriving mainly from the work of Karl Mannheim, forms one of two major theories on knowledge. The second theory, which contrasts with constructivism, is objectivism. Objectivism, which is more prevalent in quantitative research, believes in the existence of objective truth. Objectivism is the view that things hold meaning independently of people and experiences (Crotty 1998). Constructivism rejects this view and argues objective truth or meaning is not attainable, and believe experience and engagement assign meaning. Constructivism is a valuable tool for qualitative researchers. Constructivism aims to discover the assigned meaning of objects, and all resources that may help a researcher to develop that meaning are considered valuable. Constructivism values the personal status of the researcher as key to the research process (Grix 2010), which aligns with the strong insider researcher element in this study. When asking the epistemological question of how one knows what they know, and indeed do not know, it was the researchers lived experience as an insider in the community that highlighted the gap in knowledge and led to the generation of the research questions. This marks the project as decidedly constructionist/interpretive over objectivist, as objectivist research aims instead to extract the individual researcher from the project as much as possible.

Qualitative methods align with a constructionist/interpretive paradigm. The research questions guiding this study lend themselves to a qualitative framework, influenced by sociology and ethnography. They ask interrogative questions, seeking to understand and make meaning of, the interactions of social actors. Statistically dominated quantitative approaches could not provide answers to these questions.

Qualitative research aims to discover meaning through detailed and comprehensive attention (Richards 2005). Qualitative research is a focus on research which uses words as data (Braun & Clarke 2013). It contrasts quantitative research, which primarily uses numbers to understand relationships between variables (Braun & Clarke 2013). It is an exploratory research approach which delivers insights into issues previously not understood (Wellington & Szczerbinski 2007)(Wellington). Qualitative approaches are most frequently applied when the answer being sought does not clearly indicate what data is required (Liamputton & Ezzy 2005;

Richards 2005). The situation is likely complex and requires a in-depth response which is placed in context (Richards 2005) and provides insight into experience (Liamputton & Ezzy 2005).

Qualitative data sets are usually small (Richards 2005), leading to narrow yet rich data and thick descriptions of the phenomenon (Braun & Clarke 2013). Commonly, qualitative studies are built on the insights of between fifteen and thirty participants (Liamputton & Ezzy 2005) though researchers are keen to stress the focus is not on a specific number but instead the sight and meaning those participants can provide (Braun & Clarke 2013; Liamputton & Ezzy 2005), arguing that large sample sizes are not required for this type of focused investigation(Richards 2005). Data sample sizes which can support the desired analysis are considered sufficient (Liamputton & Ezzy 2005). Researchers typically use saturation as a rationale for justifying their sample size (Braun & Clarke 2013). Data saturation is a term used by qualitative researchers to indicate when new themes have stopped emerging from the data. Additional interviews fail to offer new insights (Braun & Clarke 2013) which suggests to researchers that they have successfully covered the breadth of the available data (Richards 2005).

(Liamputton & Ezzy 2005; Sarantakos 2005)This section has provided an overview of the philosophical paradigm of this study. It argues for interpretivism and constructivism, which promote the subjective experience and believe meaning can be obtained through the observation of human behaviour. This section has also defended the qualitative approach taken in this study.

3.2   Late-Modernity

This section will discuss theories of late-modernity as proposed by Giddens, justifying the adoption of late-modernism in this study. The desire for a framework which encompassed the study of human behaviour directed the researcher to consider sociological views, adopting a late modernity and risk framework as presented by Giddens. Studies of late modernity are apt for investigations of the current environment, including social media. Anthony Giddens is one of the most prolific sociological thinkers (Joas 1993; Ritzer 1996). Giddens is well known for his theory of late-modernity, which resists suggestions that society has passed into a stage of post-modernism and instead proposes Western society exists in an extended phase of modernity. While sociologists agree that modern technology, including modern

communications such as social media, have significantly changed the world, the degree of this impact is contested.

Modernity is considered to be the time from the mid-18th century to the 1980's (Giddens & Sutton 2017). During this time, a significant shift in society occurred, moving away from religious authority and tradition. Instead, the application of rational thinking and scientific study was seen to be key to human progress. The authority of science rose and challenged the previous inalienable power of the church (Giddens & Sutton 2017). Modernity, according to Giddens, is defined by the presence of capitalism and industrialism, increased surveillance capacity, and military control (Ritzer 1996). Sociologists who support a post-modernist ideology consider the age of modernity has passed and modern technology, specifically mass communications and mass media, has ushered in a new society which is unrecognisable. Supporters of post-modernity, such as Baudrillard, suggest that the arrival of modern technology has created 'a chaotic, empty world' which has lost meaning and tradition. (Giddens 2006, p. 115).

Giddens offers an alternate theory of late modernity, in which he argues that modern life is merely an extension of the previous. He accepts the current world has been impacted by rapid social change and a breakdown in traditional social networks, but he rejects the postmodernist claim that purpose and meaning have been lost (Giddens 1990). The introduction of modern communication technologies has fragmented the connection between time and space, and relationships now take place between people who are physically displaced (Giddens 1990). In previous societies, time and space were inherently linked; space was defined by physical presence. This removal of relationships from local contexts Giddens terms 'disembedding'. Disembedding has two mechanisms, one of which is the presence of expert systems. Expert systems are those which require specialised knowledge to understand and operate within, and as a result, users of the system need to trust, rather than have a complete understanding (Ritzer 1996). Trust is a word that is often used but less frequently defined. This study accepts the definition of trust offered by Giddens, which is 'Trust may be defined as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge)' (1990, p. 34). Trust becomes critical in modern societies where people and systems interact remotely and out of sight. Trust takes place in the space between what is seen and unseen. Trust expert Rachel Botsman terms this as a 'Trust Leap', with trust being the connection between what is known and what is unknown (Botsman 2017).

Botsman uses the analogy of a riverbank, with a fast flowing river, 'uncertainty', between the two sides. Trust is what connects the known and unknown sides of the riverbank, allowing the individual to pass safely. This analogy is useful for understanding how trust is used to navigate uncertainty. Giddens supports statements that trust and risk are intertwined; one cannot be understood without the other (Giddens 1990). Giddens' theory of late modernity, which forms the theoretical basis of this thesis, includes the belief that trust has lessened between the individual and the institution, building a nation of sceptics who no longer accept the knowledge and rulings of experts. Giddens (1990) states while trust may have once been implied, it now must be won. Equally, understandings of risk are essential, as risk also becomes increasingly disembodied from local contexts (Giddens 1990).

Sociological theories of modernism, late-modernity and post-modernism have been previously applied in a military context. The positioning of the military as a modernist or post-modernist organisation is contested. Military researcher Charles C. Moskos continues to argue for the military as a post-modernist organisation. He suggests that the key difference between modernist, late-modernist and post-modernist militaries are in the types of threats they face and the way those threats are perceived. The reduction in military size, the training and professionalism of their members and a focus on peacekeeping and humanitarian missions is indicative of a post-modernist military, states Moskos (2012). However, Booth, Kestnbaum and Segal (2001) argues a late-modernity framework is the most appropriate for understanding the changes in the modern military. They reject notions that the military has become post-modern following the Cold War, and argue that large-scale social changes in society have finally prompted the military organisation to finally become 'modern' (Booth, Kestnbaum & Segal 2001). Moskos (2012)There is limited sociological research which specifically investigates the state of the ADF.

Giddens' theory of late modernity provides a useful framework for interpreting the interactions of ADF partners online because it highlights the complicated relationship between the ADF organisation, enlisted members, and civilian partners. It allows for understandings of how civilian partners, who operate in a late-modern world, may interact with modernist organisations like the military. Further to Giddens and theories of late-modernity, trust, and risk, a framework for understanding network and information connections between individuals were required. The following segment of this chapter will explore weak-tie theory, and argue the adoption of the weak-tie theory framework for this study.

3.3   Weak Tie Theory

The previous section discussed Anthony Giddens' theory of late-modernity and argued for the adoption of a late-modern framework for understanding the interactions of ADF partners in the ADF system. In addition, a framework is needed which provides an understanding of social networks as they are enacted online. This segment will provide an overview of weak-tie theory and will explore how weak-tie theory has previously applied to analyse social networks. This section will then justify the application of weak-tie theory to this study.

According to Mark Granovetter, an American sociologist, social networks consist of a combination of weak and strong ties (Granovetter 1973). Strong-tie connections refer to close connections between two people, including family relationships. Weak tie connections are less close and include a broader range of relationships. Before the Internet, a weak tie connection may have been a neighbour or service provider (Wright & Bell 2003). Granovetter states that both strong and weak ties provide a person with social and tangible benefits in different ways. Weak tie connections offer value to an individual by providing information and resources beyond what they would have otherwise had access to (Granovetter 1973). They allow for the receipt of information from extended social networks (De Meo et al. 2014). In doing so, this increases the diversity of the information (Wright & Bell 2003) which broadens opportunities that may have been previously closed to that person if they had only been able to consult with their immediate social circle (Granovetter 1983). Granovetter states 'Those to whom we are weakly tied are more likely to move in circles different from our own and will thus have access to information different from that which we receive' (1973, p. 1371).

Over 40 years later, weak-tie theory is being used by online researchers to understand social connections on social media. Weak-tie theory has been used to understand social media interactions in virtual health communities (Wright & Bell 2003), as well as how social media weak ties can benefit students new to tertiary education (Ellison, Steinfield & Lampe 2007), new parents (Bartholomew et al. 2012) and job-seekers (Burke & Kraut 2013). The internet has increased the number of connections that could potentially be weak tie support networks (Wright & Bell 2003), and social media assists with the maintenance of weak tie connections (Brake 2014; Vitak & Ellison 2012). As social media works to strengthen connections, social capital accumulates. Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1985), refers to the benefits individuals receive when they interact with their social network. Increased social capital leads to positive outcomes, including enhanced well-being (Bargh & McKenna 2004). While there

are some negative consequences of accessing weak tie connections in virtual communities (Wright & Bell 2003), these are generally considered to be outweighed by the more powerful positive associations which result from connection with a broader, more diverse social network (Wellman et al. 2001). Granovetter's weak-tie theory is useful for analysing social media networks of ADF partners and provides an appropriate framework for understanding how information and social support may be generated and built-in virtual communities.

This section has investigated late-modernity and weak-tie theories. These sociological theories underpin the study and give understanding to the interactions of people in social situations and modern society, including online.

3.4   Ethnography

The following section will investigate the methodological framework for this study. It explores concepts of various types of ethnography and justifies the adoption of a digital (social media) ethnography for this study. Ethnography is the study of people and communities in their everyday environment (Brewer 2000). This methodology concerns itself with people ('ethno') and description ('graphy') (Werner & Schoepfle 1987), placing value in the prolonged, intensive observation of the culture of a designated population to deliver understanding to external audiences (Muecke 1994; Sanjek 2002). Ethnographers take the study of people in their everyday lives and strive to make meaning within a broader framework. Meaning is made by observing people in their natural, everyday environments and seeking understanding (Frankham & Macrae 2011).

Ethnography developed in cultural anthropology (Boyle 1994). Anthropology is the study of cultures, behaviours and appearances, and is most well-known for being used by white European researchers who travelled to remote areas of the world to understand the activities and behaviours of societies foreign to them. While interest in unfamiliar societies has existed before Greek civilisation, anthropology was only accepted as an academic endeavour in the 18th century. The 'modern father of anthropology', Edward Tylor, conducted his research in 1884 and four years later, Franz Boas became the first Professor of Anthropology at the Massachusetts University in the United States of America (Whiteford & Friedl 1992). There are four fields of anthropological study, including studies of physical aspects of humanity and studies of language. Ethnography derives from one field of anthropology, cultural anthropology. Cultural anthropology concerns itself with the study of similarities and

differences in culture and consists of two arms: the first being ethnography, the second ethnology. Ethnography is the description of the culture of one specific population, where ethnology has a comparative focus. As the number of anthropologist researchers grew, and the number of tribal cultures decreased, anthropologists began researching other social groupings, adapting the original methodology to include the study of different groups of people (Boyle 1994; Whiteford & Friedl 1992). Anthropology has since been applied in a wide variety of fields, including the social sciences (Muecke 1994) and nursing (Boyle 1994). Where researchers who chose to study spaces in which they are more familiar once attracted criticism, this was now seen as acceptable (Whiteford & Friedl 1992), leading to methodologies such as auto-ethnography which situate the researcher centrally in the study.

Two independent developments in the 20th century significantly influenced ethnographic methodology. One of these was the emergence of classic anthropology in Britain. British colonialists created a demand for methodologies which offered an understanding of the cultures and groups they desired to rule. In North America, Chicago School of Sociology studies of marginal groups in urban industrial society developed precedence for researchers actively participating in the fieldwork setting (Brewer 2000). The pressure created by World War Two restricted researchers from travelling to distant places and lead to a renewed focus on field sites closer to home. During World War Two, the US government used anthropologists in commissioned studies to gather intelligence and understanding of their enemies and allies (Whiteford & Friedl 1992), which further legitimised cultural anthropology. Anthropologists in this time worked to make anthropology seen as a legitimate research method, which included the development of standards for fieldwork by Malinowski and the arguments of Boas for cultural relativism (Whiteford & Friedl 1992).

Ethnography is concerned with concepts of culture. For researchers to immerse themselves in the study of culture, they first need to accept a definition of what culture is. Spradley and McCurdy define culture as 'the acquired knowledge people use to interpret their world and generate social behaviour' (1992, p. 25). Culture is the knowledge system which underpins everyday actions and behaviours. Ethnographers believe culture can be observed, learned, and shared (Morse 1992), and the study of culture provides knowledge and understanding. Many theoretical frameworks influence ethnography, including pragmatism, symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, feminism and post-modernism (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007). Ethnography is accepted to be both a methodology and a method and is associated with qualitative methods (Brewer 2000). An emphasis on fieldwork

is the trademark of ethnography. Fieldwork methods, most predominantly participant observation, are then combined with other qualitative methods including semi-structured interviewing.

Ethnography is a mix of science and creativity (Boyle 1994) and has struggled to be considered a legitimate research methodology. A focus on the everyday and this collaboration of artistry and scientific method is embedded in criticisms of ethnography, which dismiss the methodology for being too 'common sense', with accusations it falls below the standards of science and is inherently flawed, lacking in reliability and validity (LeCompte & Goetz 1982). Researchers using an ethnographic framework need to take significant care to specify their position and justify methodological choices and research design decisions to overcome these hesitations (LeCompte & Goetz 1982). Early anthropology was more descriptive than analytical (Whiteford & Friedl 1992), and the move for anthropologists to combine their insights with outsider knowledge and complex theory (Sanjek 2002) has benefited the methodology. In doing this, they consider equally the emic (the insider view) and etic (the outsider view) as valuable (Boyle 1994). To develop a comprehensive understanding of culture, a combination of both emic and etic viewpoints is required. Ethnographic studies should represent both the indigenous view as well as views based on outside criteria, contributing to theoretical knowledge (Barnard 2002).

Ethnography positions researchers centrally within the study, and places significant value on the subjective role of the researcher (Frankham & Macrae 2011). The relationship between the researcher and the population under study is intimate and prolonged. Ethnography acknowledges the researcher's position influences many aspects of the study, including awareness of a problem (Davies 1999), selecting a population, and the final presentation of results (Sanjek 2002). The requirement for the researcher to remain objective is contended. Boas argued that researchers need to remain neutral, leaving behind any personal cultural assumptions they may hold and refrain from making judgements about what they see (Whiteford & Friedl 1992), but others say it is not possible for researchers to separate themselves from their social knowledge of the world. They argue the subjective position of the researcher is a benefit to the study (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007).

As a methodology which heavily emphasises and values the position of the researcher, reflexivity is a concern for ethnographers. Researchers are called to reflexively reflect on their research and question the degree of impact they have had on the research process (Davies 1999).

In this case, the gender of the researcher has a significant impact on the research process and outcomes. In this study, the researcher has a privileged position as a deep insider, being a member of the population under study. This insider position has a significant impact on both the methodology guiding the research and the research plan. As such, the following section will explore literature explicitly specifically to insider ethnography.

3.5   Insider Ethnography

The previous section described traditional ethnographic methods which privilege the researcher becoming familiar with a foreign culture. In becoming intimately familiar with their way of life, the ethnographer aims to give a representation which is true to their lived experience. Modern ethnography considers researchers can be members of the population they aim to study. This section will discuss the position of the insider researcher and the impact of insider research on an ethnographic methodology, including advantages, challenges, issues of reflexivity and identity, and comparisons with auto-ethnography.

Anthropologists have believed it is in the integration of the outsider researcher into a foreign community which yields understanding (Cerroni-Long 2009). Ethnographers have frequently sought to capitalise on the access and knowledge of insiders in the communities and spaces they wish to study (Frankham & Macrae 2011), yet researchers have been cautioned against losing their objective lens and 'going native' (Brannick & Coghlan 2007). There is a particular challenge, and benefit, to research when ethnographers are privileged insiders in the community they are studying. The most acknowledged advantage of insider ethnography is related to issues of understanding and access. Researchers often have easier access to the group they are attempting to understand, as their insider status creates opportunities which may be unavailable to others (Brannick & Coghlan 2007; Pelias 2011; Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013) as participants may be more likely to welcome discussions with researchers whom they perceive to be members of their community (Greene 2014). The ability of the researcher to negotiate the research field with ease and familiarity gives them a research advantage (Costley 2010).

While an ethnographic methodology values the subjective experience of the researcher, some have questioned: whether it is possible for people to study their environment (Goldschmidt 2009), whether the researcher can sufficiently question norms (Greene 2014), and whether perceived biases can be genuinely overcome to provide a valid and accurate account (Brannick & Coghlan 2007). Insider researchers are cautioned to remain reflexive

throughout the study, which includes the maintenance of field notes and personal journals (Kerstetter 2012), individual reflection notes, (Greene 2014) engaging in peer debriefing (Costley 2010), and a reflexive statement acknowledging the impact of the researcher on the research outcomes (Berger 2015), as was written in Chapter One of this thesis. The value provided by an insider status overcomes the challenges of insider research, especially when the researcher adopts reflexive systems to prevent bias from occurring (Costley 2010).

Ethnographers can struggle with the duality of their academic and insider roles. Aside from the associated implications on the insights collected, this presents an identity challenge, as Jaffe (2009) recollected in the experience of doing an anthropology observation while serving in the Army. Jaffe, who left a graduate program to complete a military tour, unexpectedly found that she began to feel a deep connection with her military identity, and considered this mutually exclusive to her previous privileged academic identity. Her conflicting allegiances to the two 'total institutions' made the data collection process more challenging. Jaffe identified that she needed to privilege her insider status consistently; she perceived actions which might have been seen as 'outsider' would have compromised her position. Gregory and Ruby (2011) discuss a similar event where Gregory, researching in a lower-socioeconomic school in London, inadvertently portrayed an outsider status to her participants despite perceiving herself as an insider. In coordinating a reading group where mothers could read to their small children, she attempted to highlight her shared background; her family had come from the same area. She alienated the women when, moments after, she shared with them an article from a newspaper, which the mothers perceived to be only read by 'educated people'. At this moment, Gregory had demonstrated her outsider status to the participants (Gregory & Ruby 2011). Researchers who engage in insider research are cautioned to consider their insider and outsider statuses carefully. A reflexive account of the researcher's insider status and the resulting impact on the study is given in the following chapter on research design.

Insider ethnography has close ties with auto-ethnography, particularly in the way the researcher becomes aware of the research topic and gains access to the field through their insider status. Auto-ethnography refers to studies which write about the self, they are profoundly reflexive and position the researcher centrally in the research (Gatson 2012). Auto-ethnographies explore the relationship between the self and the cultural context, being part 'auto', the self, and part 'ethno', culture (Ellis 2004). This methodology is situated in the delicate space between ethnography as art, and ethnography as science (Ellis 2004), and accounts are commonly written using first-person tense. The boundaries and genres of auto-

ethnography are frequently blurry (Ellis 2004). Researchers may, or may not, consider themselves auto-ethnographers as much as insider-researchers, as was the case for Gatson and Zweerink who described themselves as 'auto-ethnographic native participant observers' (2004, p. 193). By contrast, while Ali (2009)'s ethnographic study of the same online fan community reflected on the advantages afforded by his insider status, he did not appear to consider his methodology as auto-ethnography, despite also being a member of the community before commencing his research. This research project considered but ultimately rejected an auto-ethnographic approach. Seeking the insights of others, and highlighting a broader range of views than her own, an auto-ethnographic approach was not the most suitable method for answering the research questions and meeting the research aims.

Ethnography provided an appropriate methodological framework for the current study. It provided the most potent tools for advantaging the insider status of the researcher while promoting reflexivity and validity. Ethnography aligns with the constructivist and interpretive philosophical paradigm of this study. Traditional applications of ethnography were problematic in this study. For example, ethnography requires the definition of a field site for examination. This is challenging as the focus population, ADF partners, interact online in a variety of ways, rather than in one prescribed location. Researchers who investigate online elements face unique and specific challenges. For that reason, a methodology was required which accommodated for the complexity of online research. The following section will consider a digital ethnography approach, which offers the benefits of a traditional ethnography with the flexibility needed for the online aspects of this study.

3.6   Digital Ethnography

This section explores the challenges and the opportunities of a digital ethnography methodology. Digital ethnography builds on the concepts of traditional ethnography, and in doing so offers the same benefits as the method (Hine 2015). Ethnography has always been concerned with telling the stories of others; digital ethnography collects those stories with digital methods (Murthy 2008). There have been frequent and significant changes to online ethnography in the last 15 years (Robinson & Schulz 2009) as researchers have expanded on their understandings of the interconnectedness between the online and the offline (Gatson 2012).

In the early 1990s, the new phenomenon of the internet captivated the attention of researchers, who saw opportunities for developing new understandings. In the anonymous, text-based online environment (Hewson et al. 2003), users could dissociate from their physical form and therefore were able to circumvent stereotypical associations with gender and race (Markham 2005). Users frequently changed their identities online and were suspected of having an 'online persona' which contrasted their offline identities, a concept which dominated research at the time (Robinson & Schulz 2009). During this time, online and offline spaces were considered to be distinct. People were seen to be present in either the online or the offline space; the online space was considered a separate reality (Robinson & Schulz 2009). Studies conducted over this period tended to focus on theoretical extremes, where this new technology would lead to either the salvation or the devastation of our society (Markham 2005). Early online researchers such as Harold Rheingold questioned whether the anonymous nature of internet interactions afforded the opportunity to interact without the 'constraints of worldwide shackles like hierarchy and traditional stereotypes' (Markham 2005, p. 253), while others predicted negative and dire consequences.

Early attempts to study online communities adapted traditional research methods, to varying levels of success (Lankshear, Leander & Knobel 2011). As time progressed and internet use became more prolific, researchers realised that online and offline connections were mixed. There was a shift from an online-only identity and environment (Markham 2005) to an increased understanding that the offline world has a significant influence on online spaces (Kendall 1999). Ongoing study and web developments, including Web 2.0, lead to changes in understandings of how people interacted online. The increase of audio, video and photographic data offered new challenges and equally new opportunities for understanding (Robinson & Schulz 2009). Previous critiques relating to the unreliability of Internet-gathered data were reconsidered. Initially, internet users were early adopters of technology, predominantly highly educated white men (Robinson & Schulz 2009). While researchers still need to consider sampling methods carefully, issues of representativeness, generalisability, and access became less pronounced as internet users became more representative of the general population (Hewson et al. 2003; Robinson & Schulz 2009).

Demand grew for new research methods suited for studying online interactions (Beneito-Montagut 2011). Methodologies which promoted participant observation methods grew in popularity (Markham 2005), and literature began to reflect the methodological challenges faced by early online ethnographers. Over this period, several key pieces of literature

defined online methodologies. In 2000, Hine published her landmark work on a methodology she termed 'Digital Ethnography' (Hine 2000), followed by Kozinets, who published 'Netnography' in 2002, which was later updated in 2015 (Kozinets 2015). Shortly after, Sade-Beck proposed 'Internet Ethnography' (Sade-Beck 2004). These, and other, works highlighted a shift away from purely descriptive accounts and encouraged researchers to consider the wider methodological implications of online research. 'Veteran' digital researchers grappled with questions about how virtual ethnography challenges traditional assumptions about an ethnographic methodology (Hammersley 2006). New forms of analysis were also developed to assist in analysing data retrieved from online sources, including types of discourse analysis (Androutsopoulos 2005) and social network analysis (Wellman & Gulia 1999).

Currently, there is no dominant theory which guides the study of internet communications and community, although frameworks based on sociology, anthropology, linguistics and social psychology are frequently used (Preece & Maloney-Krichmar 2005). More recently, research online is considered to be messy and complicated. Online ethnographers resisted research which studies internet activity, or face to face interactions, in isolation, stating that the offline is inherently mixed with the online (Beneito-Montagut 2011; Murthy 2008; Robinson & Schulz 2009). For example, Hallett and Barber state: 'Online spaces no longer rest at the periphery of life' (2013, p. 307), and suggest it was no longer enough for traditional ethnographers to study offline spaces, nor for digital ethnographers to study online spaces; all ethnographers needed to consider the online interactions of their research group. Where once there was a requirement to define a research 'field', researchers now consider the field as fluid and flexible. As a result, research methodologies must also be adaptable (Lankshear, Leander & Knobel 2011), include multiple types of media (Beneito-Montagut 2011) and focus on connections (Hine 2015). Also, research methodologies must include the capacity for reviewing multiple sites of interaction (Hallett & Barber 2013). Digital ethnography is appropriate for the study of ADF partners, as partners are present in multiple sites. Partners interact in various segments of Facebook, such as private groups, instant messaging and through following public and individual pages. Partners also interact face-to-face through physical meetings. A digital ethnography affords the researcher the freedom to follow participants through each of these sites, as the restriction of one site would not deliver the same breadth of understanding. Indeed, most digital researchers are pragmatic and select the most relevant methods for achieving the aims of the research (Morey 2013). Researchers more commonly use offline methods, such as qualitative interviewing, for addressing questions

about online behaviour (Postill & Pink 2012), reflecting changes which see the online and the offline as intrinsically linked.

Digital ethnography has been used to provide new understandings of complex issues, including gender (Darwin 2017) and stigmatised communities (Barratt & Maddox 2016; Ferguson 2017; Potter 2017). Having abandoned polarising viewpoints which dominated literature regarding online ethnography, researchers now sought to develop theoretically grounded studies and understand how the study of online interaction can assist in producing new knowledge about social behaviour as well as reviewing long-held views. For example, Markham sought to understand how the text-based discourse of the internet was used to construct identity (Markham 2005) while others sought to understand how the internet redefined traditionally held concepts of space and community (Hallett & Barber 2013).

Recent discussions of digital methodologies have revealed that ethnographies which involve social media platforms have unique challenges which are specific to the platform, making social media a field in its own right (Dalsgaard 2016). In 2012, Postill and Pink (2012) proposed a social media ethnography, which draws on the work of Hine (2000) and Kozinets (2015) to develop a methodology which draws focus away from traditionally considered concepts of a virtual community towards concepts of sociality and movement. They argue Web 2.0 and the rapid growth of social media has created new opportunities for practice and re-thinking internet methodology, and social media research has more to offer than big-data studies of social networks (Postill & Pink 2012). Social media research is an emerging field with which anthropologists are still grappling with (Dalsgaard 2016), and will continue to dominate discussion for some years to come.

A digital (social media) ethnography provides a suitable methodological framework for understanding the online interactions of ADF partners. This methodological framework is an appropriate choice to address the thesis research questions because it delivers deep understanding and thick description. It permits for interrogative questions which seek meaning underpinned by traditional concepts of ethnography, which provide rich descriptions of cultures. It tells a story of what is known intimately by insiders, which is particularly relevant because there are so few studies of Australian military partners. Ethnographies complement other critical frameworks and allow researchers to be flexible and adaptable. Ethnography also aligns with the constructivist and interpretive philosophical paradigm of this study. Ethnography also values the subjective positioning of the researcher, which allows for the study

to be advantaged by the insider status of the researcher. An auto-ethnographic methodology was considered but ultimately rejected because of the need for distance between the researcher and the population, and the desire to highlight experiences and views other than the researchers own. Ethnographic frameworks have previously been used to develop existing understandings of military partners and the cultures they operate within (Blakely et al. 2014; Harrison 2006; Hyde 2015), although never in an Australian context. A traditional ethnographic methodology was insufficient, whereas a digital (social media) ethnography accommodated for the complexity of online research. A digital ethnography approach offered the benefits of a traditional ethnography with the flexibility needed for the online aspects of this study, including an understanding that online experiences are mixed with offline experiences, and a framework that is adaptable and practical. The current study is a micro-examination of the ADF partner population which considers macro-level issues of community and information and support exchange.

This chapter has provided a comprehensive discussion of ethnography and its different fields, including insider and auto-ethnography, digital ethnography and social media ethnography. This chapter has outlined and justified a digital (social media) ethnography methodological framework for this study. This methodological framework considers the sociological work of Giddens and Granovetter and theories of late modernity and weak-tie networks.

Chapter 4.
Research Design

Peer-review publication associated with this chapter (Appendix H):

Johnson, A, Lawson, C, Ames, K (2018), 'Are you really one of us? : Exploring ethics, risk and insider research in a private Facebook community', in Proceedings of the *International Conference on Social Media and Society*, Copenhagen, Denmark, p. 202-109.

Peer-review publication associated with this chapter (Appendix I):

Johnson, A (under review), 'I get by with a little help from my friends: Friendship and Focus Groups, *Insider Research,* book chapter following 2015 CQU Education and the Arts symposium

The previous chapter discussed the methodological approach that underpinned this study. This chapter furthers this discussion by outlining the specific methods used to generate data which addressed the research questions guiding this study. Method is a focus on the individual tools of enquiry. This chapter firstly revisits the research questions, then introduces the data intent, and discusses the methods of case study, survey, social media content analysis, focus groups and interviews, examining their validity for the current study. It then outlines the process undertaken in collecting the data for this study. This chapter discusses relevant ethical considerations and provides a reflexive account of the complications regarding a social media content analysis method. It examines focus group and semi-structured interview methods, and the impact of insider research in planning and executing these methods. This chapter provides an explicit account of the data transcription process, and then thematically analysed in consideration of the ethnographical framework outlined in the previous chapter. By reflexively evaluating the research design this chapter contributes to the robustness and validity of the research findings.

4.1   Research Questions

There were four research questions which guided this study. These research questions impacted the choice of methods; the methods which were selected offered the most appropriate tools for answering the questions. The research questions were outlined in Chapter One, and are revisited here.

1. How do partners interact online in Facebook groups?
2. What, if any, services and support do online interactions provide partners, and how does interacting on Facebook impact relationships with ADF-sponsored support providers?
3. What can be learnt about the ADF community from the interactions of ADF partners online?
4. What recommendations can be made to ADF-sponsored support networks, like the Defence Community Organisation, regarding the interactions of ADF partners on social media?

4.2   Data Intent

Five methods were initially considered for this study. These methods were considered for their ability to provide robust and comprehensive data which could be used to address the research questions. These methods were qualitative as part of an interpretive paradigm, and each fit with the broader digital (social media) ethnography methodological framework which

was outlined in the previous chapter. The five methods discussed below are case study method, survey method, social media content analysis, focus groups and qualitative interviews.

4.2.1   Case study

A case study approach was considered for this study. A case study method is commonly used in anthropological and ethnographical studies (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993), and align closely with an ethnographic methodology, where the aim is to achieve a rich-description of a single population (Muecke 1994). They are a qualitative research tool, commonly used by sociologists (Zainal 2007) and use a constructivist approach (Gagnon 2010). Case studies highlight social interactions in everyday life and build understandings of social life based on the intensive investigation of a carefully selected case (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993). They provide a comprehensive understanding of complex issues (Zainal 2007), often in an engaging manner (Stake 2009), providing a level of detail not offered by other methods (Zainal 2007). The method heavily grounds the results in the context (Gagnon 2010) and is most suited to studies which aim to describe or explain a phenomenon. Case studies can have either a singular or multiple units of study. Usually, case studies analyse a single individual, a limited group of people or a small geographical area (Gillham 2000; Zainal 2007). They are concerned with micro-level investigations (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993). Researchers following a case study approach perform a range of activities to collect their data, including interviews and participant observations. Case study has a naturalistic style, where the researcher follows the lead of the participants (Gillham 2000).

The case study method has been criticised for lacking in generalisability and academic robustness (Zainal 2007). Critics have questioned how social life can be perceived based on the observations of one case (Hamel, Dufour & Fortin 1993). While case study researchers accept that the method is holistic and involves complex, non-isolated variables, they reject the argument that the method is inherently flawed due to the inability to generalise the results (Stake 2009). They argue generalisation is not the goal, and support the other valuable attributes the method offers to the provision of knowledge (Lincoln & Guba 2009). Others propose that combining case study with other methods, such as quantitative surveys can overcome issues of generalisability (Gagnon 2010).

Researchers aiming to gain understandings of the military partner community have used a case study approaches. Academic literature investigating military partners has been

significantly influenced by the work of doctoral researchers. Some of these researchers have adopted a case study approach, including Heredia et al. (2017), who investigated strategies for partners maintaining small businesses during military relocations based on a case study of five military spouses. Heredia made suggestions for future research and presented her findings as 'emergent themes' in acknowledgement of the challenge generalisability presents in case study research. Gall et al. (2009) combined case study observations and interviews with surveys to achieve an in-depth understanding of self-reliance and self-sufficiency of spouses in the US Army Team Building Program. Likewise, Evans-Joyner et al. (2014) used data triangulation in her doctoral research about four partners of US government employees completing foreign assignments.

In this study, the researcher ultimately rejected a case study approach. Combined with an ethnographic methodology, case study methods were considered to be too restrictive and did not provide for the collection of data which would allow for the generation of recommendations, which research question four required. Although others have successfully combined insider research with a case study method (Evans-Joyner et al. 2014; Heredia et al. 2017), in the current study, the researcher believed that a case study approach would be too narrow.

This section has discussed case study methods and highlighted the advantages and challenges afforded by the adoption of this method. It considered and then rejected a case study method for the current study.

4.2.2   Survey

This section will continue the discussion of methods by considering survey methods, including the advantages and disadvantages of the method. It will justify the rejection of a survey method, as it does not provide the depth of understanding the researcher sought. It was also likely to be rejected by the participant community.

Surveys are a useful method for conducting research. They systematically collect information from a designated population (Groves et al. 2009) and in doing so, offer measurable understandings (Olsen 2012). The use of surveys for the collection of research data is common, particularly in the social and behavioural sciences (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele 2012) and are used with both qualitative and quantitative methodological frameworks (Fowler 2008). Surveys appeal to researchers because they are cost and time effective (Groves et al. 2009; Olsen 2012; Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele 2012) and can be combined with other methods (Rugg & Petre 2007).

Survey methods can be challenging to use because response rates are typically low (Rugg & Petre 2007), which can have a significant impact on the resulting data. Surveys need to be carefully planned and administered, as the structure and layout of the survey correlate to the quality of findings achievable (Fowler 2008). Survey methods are most effective when the desired data can be obtained through the collection of relatively brief answers to structured questions, given by participants considered to be reliable, and when reasonable response rates can be assured (Vogt, Gardner & Haeffele 2012).

This study considered a survey method. Ultimately, the researcher rejected the method because deeper insights were required beyond what this method could provide. While surveys can be effectively combined with other qualitative methods, information which may have been provided by a survey was deemed to be currently available through other sources, in particular through the Defence Family Survey (Atkins et al. 2017) which was conducted most recently in 2017. Additionally, the researcher's insider knowledge provided insight that surveys may not be well received by the target population, and have a significant impact on the reliability of the data received from the survey. ADF partners had previously reported feeling apprehensive about surveys due to a perceived lack of response and change based on previously administered surveys. Similarly, other insider researchers have had increased success when they have used their insider knowledge in selecting the most appropriate methods. Jones (1999) experienced resistance to the survey method in online communities, where an influx of poorly executed survey-based research had fatigued the group. Jones found participant observation gave him enhanced results and cautioned other online researchers to consider the experiences and attitudes of the community before selecting appropriate methodologies, which confirmed the decision to select a methodology that allowed for thick description and deep insight, supported by a philosophical framework which values this knowledge.

This section has provided an overview of survey methods, and justified the rejection of survey methods for this study in favour of those which provide more in-depth insight. The following section will discuss an additional method considered for this study, which was social media content analysis.

4.2.3   Social Media Content Analysis

This section will discuss content analysis methods, mainly as applied to social media interactions, and will justify the use of a social media content analysis in this study.

Content analysis is the study of things people have created. It gives insight into human communication and allows researchers to systematically review communication patterns unobtrusively (Lee Abbott & McKinney 2013). Traditionally used in the communications field, content analysis methods have been growing in popularity (Neuendorf 2016). Content analysis is particularly useful for documenting gaps between perception and reality (Lee Abbott & McKinney 2013). Content analysis can be successfully combined with an ethnographic framework (Altheide & Johnson 1998) and is a method used by quantitative and qualitative researchers (Elo & Kyngäs 2008). Quantitative researchers emphasise the numerical value of the data obtained, whereas qualitative researchers focus on the themes which emerge during analysis (Pfeil & Zaphiris 2010). There is some critique of the flexibility and adaptability of the method, where there is no consensus on how the method must be applied, while others praise it for this aspect (Pfeil & Zaphiris 2010).

A content analysis approach has been used to make meaning of interactions on social media networks, as the method gains popularity with online researchers in a variety of fields. Parsons (2013) used a content analysis method to understand how companies use social media to connect with customers, while Hum et al. (2011) used the method for analysing tertiary students' Facebook profile photos to look at identity construction and gender roles. Similarly, Shelton and Skalski (2014) conducted a content analysis of Facebook profiles which included the analysis of text and image-based data. More relatedly, text-based interactions on social media have offered new opportunities for researchers to use content analysis to assess attitudes and behaviours (Schwartz & Ungar 2015). Qualitative and quantitative researchers who investigate online communities have used content analysis methods (Pfeil & Zaphiris 2010). Lerman et al. (2017) conducted a content analysis of posts from six Facebook groups used by adolescents with depression, aiming to discover how support was provided in informal social networks. Thoren et al. (2013) also investigated online social support with content analysis methods, investigating Facebook groups supporting parents of premature infants, similarly to Bender, Jimenez-Marroquin and Jadad (2011), who sought to understand how support was provided in breast cancer groups on Facebook. Content analysis methods provide online community researchers with a useful tool to analyse online interactions in regards to information and support.

The previous applications of a social media content analysis method for investigating social media communities provides support to the use of this method in the current study, which aims to understand the interactions of ADF partners in Facebook groups. A qualitative social

media content analysis will provide sufficient depth of understanding when combined with other qualitative methods, and is applicable to an ethnographic framework. Despite the potential suitability of content analysis, this method was ultimately not used to generate data in this study due to ethical concerns. A later section in this chapter will outline the ethical dilemma which occurred in attempting to conduct a content analysis during this study.

This section has justified the use of a social media content analysis for the study of ADF partners online in Facebook groups, although one was ultimately not used. Further methods, however, are required to contribute to the depth of understanding desired.

4.2.4   Focus groups

This section will discuss focus groups as a qualitative method, which will provide the comprehensive understanding desired.

Commonly used for marketing and business purposes, the use of focus groups, or group interviews, for social research has been steadily increasing in popularity since the 1990s (Wilkinson 2004). Focus groups deliver insider, native perspectives of issues (Barbour 2007). Focus groups afford unique opportunities for the collection of comprehensive data (Daymon & Holloway 2011). Focus groups are useful for exploring ideas and allowing participants to build on each other's ideas, affording the researcher the opportunity to probe participants for additional information or deeper insights when necessary (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). They are designed to replicate natural social communication (Flick 2009), which Barbour (2007) states is particularly appropriate for the study of women, as focus groups may duplicate regular feminine social interactions. Some claim that focus groups save money and time over individual interviews (Hansen & Machin 2013; Weerakkody 2009) while others reject that claim, indicating the additional costs of room hire and multiple-participant transcription increases costs and makes focus groups an expensive method (Morgan 1998b).

Generally, focus groups consist of a small group of participants, between two and twelve people. This small group informally discusses an issue while a moderator monitors and steers the discussion (Wilkinson 2004) through a set of predetermined question guides. The group usually takes no more than two hours (Krueger & Casey 2015). Focus groups are especially effective at allowing a range of opinions on the topic in one setting (Daymon & Holloway 2011), especially as participants debate the topic. Focus group methods can highlight and challenge concepts previously considered norms (Bloor 2001). Focus groups need to be

carefully planned, as the influence of the group participants, the location, and the moderator have influence over the group dynamics and therefore the research outcomes (Hansen & Machin 2013). Participants need to be selected carefully, and researchers desire to strike a balance in a group that is neither too homogenous nor too vastly different (Bloor 2001), to encourage candour within the group (Hansen & Machin 2013). Previous research has indicated that participants tend to talk more freely when they consider they are in a safe environment and interacting with others like themselves (Krueger & Casey 2015). Focus groups may work particularly well in populations where participants desire interaction with each other, as Barbour (2007) states, 'focus groups may be an attractive option for those who craved the opportunity to talk to others in the same situation as themselves, especially when there are not relevant support groups available'. In this way, focus groups strike a balance between observational and individual interview methods (Barbour 2007), offering the benefits of both. Focus group methods can be successfully used in conjunction with other methods to provide a comprehensive view of an issue (Hansen & Machin 2013).

As a flexible method, focus groups are used for developing understandings in a wide range of fields (Liamputton 2011), including for gaining insight into the interactions of people in online communities. Eysenbach et al. (2011) used focus group methods for investigating how virtual communities helped to improve health behaviour in overweight adults. De Wolf (2016) conducted a series of focus groups to study adolescent privacy needs on Facebook, and Ferguson et al. (2016) ran focus groups to investigate how first-year nursing students used social media to assist their transition to tertiary study. Brandes and Levin (2014) also used focus groups to investigate the interactions of Israeli teenagers on Facebook. There is also strong precedence for the use of focus group methods in generating understandings of military partners. Biedermann (2018) conducted virtual focus groups to investigate the experiences of Australian military partners accompanying their spouses on overseas postings. Foreman (2001) used focus group methods combined with individual interviews to collect the experiences and insights of Australian military partners in Townsville, Queensland. Blakely et al. (2014) combined focus group and interview methods with an ethnographic framework to investigate the impact of foreign postings on the spouses of British military personnel.

Focus group methods were determined to be an appropriate choice for the current study. Aligning with the interpretive, digital (social media) ethnography methodological framework identified in the previous chapter, focus groups deliver comprehensive data in sufficient depth. As literature has outlined, the online and offline worlds are inherently linked,

therefore using face to face methods to discuss online activity is a suitable choice. Focus group methods have been used to develop understandings of both online behaviour and the military partner community. Findings are strengthened when used in conjunction with other methods. Focus groups are also likely to be well received by the target population, who was identified earlier in this chapter to be resistant to survey methods, and may be receptive to focus group methods due to being predominantly female and seeking social interactions with others like them (Barbour 2007).

This section has explored and justified the use of focus group methods for this study. It outlines how focus group methods will deliver comprehensive findings to the depth desired. Focus group methods pair well with other qualitative tools and can be used in conjunction with interviews to expand on concepts developed in the group. For this reason, the following section will consider semi-structured interviews as a suitable method for this study. It will justify the use of methods within a digital ethnographic framework.

4.2.5   Interviews

The previous section considered the use of focus group methods in the current study and justified why these methods are appropriate and provide the depth of understanding desired. It also identified that focus group methods are particularly useful when paired with other qualitative methods. This section will consider interviews as an additional method for this study. It will outline the strengths of interviews, and justify the use of interview methods in this study.

Interviews are a vital method in the social sciences (Brinkmann 2013). Interviews are a conversation between researcher and participant to reveal insights, experiences, and understandings as the researcher seeks to understand the lived experience of the participant, as a representative of a group or population (Brinkmann 2013; Taylor, Bodgan & Devault 2015). Interview methods align with an ethnographic framework (Gubrium & Holstein 2002; Taylor, Bodgan & Devault 2015), in that the goal of interviews is to reveal participants knowledge and experiences for analysis and interpretation (Flick 2009). Interview methods offer the researcher the opportunity to ask for clarification and explore concepts in greater depth (Denzin & Lincoln 1998; Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009). They are interactive, occur in real-time, and use natural language (Rugg & Petre 2007). Interviews align with an interpretive methodology, where meaning is made through social interaction. Social relationships between people are

conversational and, as a result, conversations are rich with everyday knowledge and meaning (Brinkmann 2013). As language is key to experience (Schostak 2005), interviews create a space where two individuals can openly share their experience and learn from each other. Taylor, Bodgan and Devault (2015) state that an interview is a form of social interaction, and in line with an interpretive approach, knowledge is sought and obtained through this mutual interaction. Within interview methods, the researcher is considered a tool and the subjective positioning of the researcher is valued (Taylor, Bodgan & Devault 2015), as is the case with qualitative approaches. Aspects of the interviewer, including their gender and lived experiences, impact on the interview (Gubrium & Holstein 2002).

Interview methods are flexible (Hansen & Machin 2013; Rugg & Petre 2007; Wilson 2012), permitting the researcher to freely adapt the conditions to suit the aims of the research (Brinkmann 2013). While the flexibility of the interview method is an advantage, it has been critiqued for allowing too much fluidity, and for the possibility of bias, including social desirability bias, where the participant discusses what they perceive is socially acceptable to the researcher (Weerakkody 2009). Because conversation occurs naturally in everyday life, some naively perceive interview methods to be a simple form of data collection, which is an erroneous assumption as interviews are complex, and many aspects need to be carefully managed (Brinkmann 2013; Rugg & Petre 2007).

There are three main types of interview structure. These can be placed on a continuum (Brinkmann 2013), from structured interviews which follow a specific line of questions to the unstructured, where the dialogue between participant and researcher is casual and conversational (Wilson 2012). Situated centrally on this continuum is semi-structured interviews, which allow the researcher to follow a list of general questions, but allow the discussion to be fluid and lead by the participant (Wilson 2012). Semi-structured interviews provide the benefits of a structured interview in allowing for comparison between the interviewees, while also allowing the researcher to probe and explore issues further (Weerakkody 2009). The most common type of interview in the social sciences, semi-structured interviews permit the researcher leeway to follow what the participant considers relevant (Brinkmann 2013). Interviews can take place in a set physical location, which gives the researcher the benefit of being able to consider the emotions and body language of the participant (Brinkmann 2013), or via telecommunications, which can benefit the research by being less costly, allowing access to geographically separated participants, and reducing the impact of the researcher (Brinkmann 2013).

The ability of interview methods to deliver in-depth understandings into the everyday experiences of a population makes this method an appropriate choice for this study. In particular, as part of an ethnographic methodology, interview methods pair well with other qualitative approaches, including a focus group method. Where participants may be reluctant to discuss details in a group environment, the researcher can probe more intimately into an issue on an individual basis. Equally, as participants may be hesitant to talk to the researcher separately, the option of a group interview may allow them to share their experiences comfortably. Interviews allow the researcher the flexibility to receive a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and allow for complex and detailed answers in response to the set research questions.

The current section of this chapter has examined four research methods considered in this research; case study, social media content analysis, focus groups and interviews. It has outlined each of these methods individually and discussed the advantages and challenges each method offers. It has justified the rejection of case study methods, and the adoption of social media content analysis, focus group and interview methods. It has identified how these methods will allow the researcher to develop deep insight, values the subjective insider experience, and aligns with the qualitative, digital (social media) ethnographic framework identified in the previous chapter. These methods will permit for answers to the research questions which meet the aims of the study. The following section of this chapter will discuss the ethical considerations of the study and how the data for this study was collected.

4.3   Data Gathering

In the previous section on data intent, five methods were initially considered for use in this study. It concluded that a social media content analysis, focus group and interview methods were the most appropriate data collection tools for the current study. This section will continue the discussion of methods by discussing how each of these was used in the study. This section begins with a discussion of ethical considerations, including providing the details of ethical approvals which were acquired. It then discusses the ethical complications which arose from attempting to conduct a social media content analysis and justified the ultimate rejection of this method. It evaluates the focus group and interview methods, including providing an account of how the insider status of the researcher impacted on the data collection.

4.3.1 Ethical Approvals

Two relevant ethical boards approved the ethical aspects of this study. Firstly the Defence People Research- Low-Risk Ethics Panel Approval gave their approval. Reciprocal approval was then given from the Central Queensland University Human Research Ethics Committee. The ethical approval was given in consideration of the National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).

There were three primary considerations when preparing the application for review: minimising participant harm; obtaining informed consent; and protecting anonymity and confidentiality. The remainder of this section will address each of these considerations in turn, outlining the decisions made by the researcher to accommodate these ethical concerns within the study. The first ethical consideration was minimising harm. Researchers are expected to reduce the risk faced by participants as a result of their participation in the research project (Israel & Hay 2006). In this study, the risk of harm to participants was evaluated to be low. All participants were adults capable of giving consent, the topic was not sensitive or controversial, and the participants were not members of a vulnerable population. As such, low-risk ethics approval was sought and approved. Participants were provided research information sheets which gave the details of the Defence Community Organisation Helpline, where they could seek support and speak to trained counsellors if their involvement in the study prompted the need for further discussion.

The second ethical consideration regarded obtaining informed consent from participants. Written consent was sought from all participants. Appendix A and Appendix B includes copies of the information sheet and consent form provided to participants. For in-person focus groups and interviews, the consent form was given to participants as they arrived and before the interview commenced. Participants were given the opportunity to ask questions and reminded their participation was voluntary and they had the right to withdraw their participation in the study without consequence. For interviews conducted over the telephone, participants were e-mailed a link to a website where an electronic copy of the consent form was available. They confirmed their agreement to participate virtually. These participants were also reminded of their rights before the interview commenced. No participant withdrew their participation from the study.

The third ethical consideration was regarding protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of participants. The potential identification of participants was a particular concern raised by the Defence People Research Low-Risk Ethics Panel, as the ADF community is small, and individuals may be identifiable based on their roles and locations. Information provided about current and previous posting locations, as well as references to the members' rank, position or deployment location was removed from participant's comments to assure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants.

This section outlined the ethical approvals received for the current project and given details of the ethical factors considered in this study, including minimising harm, obtaining informed consent, and protecting anonymity and confidentiality.

4.3.2 Conduct and Ethical Considerations: Social Media Content Analysis

This section will continue to expand on the discussion of ethics by outlining complications which became apparent when conducting a social media content analysis. This method was designed to collect and analyse posts in one Defence partner Facebook group. These posts would give insight and understanding as to how partners use the group, as well as list topics of discussion. Despite the perceived benefits, this method offered to the research study, the implementation of the method was more challenging than was initially anticipated and placed the researcher at an unacceptable level of risk.

The research aimed to capture the social media interactions of the partners of those currently serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). At the time of study's design, the concept appeared simple. If the focus of the study was to discover how ADF partners use social media to meet their support and information needs, why not examine the interactions directly, by conducting a content analysis of posts in a Facebook group populated by ADF partners? As an insider in the community, there was no issue of access, and indeed, research on social media platforms is not an entirely new phenomenon. Researchers are drawn to social media methods for the advantages these methods offer in investigating naturally occurring behaviour, particularly in difficult to reach communities (Moreno et al. 2013).

Moving into the data collection phase of the research, it was immediately apparent it would not be so simple, and the established ethical debates around social media methods become increasingly complicated when adding additional layers of insider research and closed

communities. This section offers a reflexive account of the researcher's experiences and decision-making process with regard to using content analysis as a research method in this study. Reflexive accounts are essential for continuing discussions about the risk researcher's face while undertaking fieldwork across all forms which is especially important as researchers from a variety of fields engage more with participants in new places, such as the online space (Steinmetz 2012). As an account, it offers a unique perspective in that many discussions about social media research and ethics focuses on the risk to the participants, rather than offering perspectives on risk faced by the researcher.

One of the most significant ethical challenges debated by internet researchers is the decision to consider the research space as open or closed- that is, whether to consider the data public or private (Golder et al. 2017). As with ethnographic studies, a strong argument is made that data collected in a public space does not require individual consent from each participant in the study. To date, published research in online communities has frequently taken place in publicly accessible platforms such as Twitter and Reddit, where the content is open and available, even to those without a user account. By contrast, when a researcher needs to create a user account to gain access to an online community, the decision to declare the data as public or private is less obvious. While some researchers argue the internet is rarely a private space, others identify there are many factors which must be considered, including the community's expectation of privacy (Steinmetz 2012). This debate is ongoing (Roberts 2015) and complicated, as Henderson, Johnson and Auld state: 'In the context of social media, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to ethically claim a dichotomy of private and public' (2013, p. 550). Therefore, one of the most important decisions was to consider the private or public status of the focus community. This decision was approached in the context of deciding whether or not consent was required from participants, rather than an attempt to evaluate the groups' willingness to be approached, or gauging their potential reaction to a researcher in the space. As is common in content analysis methods, the review of publicly available text often does not require consent to be obtained. The researcher, perhaps naively, assumed the online community would be as warmly accepting and open as others had been until that point. The insider status of the researcher may have played a role in giving a false sense of confidence about the groups' likely reaction to a request for research.

The community under study in this account, ADF partners who are members of a Facebook group, has some unique features that led to the decision to define the group, and thus the research space, as private for consent collection. There is a gap in literature where

researchers do not offer detailed justifications for their decisions in considering the research space public or private. This paper fills this gap by explicitly examining decisions made.

'Groups' are a feature on Facebook, the popular social networking platform. Groups facilitate discussions between users, based on their commonalities (Park, Kee & Valenzuela 2009). Firstly, people seeking access to the group need to be added or invited by an existing member. At the time of research, the group under study was labelled 'Secret'. Secret Facebook groups do not appear in search engine results, and only current members can see the group's membership list, meaning incoming members need to have been made aware of the group through their networks. New members are vetted by group administrators, to confirm their association with the ADF. This intensive validation process aims to ensure that outsiders are not included, leaving the group with a clear peer-support focus. This community is one of many similar Facebook groups that offer links to information and support for ADF partners.

Based on the researcher's own participation in the group, it was clear the group expects privacy. While group members appeared to be realistic and appreciate that true privacy within internet groups is rare, access to the group by 'outsiders', or people using the group for their own gain, for example, businesses selling items, was discouraged, or outright disallowed through restriction of membership and deletion of posts. Despite frequent reminders from group administrators about the non-private status of social media platforms, people responded negatively to instances of perceived privacy violations. Indeed, members had past experiences where content from the group had been shared externally, which will be explored in more detail later in this paper. The openly negative responses to these instances are a clear indication that members of the group perceived it to be a private space. Kantanen and Manninen argue these expectations are present in social media communities, saying 'Even on public forums, people may have expectations of privacy, or find it inappropriate that their inputs are read, collected or analysed by external parties' (2016, p. 90). Steinmetz (2012) states the feelings of the participants about privacy are essential in considering whether or not their space is private or public; Roberts (2015) agrees, listing participant perception as one important component in the process of defining the privacy of the research space. Roberts states 'When making an initial assessment of whether an online community is public or private, consideration needs to be given to the accessibility of the community to the general public, the perceptions of members, community statements, topic and setting sensitivity, the permanence of records and intended audience,' (2015, p. 318). It was the difficulty in gaining access to, or even awareness of, the

group, as well as the group's clear intention of privacy that led the researcher to consider the group operates in the private, not public space.

The decision to consider the space as private led to the conclusion that informed consent would need to be collected from group members. Despite deciding the group's privacy status deemed informed consent necessary, the researcher did not anticipate a negative response to her request to research within the group. While the group had a history of negative responses to perceived privacy violations, this was not in the context of research. Having previously received support from potential participants about the importance and value of the research topic related to ADF partners, the researcher assumed the online community would be as accepting as it had been to others thus far.

The researcher approached administrators of the group, who act as community gatekeepers. There appears to be no consensus on whether or not researchers should approach administrators before commencing research in an online space (Golder et al. 2017). Social media community research academic Christine Hine (Hine 2015), in one of many experiences researching in social media groups, explored her decision to approach community moderators for permission prior to contacting group members. Similarly, in the instance of ADF partners, Hine aimed to gather the endorsement of group administrators to confirm the legitimacy of the research project to group members. The researcher was also considerate of the control the administrators exercised in the group, and while the researcher appreciated the administrator's concerns around privacy and external use of group content, did not perceive the administrators would be resistant to the researcher approaching group members for their consent. Informed consent is collected from each member of the group whose content (posts) would be included in the research.

Due to the sheer data load, and considerations about how and from whom to collect consent, the collection of informed consent from participants in a social media study can be overwhelming and incredibly time-consuming (Golder et al. 2017), which may be a factor contributing to the decision of researchers to declare a space public and not collect consent from participants. Hudson and Bruckman highlighted this in their study of internet discussion boards, stating a 'waiver of consent is appropriate in most cases, as obtaining consent is impractical' (2004, p. 127). Kozinets (2015) feels strongly about this issue and states a project cannot claim to use methods of netnography if informed consent is not obtained from participants. He considers the autonomy of the group must be respected in the first instance, and actively

discourages identity deception. Identity deception is where researchers pose as community members to gain access to the space and elicit responses, as was the case in Brotsky and Giles (2007) project with pro-anorexia online communities.

Consent in this study was intended to be collected electronically, with the researcher sending the participant an individual private message on Facebook about the research and asking for their permission to use their comments from the group. The researcher would then direct the participant to an online version of the research information sheet where the participant was provided more details about the research and their involvement. Following the receipt of successful low-risk ethical approvals, the researcher sent the group administrators a private message on the social media platform as planned. This message outlined the research purpose, the intent to collect posts from the group following obtaining consent from members, and then asked for the support of the administrators for these activities. The response to this message was very negative. The group administrators were protective of the community, and the privacy of the people within it. The group administrators used words such as 'betrayed' to indicate their feelings, not just about the research project, but the researcher herself. They went on to question the researcher's status as a member of the ADF partner community, suggesting the researcher may have gained access to the group under false pretences, and accused the researcher of possibly being a member of the media. The group administrators' responses were not anticipated by the researcher, despite the experiences of other online researchers, particularly in consideration of links between privacy, autonomy, and concepts of territory. Kozinets (2015) examines issues of territory in his analysis netnography research methods. Claims over territory have always been important to groups in society, and these territorial actions are no less important to those groups that meet in a virtual space, he argues. It is important to consider the autonomy these online communities hold, and desire to maintain. As demonstrated by the reaction of the ADF partner group administrators, perceived breaches of territory elicited territorial responses and with retrospective analysis the response from administrators could have been expected. This paper will clarify why, as an insider, the researcher did not consider the possibility of the response to her request being so negatively opposed.

The researcher felt a substantial impact from this negative response, not just professionally, but also on a personal level, having had her identity as a military partner questioned. The group administrators asked for some time to consider the researcher's requests, and the researcher agreed that time would be the best option for de-escalating the situation.

After re-examining the initial message and exploring further literature on digital ethnography, the researcher could see how she had ineffectively connected with the administrators.

Kozinets (2015) demonstrates the importance of language in communicating with participants, providing an example of how online researchers can neglect to adjust their speech and tone to the participant group. This example closely aligns with the experience of the researcher in this case study. Kozinets was researching within an online discussion board, investigating online boycotting. Similar to the message that the researcher sent to the Facebook group administrators, Kozinets presented an introductory message that affirmed his researcher status and expertise. An influential discussion board member protested his presence in the group and petitioned for other community members to also exclude him. Kozinets advises that the language of the message accounted heavily for the reaction of the community; by advertising his academic credentials and using advanced vocabulary, researchers' interactions could be negatively perceived as signals of outsider status and superiority. Negative responses from community gatekeepers are not uncommon in social media research (Roberts 2015) and groups may reject researchers' who have a dual commitment (Adler & Adler 1987).

In addition, the researcher had not accounted for the group's negative history in regards to content misuse. As previously highlighted, group members had either personally experienced or heard of experiences where content from ADF partner Facebook groups was shared externally, with negative consequences. Group posts were previously shared with military unit command teams and subsequent disciplinary action ensued for the member. Additionally, online bullying and media attention resulted from individuals sharing of group screenshots. An article in the Northern Territory News in 2013 highlighted behaviours of some ADF partners in Facebook groups and caused the closure of the particular group identified in the article (Turner 2013). This history meant there was the increased possibility for members to associate this request for research with other incidents in the past, where information from the group was shared externally and damaged personal and professional relationships. In not considering the group history applicable to her request for research, the researcher started the conversation at a disadvantage. Kozinets (2015), in the context of the earlier example, also acknowledged his oversight in failing to account for the history of the community under study had with outsiders and research.

Kozinets (2015) experience of naivety, which aligns with the researchers, is not uncommon. Markham recalled the experience of commencing research online. She states 'We

were naïve enough to think that it would be relatively straight-forward to transfer research strategies developed for studying face-to-face context online' (2005, p. 793). Likewise, Hine (2015) discusses the difficulty, even for experienced researchers in adapting complicated ethnographic methods with computer-mediated communication. Markham (2005) believes continual discussion of the specific challenges, issues and solutions in reflexive accounts such as this one, are essential for moving forward.

The original message sent by the researcher to group administrators also neglected to identify the researcher's identity as a military partner. In highlighting the researcher status, the researcher minimised, rather than utilised, her insider status (Wilkinson & Kitzinger 2013) which demonstrated to the group administrators that she was indeed an outsider, by way of her connection to a more privileged status, as that of a university researcher (Kerstetter 2012). Considering the researcher had considered her insider status as key to gaining permission to conduct research, this was especially unhelpful. In a later message to the group administrators, the researcher clarified her background, family situation, and the work her partner did in the military before discussing her research. This message was very well received, leading to the eventual repairing of the relationship. Though the social media analysis did not eventuate, the group administrators became supporters of the research project, which also included qualitative interviewing, which further confirmed it was the researcher's insider status which engaged participants.

The adverse reaction from the community administrators caused the researcher to carefully reassess the decision to research the group. When negative responses were received, one immediate cause for concern for the researcher was that she would be removed from the group. This would mean removal from a community that is a personal resource, both socially and informationally. This fear is not unfounded, Hudson and Bruckman (2004) were removed from 63.3% of the internet chatrooms they attempted to research when their status as researchers was revealed. This action would also have a sustained impact on personal reputation. Likewise, this was a consideration for Hine (2015), who understood that an adverse reaction from group members could be damaging to her future research prospects, and professional reputation.

The ADF partner network is a small, closed community. The partners in these online groups are also active throughout the broader community, and accordingly, the researcher risked isolation not just from online, but also offline networks. The online space is no longer

separate from the offline one (Brake 2014). The two worlds frequently shift and move between, and a person can feel equally invested in a virtual community, with the associated risks, as a traditional geographically based one (Wellman & Gulia 1999). Online communities are places where the distinction between roles of researcher and participant, insider and outsider distort (Driscoll & Gregg 2010).

Researcher risk is a topic not frequently discussed in relation to social media research. It may be easy to dismiss social media research as safe, especially compared to the physical danger some researchers face when undertaking fieldwork. It would seem that comparing a researcher interacting with participants via a computer screen seems inherently less risky than a researcher conducting face-to-face fieldwork. Until recently, the risk to the researcher was a concept limited to physical danger. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) developed a four area framework for understanding risk to the researcher. Their framework argues that researcher risk includes four components; physical, emotional, ethical, and professional. Others have demonstrated these aspects of research risk in the field. One example of this is the work of (Letherby 2000), who wrote a comprehensive exploration of emotional risk that can be faced by researchers. Her work, which was concerning insider researchers interviewing women on involuntary childlessness, reflects on the difficulty faced by those engaged in research on emotionally charged topics.

The researcher's work within the ADF partner community was, by previous definitions, safe. While the researcher met with participants face-to-face to undertake semi-structured interviews and focus groups, precautions were taken to assure the researcher's physical safety. The classification of this research as low risk led to the decision to apply for a low-risk ethics application, which was approved by two relevant ethical boards. The experience of the researcher engaging in online research provides an apt demonstration of how research projects initially considered to be low risk can still present a risk to the researcher. In this instance, the researcher faced professional risk, and additionally a type of emotional risk, social isolation.

The topic of the research was not considered sensitive or risky. Researchers who engage in research on controversial or sensitive topics may prepare themselves for resistance; however, when the topic is not considered sensitive, there is no preparation for an adverse reaction. A report establishing the best practice norms for researchers engaged in 'risky research' provides advice to universities and researchers on how to respond to online

harassment (Marwick, Blackwell & Lo 2016). This report opens by stating these recommendations are 'practices for researchers engaged in risky research.' The examples given in this report focus on more traditional understandings of risky projects and sensitive topics. The experience of the researcher in this reflexive account suggests that concepts of risk can be more nuanced and complicated than they first appear.

The human need for community and the benefits of an active community connection is well established. While studies on ADF partners are limited, existing research on military partners in both Australia and overseas demonstrates a clear link between connections with a strong community or support network, and the partner's wellbeing (Blank et al. 2012; Karney & Crown 2007; Rea et al. 2015; Siebler 2003). Additionally, recent surveys of the ADF family community indicate the community is online, both complementing and replacing offline community links (Atkins 2009). From the commencement of the research, the researcher had already begun to withdraw from the group. This trend towards withdrawal has been noted by other insider researchers, who found that researchers who are insiders tend to withdraw from the group in order to assert their new researcher status, while outsiders tend to immerse into the group and distance themselves from their identity as a researcher (Adler & Adler 1987). The researcher noted in the days following the decision to not pursue the social media analysis, the researcher began commenting on posts in the group again for the first time in months, responding to one group survey about military orders, and a second response providing local resource suggestions. Following these posts, the researcher noted in a fieldwork diary how the decision to not proceed with the social media analysis might be associated to her re-engagement in the community.

While researcher risk, specifically social isolation, was the primary reason for the withdrawal from the social media analysis following the adverse reaction of group administrators, other factors contributed. These factors include the impact on the community and the protection of participant identity. The presence of a researcher knowingly collecting data from the group would have had an impact on the group, in part due to the group's negative association with outsiders and content removal, as was detailed above. The potential risk to participants was also carefully considered. The possibility of participants being identified was considered by the researcher, as social media research carries with it an increased responsibility to protect the identities of participants due to the unique dynamic of social media sites (Zimmer 2010). It is worthwhile to consider the researcher's presence in the community could also betray the anonymity of the group, as Facebook allows for friends and others to search for groups that

a person is a part of (Cote 2013). The researcher's desire not to alienate community gatekeepers to do future research in the community was also considered. Ultimately, the decision was made not to engage in research directly within the group. The researcher's involvement in the group undoubtedly informed the research project, in assisting with the formation of research questions, the generation of interview questions, and later identifying themes from the data. Cote also reflected on the indirect impact of social media on her research, stating 'data collected while conducting interviews are suddenly contextualised or challenged by reading a participant's latest Facebook posts' (2013, p. 616).

In reflexively evaluating the decisions and outcomes associated with the social media analysis, the researcher became aware of the influence of the chosen methodology. The researcher had approached the social media analysis as content analysis, rather than a digital ethnography. In hindsight, a digital ethnography approach would have been a more appropriate methodological choice for framing the collection of data from the social media group. This influenced the research as literature related to online content analysis generates different discussions and holds different norms than digital ethnography. This difference is evident firstly in the way online content analysis tends to consider the data as text, rather than human interaction. If the researcher had identified the methodology as a digital ethnography, the ethical review board might have applied their understanding of traditional ethnography, which alludes to challenges being present. A digital ethnography methodology may have prompted a search into ethnography, as opposed to online content analysis, which may have led the researcher to literature by Rheingold (2000), Hine (2015) and Pink et al. (2016). Hine (2015)'s experience in researching 'Freecycle' social media communities would have been particularly helpful to the researcher. This is a significant finding as more researchers from a wider variety of fields engage in social media research, attracted by the richness of the data on offer.

In summary, the decision to remove the social media analysis from the research methodology did not have a negative impact on the outcomes of the research; the supporting methods of qualitative interviewing proved to be sufficient in providing robust findings. While challenging at the time, this experience has provided the researcher with rich insight into issues impacting social media, trust, and online community. This study has therefore provided background into netnography and social media research methods. It also highlights that researchers neglecting to publish their experiences with planning and ethical components of social media research has emerged as a gap in the literature. This study also contributes to discussions on what constitutes public and private spaces online by providing an example of a

space where members demand privacy and are exclusive towards outsiders. These attitudes indicate to researchers they should also consider those spaces private, and carry out their research accordingly. This study is also unique, as unlike more common research projects of open social media platforms such as Twitter or Reddit, the online space being researched could not arguably be considered public, which complicated issues of consent and access. It considered researcher risk, using Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000)'s four-part framework for understanding risks beyond the immediately physical. Ethical committees and researchers alike are perhaps ill-equipped for assessing the risks faced by online researchers as they engage people on modern communication platforms.

In providing a reflexive account, this discussion has detailed the experience of one researcher who attempted to collect informed consent from the community under study. Aligning with Kozinets (2015) theories on online territorial behaviour, the community gatekeepers (Facebook group administrators) responded by demonstrating their feelings of protectiveness towards the online space where members operated. The administrators questioned the right of the researcher to be engaged in the space, primarily as a researcher, but then secondarily as a person, doubting her status as a military partner. The researcher's following reflection on the experience demonstrates that researchers need to be considerate of their tone and language when engaging with potential participants on social media platforms. This is of particular importance for insider researchers, who have the unique challenge of balancing their dual identities. Further study is needed regarding supporting social media researchers, especially those engaged in insider research.

This section has provided a reflexive account of attempting a social media content analysis. It justified the rejection of the method, citing risk to the researcher as too significant. The following section will continue the discussion of methods by reflecting on focus groups, and outlining how focus group methods were used to elicit broad and comprehensive data.

4.3.3 Conduct and Ethical Considerations: Focus Groups

As identified earlier in this chapter, focus groups were chosen as a research method for their ability to give deep insight into the experiences and attitudes of ADF partners. Five focus groups were conducted. These took place in: Perth, Western Australia; Brisbane, Queensland; Townsville, Queensland; Darwin, Northern Territory; and Canberra, Australian Capital Territory. A total of 19 people participated in the focus groups across all locations. The

smallest focus group had only two participants, and the largest group had six participants. The focus group participants were all civilian partners of currently serving ADF members, except for one participant, who was in a dual-serving relationship. Participants were all female. Ranging in ages from 23 years to 57 years, the average age of participants was 35.38 years. Participants, on average, had been in a relationship with their partner for between five and 15 years, and their partners had been in service for between 11 and 24 years. Two participants' partners had served for less than five years, and two participants' partners had served for greater than 25 years. Nine participants were associated with the Army, eight participants associated with the Navy, and two participants associated with the Air Force.

Participants were recruited through posts on a variety of ADF partner Facebook groups, advertising the focus group details and requesting partners attend. The researcher also advertised the focus groups on her own social media profiles. Participants who expressed interest in attending a group were contacted via e-mail or Facebook messenger, given the details of the focus group, and asked if they knew of anyone else who may be interested in attending. Facebook group advertisements were deleted following the group to protect the anonymity of participants who had indicated they were planning on attending. A copy of this advertisement appears in Appendix C.

An essential choice in planning the focus groups was location. The focus groups in this project were conducted in public spaces, including Defence Community Houses, community buildings, and local libraries. Defence Community Houses are located on or near military bases and are funded in part through DCO grants. The use of Defence Community Houses and public spaces offered a familiar and neutral site for the focus groups, which is desirable for encouraging participants to be relaxed and forthcoming with opinions (Daymon & Holloway 2011). These spaces reduced access barriers for participants, as community and public spaces did not require Defence identification to access, had ample parking space and disability access, and sufficient room to comfortably house the group.

Often the most significant disadvantage to focus group methods is cost. Venue hire, catering, monetary compensation for participants, moderator wages and transcription fees can quickly drive up the expense. Utilising local resources assisted with managing expenses. Many of these facilities permitted free hire for academic use, where others only requested a small donation. Reducing venue hire expenses made the focus groups an affordable data collection

method. Catering for the focus group was also reduced as the researcher purchased goods at a local supermarket before each group, rather than engaging professional catering services.

The decision to not monetarily compensate participants also significantly reduced expenses. The researcher considered offering participants a small financial compensation in the form of a gift card under twenty dollar's value. After consideration, however, the researcher believed participants would be willing to give their time for free, being motivated by altruism rather than financial gain. Largent and Lynch evaluated the role of altruism in a review of payments to participants and found altruism 'plays an ethically significant role in justifying the imposition of risk on participants' (2017, p. 1), stating the offer of payment may indeed offend or turn away participants, especially if the compensation is small. In consideration of these issues, the researcher instead redirected participant compensation funds to providing free childcare at the focus group venues, and increasing catering at each venue. This was successful, and participants commented on how they appreciated having childcare for their children while they participated in the group. The availability of a childminder during the group appears to have been a stronger motivation for participation than financial incentive.

Eight questions were created to generate discussion in the focus groups. An initial set of questions was created and then tested with two individuals from the sample population. The final eight questions were decided after receiving feedback from this test process. These questions were used in all five focus groups to enable comparability between each group. Not all questions were asked in each group, as some groups ran overtime, or covered the question during their discussion of other questions. The first question was designed to enable everyone in the group to speak, allowing for two advantages. The first of this was that each participant gave their name for the audio recording, and the second was it formed an 'ice-breaker' to build a level of comfort and familiarity with the other participants. The final question allowed participants to summarise and close their discussion on the topic. A prompt sheet was made to give participants a list of places where they can receive information and support to prompt participant's thoughts, and also generate discussion about what resources might be missing from this list. The prompt sheet and complete question list can be found in Appendix D and Appendix E.

Each of the five focus groups ran smoothly, and participants appeared comfortable and willing to share their intimate experiences and insights. Each focus group had between two and six participants, a number which was carefully planned. The largest group had six participants

and did not appear to be too large that any participant felt excluded or unable to have their turn talking. In contrast, the presence of only two participants in the smallest group, due to last minute cancellations, appeared to have a negative impact on the willingness of participants to share and discuss freely. While conversation from the group was still fruitful, following the closure of the group and the departure of the other participant, a participant stayed behind to clarify her position further. The participant told the researcher she had not discussed a particular topic while the other participant was present. In all groups, the careful consideration of the researcher to build a comfortable environment was successful. In each group, the participants remained behind to share some social time with each other, and in one group participants made future arrangements to meet, which aligns with Barbour (2007)'s statement where focus groups may be particularly beneficial for participants who desire to meet with others in similar situations.

The insider status of the researcher impacted on the implementation of focus group methods as the researcher acted as the moderator for all five focus groups. There are mixed opinions on whether the best moderator is one who is deeply engaged with the topic materials and who knows the history and norms of the group, or if the ideal moderator is someone who is unfamiliar with the setting and thus able to ask more probing questions, which is an argument that takes place across insider research more broadly (Brannick & Coghlan 2007). The moderator's potential bias must be carefully considered in a focus group dynamic (Teddlie & Tashakkori 2009);however, subjectivity can be a valuable resource that enhances rather than distracts from the group (Daymon & Holloway 2011). The researcher's status as a community insider benefited the groups by increasing participation and allowing an understanding of the particular discourse unique to Defence. Participants also noted their appreciation to talk to someone who 'knows what it is like'.

Potential participants may have been known to the researcher before the focus group due to the insider status of the researcher. While literature neglects to explore the issue of focus group moderators having social connections with participants, it is accepted that participants may know each other before the group convenes. In fact, due to the size of the target community, this was highly likely to occur in these focus groups, and this is not necessarily a disadvantage. Also, it was very likely participants would have existing social relationships with each other. It was critical then for the researcher to consider whether to purposely include or specifically exclude people whom the researcher had previously known. A book chapter titled 'I get by with a little help from my friends: Friendship and Focus Groups' investigated this

decision. The following section is an edited version of that book chapter. The full chapter, which has been submitted for publication, can be found in Appendix I.

In preparing the ethics application, the following question was raised: as an insider in a closed community, the potential for research participants with whom the researcher has an existing relationship is highly likely. Should she utilise these connections by placing friends into focus groups? Seeing both the advantages and disadvantages, and finding limited guidance in literature, it was decided to explore the concept of friends in focus groups through this chapter. Despite these advantages, this section has justified the decision that in this circumstance, and other circumstances where focus groups are used in an insider research project, the use of friend-participants is not ideal and subjects the research and the researcher to unacceptable disadvantages. Accordingly, friends of the researcher were not invited to be participants in this research. This chapter also argues that while friends should not participate in focus groups, they still have an essential role to play in the research process.

The inclusion of friend-participants in group interviews provides some definite advantages to the research project, especially in regards to lifting the time-intensive burden of recruitment. People who are invited to focus groups by people they know and respect are more likely to attend the focus group (Krueger & Casey 2015). It is difficult to not take advantage of this enhanced willingness, especially in this case where there is also significant travel cost in conducting the focus groups. This use of insider status to make contact with participants is termed by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013, p. 252) as 'utilising' the insider status. Having friends who are emotionally invested in the decision to participate is an appealing factor in the consideration to include friends in the focus group.

Furthermore, friends are more likely to be able to identify body language cues. In Taylor's experience in holding face to face interviews, being able to use her previous history to identify when a friend-participant was feeling uncomfortable, perhaps telling a false-truth, or withholding information, was a significant benefit. Taylor (2011, p. 6) noted that while the data received from non-friend participants was still useful, it was not to the same volume and depth as that which resulted from friend-participants. This same benefit would apply to a focus group setting, where the moderator would be able to identify body language cues from friend-participants, including knowing when to prompt for further information. Although the topic of study is not sensitive and it is expected that participants will be reasonably forthcoming with opinions and enter freely into the discussion, people in group situations can still be slow to

warm to a group discussion. While a skilled moderator would create a relaxing environment which encourages the full participation of participants, the inclusion of friends in the group may hasten this settling in process. Having prior knowledge of the friend-participants personality may provide an additional benefit in allowing the moderator to prepare. Krueger (1998b, p. 59) encourages moderators to spend time in identifying who is likely to be dominant and reluctant speakers in the focus group to enhance the discussion and avoid conflict in the group, and with friend-participants this would be simpler. It is also worthwhile to consider that friend-participants may be more ready talkers overall, in that friends feel comfortable both agreeing and disagreeing on topics. This means friend-participants may be more readily forthcoming with opinions, even if those opinions are in contrast with the rest of the group, which is desirable in a focus group.

In establishing a welcoming, comfortable environment where participants feel free to share views and opinions on the topic at hand, which is the ultimate goal of focus groups, the moderator needs to maintain neutrality amongst the focus group participants. Managing the composition of the focus group is key to its success (Morgan 1998a). Moderators are warned when one participant may consider another participant to hold a claim to a more expert opinion or higher social status, the participant may be less forthcoming with their own opinions and experiences, considering it less valuable than that of the other participant (Krueger & Casey 2015). This may be the case with military spouses on the issue of their partner's rank. Focus group moderators, who understand that all opinions are as valid as each other, need to create an environment where all participants feel able to share, which can be a challenge. Creating an open and comfortable environment starts at the commencement of the focus group, where the participants are arriving and already collecting cues about the focus group, their fellow participants, and the moderator. An indication the moderator has friends within the group may have a negative impact. Participants may identify the more comfortable and familiar dialogue shared between the moderator and the friend-participant, in the way that friends have a more relaxed body language with each other and others may subconsciously pick up on this (Edwards 2002). Any messages that may indicate the moderator's agreement with one opinion or idea may inhibit the willingness of others to contribute to the group discussion or may cause them to be defensive of their ideas in ways that may not be accurate to their position on the issue, having an impact on the analysis.

The structure of focus groups demands minimal interaction between the moderator and the participants, the role of the moderator is to keep the conversation relevant and flowing. The

intent of the focus group is for participants to interact with each other to explore the questions and issues posed by the moderator. Focus groups differ in this way to other interview methods, where direct interviewee/interviewer interaction is ideal. Similar to the situation where friends within the group revert to interacting directly with each other, rather than the whole group, the situation of the moderator and the friend-participant interacting with each other needs to be avoided (Krueger 1998b). As they are used to doing as friends, the friend-participant may naturally tend to address the moderator, rather than the whole group, which may have a negative impact on the dynamic of the focus group. Friend-participants may also use shared experiences with the moderator to confirm or highlight their argument. This exclusive dialogue alienates other participants and is unhelpful during the analysis.

The inclusion of friend-participants in the focus group research is a concern in regards to validity with concerns the research may be dismissed as biased or anecdotal. Greene confirms insider researcher is 'frequently accused of being inherently biased' (2014, p. 4). The inclusion of friends as participants may strengthen this claim by others that the research does not conform to standards of high objective rigour due to the substantiative emotional investment in the research (Brannick & Coghlan 2007). For those who hold true to a scientific ontology, this is especially true, as the researcher is considered to be distinctly separate from the research. Researchers who subscribe to this ontology consider the need for separation extends to the researcher's social network (Blake 2007). While insider researchers are already challenged to be aware of their own bias, when that opinion is also shared by members of the focus group they may have even more difficulty in analysing and adopting conflicting views in the research (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Those who have engaged in insider research with friends acknowledge the potential for data distortion and lack of objectivity with the inclusion of friend-participants. Taylor states that 'insiderness coupled with intimate knowledge and an emotional attachment to one's informants makes objectivity incredibly difficult and leaves very little room for analytic distance' (2011, p. 9). Some of this is because friends are more likely to share opinions and values (Taylor 2011).

As Taylor (2011) found in her insider research in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community, the researcher questioned if she had shared too much detail with friends about the research plan, and had to consider the level to which these previous discussions may impact on the friend's knowledge of the subject. These friends may hold information regarding the topic they might not have known before discussions about the research. Morgan (1998a, p. 97) cautions researchers of the dangers of 'over-scripting' focus

group participants. These friend-participants may bring this new knowledge into the focus groups, or they might bring up topics in the focus group that they know the researcher holds an interest in, despite the fact they might not have done this naturally. During the early stages of the research project, this event occurred at a social outing. During a discussion about a local Facebook group, the researcher's friend shared the details of the research project, along with views about social media use by ADF spouses and members. These views reflected a discussion the friend and the researcher held a few days earlier.

A final disadvantage in the inclusion of friend-participants relates to maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Friend-participants may have difficulty understanding that the researcher, in the moderator role, will not be able to discuss the focus group afterwards as they may have if they had been involved in the group discussion informally. Any discussion that arises afterwards can have an impact, not just on confidentiality but also analysis. While declining to discuss the focus group afterwards protects confidentiality and the analysis stage of the research, it risks offending or alienating the friend. Many insider researchers experience issues related to confidentiality (Kerstetter 2012). While few focus groups are genuinely anonymous (Morgan 1998b), the protection of the participant's identity is just as crucial in focus group research as it is in other qualitative methods. The use of friend-participants limits confidentiality, especially in this situation where the participants have extensive connections through the small ADF community (Morgan 1998b).

By exploring the positive and negative outcomes of the use of friends as participants in focus groups, this section has presented the argument that the benefits of friend-participants, including the ease of recruitment, do not outweigh the more significant disadvantages. Despite this, friends can play an important and influential role. Using friends to suggest and recruit others, which are similar to themselves, can be useful. Friends would recommend others who would be suitable for the focus groups and provide contact details and an introduction to make recruiting smoother. As mentioned earlier, participants who are invited to focus groups by people they know and respect are more likely to attend the group (Krueger & Casey 2015). Morgan (1998a, p. 89) terms this as the 'referral' method of obtaining participants and argues it is often the best method of sourcing participants, mainly because it considerably reduces the time spent on recruitment. This allows friends to be engaged in the research, which is a positive association for them, without potential negative impacts. Referrals are still screened for suitability according to the requirements of the research; in this case, the screening confirms that participants are spouses or partners of ADF members.

Testing focus group questions is the second way in which friends could be valuable. Krueger (1998a, p. 16) recommends testing focus group questions with people who are similar to the planned participants, perhaps by inviting them for a coffee. The intention is for the friends give their impression of what the question means, and it is a chance for the researcher to identify before the focus groups any questions that are ambiguous, misleading, or result in answers that do not meet the needs of the research. Being an insider in the community makes this very simple, and the researcher perceives many friends being enthusiastic about being asked to be involved in the research project in this way. Friends, being more invested and emotionally connected, would be prepared to give detailed feedback about the questions.

Researchers who use friends in fieldwork must consider the ethical impact of their choice. The literature on inside researchers attributes insider status with resulting in an increased comfort level, so participants share information more willingly and this would be increased with friends (Dwyer & Buckle 2009). Taylor (2011, p. 9) cautions insider researchers to be aware of the onus they hold for their friends 'Knowing when to not overstep the line between friend and researcher is a vital skill that the intimate insider must develop'. In the relationship between researcher and friend-participant relationship, there is a power difference, unlike that of the friend-friend relationship, and the researcher needs to be conscious of this power difference (Taylor 2011). While friend-participants may give consent, the researcher needs to be aware of their feelings and the value of their trust by establishing valid and robust ethical standards, which protect both the researcher and the friend-participant from future harm or discomfort. Over-disclosure is an issue in focus groups; moderators need to be cautious of personal and ethical boundaries that can be approached when people feel comfortable and turn the friendliness and open nature of the focus group into an almost cathartic opportunity to release their feelings on topics (Morgan 1998a).

The trust developed in the friendship may be impacted on in the focus group, especially if the friend feels as though something they disclosed in the focus group has been falsely represented, whether this feeling is real or perceived (Kirsch 2005; Labaree 2002). Feminist researcher Whitaker encountered a situation where her friendship suffered because she, as the researcher, confused her friend and researcher roles (Whitaker 2011). The suggestion of inside researcher literature warns of the importance of making clear the distinction between friends and informant-researcher (Labaree 2002). The format of focus groups aids the researcher in this regard, in that they have a definite start and end time, are often one time only, and the signing of consent before starting the group cues the friend-participant that this situation is different to

regular interactions as friends. Interacting in a location different from where the friends would typically connect socially is helpful also. Focus groups naturally provide a boundary between the researcher and the friend, which helps in the management of expectations, confidentiality and trust (Kirsch 2005). Greene (2014, p. 8) recommends adopting safeguards throughout the research including keeping a methodological log in which any data gathering techniques or involvement with participants is recorded. One recommended strategy of balancing disadvantages of insider researcher status is to engage in ongoing reflection with peers, of which this chapter forms part (Costley 2010). As with everything, the recommendations to overcome any potential bias are professionalism, an ability to be open and honest, and a focus on the protection and comfort of the research participants (Dwyer & Buckle 2009).

Finally, others would argue the disadvantages of friends in focus groups could be overcome with the use of an alternate moderator. In this study, the use of an alternate moderator is not ideal. Morgan (1998b, p. 48) argues that a moderator with an active connection to the community can be a better choice than one with professional training. It would be a disadvantage for the study to lose the benefit of the researcher's insider research status to use friend-participants or gain objectivity. Further to this, the military family research community is very limited, and it would be difficult to find someone with both the background knowledge of the topic and the required skills to host the focus groups. Also, arguably the purpose of a PhD program is to enhance and train research skills. The focus groups provide dual functions in not only collecting data for this project but in training the researcher for future qualitative research.

The advantages of including friends in focus groups include having more willing and ready participants for the group, which relieves the time-intensive burden of recruitment. As has been the experience of people holding interviews with friend-participants, the use of friends in focus groups may aid in being able to respond to body language cues and create a more relaxed and open focus group environment. The researcher concluded that friends should not be included in a focus group where an intimate insider relationship exists between the moderator and the participants; however, researchers should utilise their friendships to benefit their research in other ways. This section suggests researchers can use their friendship networks to source non-friend participants, by asking friends to refer others like themselves, not already known to the researcher moderator. This referral system allows the researcher to access the rich benefits afforded to insider researchers, while not encountering the difficulties faced by the inclusion of friends in the group. Focus groups are a rich qualitative research method, which

provides deep understanding and data for researchers. With careful planning and consideration, focus groups pair well with insider research, due to the increased ease of obtaining participants and background information on the community, which results in more effective focus group discussions. In the current study, participants who were friends of the researcher were not permitted to join in the focus group discussions, on the basis of the potential issues and complexities outlined above. Some participants were previously known to the researcher, however, were acquaintances rather than people with whom the researcher had a significant relationship with. In addition, the decision to include friends for the purpose of recruitment was successful. Several participants were introduced to the researcher through the networks of her friends.

This section has reviewed how focus group methods were used in the study. It described the participants, the locations of the focus group, and the decision to not financially compensate participants for their time. It also conducted an extensive investigation into the decision to not invite participants with whom the researcher had a social relationship. The following section will continue the discussion of methods.

4.3.4   Conduct and Ethical Considerations: Interviews

Interviews were conducted to complement the focus group method. They allowed the researcher to explore issues raised in the focus groups in greater depth and afforded greater flexibility in discussing topics with participants. Fourteen individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted in this study. Interview participants were partners of currently serving ADF members, with two exceptions. One participant had separated from the member who was still serving, and another participant was in a relationship with a member who had recently discharged. The participants were civilians, except for one participant who was in a dual-serving relationship. Thirteen participants were female, and one participant was male. Ranging in ages from twenty-nine years to fifty-seven years, the average age of participants was 34.10 years. Most participants had been in a relationship with their partners for between five and fifteen years, and their partners represented a mix of time served. Several had been in service for between 11 and 24 years, and an equal number had been in service for over twenty-five years. Two participants' partners had served for less than five years. Most participants were associated with the Navy, and only one participant was associated with the Air Force. In considering both the focus group and the interview participants, there were a slightly higher partners associated with the Navy than the other two services. This could be considered to be

not representative of the wider ADF, as the Army is the largest service (Australian Government Department of Defence 2015). The insider status of the researcher may have influenced this aspect of the study, as the researcher was associated with the Navy service, although other factors may have also influenced the higher number of Navy-associated participants.

Similarly to the focus groups, participants were recruited through posts on a variety of ADF partner Facebook groups, and through posts on the researcher's personal social media profiles. Individual interviews were arranged with partners who expressed interest in attending a focus group but were unable to attend the designated time. In some instances, the researcher directly approached potential participants to request an interview, as was the case for interviews conducted with the administrators of Defence partner Facebook groups. Also, articles were published in two Defence related publications, the Army newspaper ('ADF families' 2016) and the Defence Family Matters magazine (Robinson 2016). These articles discussed the research study and invited participants to come forward. The participants lived across Australia in a variety of locations. Face to face interviews were conducted when the participant and the researcher were available. The participant selected the location. Most interviews took place in a local coffee shop, and a few interviews were conducted in participant's homes. Where the researcher was unable to travel to the participants' location telephone interviews were arranged, and one interview took place over e-mail.

Interview questions were designed to prompt discussion, but as per the semi-structured format discussion was often led by the participant. Questions were initially identical to those asked in the focus groups. Additional questions, which suited the particular experience of the participant, were often added. For instance, when the participant was an administrator of a Defence Facebook group, the researcher tailored questions to explore those experiences. Questions were also adapted as the research progressed. The researcher used the interviews to explore issues emerging from the focus groups in greater depth. As with the focus groups, the insider status of the researcher impacted on the interviews. Participants discussed their comfort in speaking with someone who understood their experiences. In every face-to-face interview, and some telephone interviews, the conversation became more social, and the participant asked the researcher to share her experiences as the partner of a Navy member. Many participants also asked for the researcher's advice in regards to balancing academic study with parenting and military life, expressing their interest or current engagement in tertiary education.

This section has discussed how this research study applied semi-structured interview methods. It describes the participants, the interview locations, and the types of questions which were asked. This section also explored the impact of the researchers' insider status. It also discussed ethical considerations that impacted on methods chosen for the study.

4.4 Data Analysis: Overview

The previous section explained the methods used in this study, firstly outlining the literature regarding the methods more broadly, and then explicitly outlining how these methods were applied and the ethical considerations that informed the approach. It discussed the initial adoption, and then rejection of a social media content analysis, and then the adoption and use of focus group and interview methods. This section continues the discussion of research design by identifying how the data was firstly transcribed, and then analysed. It outlines the transcription style taken and justifies a thematic analysis approach in line with an ethnographic methodology.

4.4.1 Transcription

The audio recorded during the participant focus groups and interviews was transcribed. Oliver, Serobich and Mason argue transcription is an important, and often under-examined, part of the research process, stating 'While often seen as a behind-the-scenes task, we suggest that transcription is a powerful act of representation', (2005, p. 1273). Representation occurs as the transcriber makes the decision, either consciously or not, as to what to include in the transcription, and what not to include (MacLean, Meyer & Estable 2004; Witcher 2010).

The primary researcher was also the transcriber for this project. This decision was made for several reasons, the first being budgetary restrictions. If time permits, literature agrees that it is ideal for the researcher to be the transcriber (Easton, Judith & Greenberg 2000). One reason for this, Easton, Judith and Greenberg (2000) states, is the outcome of the research is more accurate when the transcriber is deeply invested in the outcome of the research. Having the researcher as transcriber was also a benefit when placing non-verbal notations into the text (Easton, Judith & Greenberg 2000). In this study, during the focus groups and interviews, the researcher only took light notes to capture observations such as facial expressions, body language and movements, and details about atmosphere and surroundings. During the interview, the researcher, keeping in mind the future transcription process, gave verbal cues

about the nonverbal actions of the participants. This was especially useful in focus groups where conversation moves quickly, and the researcher might not remember afterwards that a participant had made a crucial nonverbal motion. As an example, in one focus group, while one participant was talking, a second participant was nodding her head. Once the talking participant finished, the researcher turned to the second participant and asked 'You were nodding your head then. Do you agree?'. Had the researcher not been actively considering the transcription work ahead, they might not have been as mindful of capturing this interaction.

Participants often used specific and localised terms and phrases. The researcher, as an insider, was more easily able to capture and understand the meaning of these terms, reducing transcription errors (Oliver, Serobich & Mason 2005). Fellow insider researcher Witcher considered his insider position an asset in this regard, stating 'I believe my relative insider status gave me a distinct advantage over relative outsiders in terms of transcription. My familiarity with the dialect spoken by participants and knowledge of unique terms and phrases enable my transcripts to remain faithful to the words spoken by participants. As a result, the quality of transcripts and integrity of interpretations were enhanced' (2010, p. 122).

Oliver, Serobich and Mason (2005) state there are two major transcription styles- naturalism and denaturalism. A naturalist approach is when the transcriber captures every word and noise verbatim, while denaturalism focuses on the content of the interview, correcting grammar and removing background noise, including utterances and verbal fillers- i.e. 'umms' and 'ahhs'. Transcribers can choose between the two, and anywhere in the space in-between. In considering that this project is not seeking to perform a detailed conversational analysis, the transcript took on a denaturalist lean. The focus was on content accuracy, rather than a verbatim recollection (MacLean, Meyer & Estable 2004). While grammar was not corrected, standard spelling was and verbal fillers, such as 'umms' and 'ahhs', were removed. A notation was made where a verbal or nonverbal signal was considered significant. Notations for emotional content, such as laughter, long pauses and crying, was adopted from the list suggested by Easton, Judith and Greenberg (2000). Verbal encouragements, such as 'Mmm, okay, yes' from the researcher, aimed at encouraging the participant to continue their discussion, were removed to aid in the reading of the transcript. These decisions were made in consideration of participants, who were offered the opportunity to review the transcript once complete, and who may have been self-conscious about their speech when presented in its detailed form (MacLean, Meyer & Estable 2004). The transcription process was undertaken manually, with the researcher listening to the audio for content and typing, a process that MacLean, Meyer and Estable (2004) suggests

improves accuracy. Transcription through voice software systems was considered but rejected on advice that fixing errors negates the time saved (MacLean, Meyer & Estable 2004). The researcher was also a proficient typist.

The transcriptions were spot checked in a process suggested by MacLean, Meyer and Estable (2004), where a small number of the total transcripts were listened to again in full, and when minimal errors were found, the remainder of the transcripts were accepted as correct. The checking of the transcripts for errors is directly related to the trustworthiness and validity of the research (Witcher 2010). Interview participants were offered the opportunity to read and review their transcripts as another method of validity checking. Most participants declined or did not respond to the invitation to review their transcripts. No edits were requested by the three participants who accepted a copy of their interview transcript.

The current section of this chapter on research design has outlined the process which was undertaken to transcribe the focus group and interview data. It identified which elements of the verbal discussions to include in the transcript, and which were disregarded. It also demonstrated the robustness of the transcripts, which were sent to participants for review.

4.4.2   Analytic Approach

This section demonstrates the validity and robustness of the research findings by explicitly describing the data analysis process. It justifies a thematic analysis approach for developing knowledge about ADF partners, and for answering the research questions. It explores how thematic analysis aligns with ethnography and insider research before providing a detailed description of the coding framework, leading to an understanding of how the themes were developed.

Thematic analysis is an analytic method for identifying, analysing, and displaying patterns of meaning in a dataset, commonly known as themes (Braun & Clarke 2008; Joffe 2012). The researcher searches carefully through the data, seeking themes which accurately describe the phenomenon being studied (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006). These themes emerge from the careful reading and revising of the data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane 2006), which may include data transcription (Braun & Clarke 2008). Thematic analysis has roots in the much older method of content analysis, sharing many of the same principles (Joffe 2012). Where content analysis engages in the process of counting the frequency of themes, thematic analysis acknowledges that frequency is not correlated with importance (Joffe 2012). Thematic

analysis has parallels in other popular qualitative analysis methods, including grounded theory (Attride-Stirling 2001), and is not aligned with any particular theoretical framework. It is paired frequently with interview and focus group methods (Joffe 2012). This method of analysis remains relatively unexplored in the context of qualitative research, and researchers call for increased literature which explicitly outlines the process and experience of undertaking a thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling 2001; Braun & Clarke 2008; Joffe 2012).

In qualitative research, it is customary for researchers to perform multiple roles; both fieldworker and analyst (Okley 1994). In this way, the lines between data collection and data analysis stages are blurred. There is no distinct stage where the researcher ceases data collection and commences analysis (Bryman & Burgess 1994); preliminary coding structures and themes emerge before, during, and after the researcher engages in fieldwork (Okley 1994). This aligns with the experience of analysis for ethnographers, who analyse the data during collection, rather than conducting a specific data analysis process (Muecke 1994). Original ethnographic researcher Malinowski (1922) demonstrates this, as he collected detailed field notes and performed frequent analysis on these notes while still being present in the field. While appearing chaotic and messy to the positivist (Okley 1994), this approach to coding allows for all aspects of the fieldwork to be represented. Coding during the transcription process enables robustness in the research process (Saldana 2013), highlights the subjective positioning of the researcher, and provides evidence for the critical importance of reflexive practice and explicit explanations of research design.

While acknowledging analysis is an emergent process, literature agrees there are several stages evident in conducting a thematic analysis. These are broadly the coding of material, devising a coding framework, and then identifying themes as they emerge from this framework (Attride-Stirling 2001). These stages align with the ethnographic method of analysis, which suggests the organisation of the data, the identification of codes and themes, and then the interpretation of themes (Brewer 2000). This study adopted Braun and Clarke (2008)'s approach to thematic analysis, which they described as a six-stage process. The remainder of this section will provide a detailed description of the codes and themes as they were developed through this process.

The first stage in conducting a thematic analysis involves the familiarisation of the researcher with the data (Braun & Clarke 2008). In this study, this process was conducted during fieldwork, as the researcher was the interviewee and moderator in all interviews and

focus groups, and also began to transcribe audio from these discussions. This process of transcription afforded the researcher the opportunity to become immersed with the data, which leads to the second stage of analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2008) categorise as generating initial codes. The researcher, being attentive to possibly emergent themes, kept a log of initial codes as they emerged. This process is also called first cycle coding, where the data is organised in preparation for later, more intensive analysis (Saldana 2013). This list included several different types of codes, both descriptive codes, where the data is summarised using a single label selected by the researcher; and in-vivo coding, where the participants own terms and phrases are used (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). The initial list of codes in this phase included codes such as support sources, information sources, 'Pillow Talk', 'You Chose It', 'Entitlement', mentions of DCO and DFA, benefits, and security. The complete list of codes is provided in Appendix F.

Following the generation of an initial coding list, the researcher collated the codes to begin searching for themes. It was at this stage the data and coding structure was imported into the NVivo11 software, a qualitative data management program. Through this process, a smaller list of codes was generated, which also prompted the process of identifying emergent themes in the data which could provide an understanding of the phenomenon. The research questions were also carefully considered during this time. The secondary coding list included codes such as 'mention of DCO', 'Category- I Am A statements', and 'community'. The complete list of secondary codes is available in Appendix G. The researcher then engaged in the third, fourth and fifth states of thematic analysis. As according to Braun and Clarke (2008), this involves the researcher searching, reviewing and then defining themes. This secondary list of codes was refined into the final five themes, which ultimately became the five chapters of this thesis, which are: community, networks, trust, security, and identity. This was done with the NVivo11 program and manually, as the researcher printed material organised in the software program and reviewed it in hardcopy. Braun and Clarke (2008) suggest a sixth, final stage of analysis, which is when the final report is produced. The researcher in this study concurs as the themes continued to be developed and refined through the preparation of this thesis.

This chapter commenced by revisiting the research questions which guided this study. This chapter aimed to present the decisions which were taken in planning the research design of this study, all of which have an impact on the findings. It introduced the data intent and discussed case study, survey, social media content analysis, focus group, and interviews methods, examining their validity for the current study. It outlined the process undertaken in

collecting the data for this study and discussed the ethical considerations, including a detailed discussion of the complications regarding a social media content analysis method. This chapter examined focus group and semi-structured interview methods, and considered the impact of insider research in planning and executing these methods. This chapter provided an explicit account of how the data was transcribed, and then thematically analysed in consideration of the ethnographical framework adopted in the previous chapter. By reflexively evaluating the research design, this chapter contributes to the robustness and validity of the research findings, which are now explored in the following five findings chapters.

Chapter 5.
Community

ADF partners use social media to connect with people in new postings, to stay in touch with friends and family when they move away, to find out information, to feel supported and to share their experiences (Female, 29, Navy partner)

The previous chapter discussed research design. It outlined the methods chosen, focus groups and interviews, and justified the use of these methods in a digital (social media) ethnography. It outlined how the focus group and interview methods generated transcripts, which were then thematically analysed to generate five central themes. Individual findings chapters explore these themes. This chapter will explore the first theme which emerged during analysis: community. Chapter One defined community and virtual community and this chapter relies on those definitions.

Earlier chapters identified how the transient lifestyle of the military places unique social and community constraints on partners. Partners may be required to establish new community connections on each relocation. As was also outlined in previous chapters, secure connections to community are linked to support, resilience, and increased well-being outcomes for partners, making the exploration of a community theme important. Four sub-themes emerged in the analysis of the community theme. The first of these is related to connection and demonstrates partners desire connections with their local community in addition to connections with other ADF partners. The next sub-theme relates to information and support, and how participants perceive Facebook groups meet their information and support needs, demanding minimal time and emotional energy. The third sub-theme exposed social media as a tool used by participants in times of transition. The fourth and final sub-theme explored in this chapter discusses disconnection from the community and outlines instances when participants disengaged from the ADF community.

This theme refers to both online and offline community connections. As is accepted in a digital (social media) ethnography, the online and offline worlds are no longer separate entities, which was demonstrated in this chapter as participants discussed both physical and virtual interactions. The first sub-theme explored in this chapter will be community connection. It will explain how participants desired to participate in both local and ADF partner communities.

5.1   Connection to Community

This section will discuss the first sub-theme of community, which is connection. Focus group and interview participants indicated strong desires for connection to a community. Their need for community involved both a desire for local community, as well as a desire for community with other ADF partners. This section explores both of these elements, starting with a desire for local community connection. Participants identified this need for connection with a community is not unique to ADF partners, but aligns with the general human need for community. Thus, their need for connection was not considered dependent on their relationship with the ADF. The following example demonstrated this:

> *I do not think we are unique to anybody else who has moved house. I do not see Defence as the issue, people relocate all the time, whether they are in the Defence force or not, people have a need to feel connected, and have friends, and social media is one way of doing that* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

Along with demonstrating a need for community, participants identified social media allows for easy social and community interactions. Social media was identified as a valuable tool for establishing and maintaining connections with a community. Interview and focus group participants discussed how social media provided the ability for partners to feel engaged with others easily:

> *The benefits are being able to be connected and being able to engage with your community, and you know, not feel as isolated and alone* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

One benefit of social media groups was the value provided by instant social connections was considered, as one interview participant outlined in the experience of relocation:

> *It is a very immediate fix of comfort and connectivity. Especially when you have been posted to a new area, and you do not know anyone or your support groups are not there* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

In addition to desiring local community, participants indicated a need for connection with other people in the same situation, those being other ADF partners. This study reveals that partners have a specific need to connect with other ADF partners. They desire connections with those who shared their lived experience as the partner of a serving ADF member. Participants were aware that many aspects of military life are unique, and are not shared by anyone else, even in similar frontline occupations such as police and paramedic services, or other absentee workplaces, such as Fly-In, Fly-Out workers. This was demonstrated with the following example:

Being in Defence is unique. There is no other business that I have ever come across where the partner is sent away for some [undetermined length of] time and the communication with that partner is undetermined, and there's all these 'I do not know'. Can I go to that wedding? Well, I can. But I do not know if he can. Can I RSVP one and a maybe? (Female, 31, Navy partner)

Defence life is not something I can discuss with people. They do not understand, and I do not want to seem like I am looking for sympathy, oh, woe is me (Male, 32, Navy partner)

Participants indicated that they sought out connections with others 'like them', or those 'who got it', or 'who were in the same boat':

They want a community, and they want a community of people who understand what they are going through (Female, 27, Navy partner)

I think a lot of the time partners and families of Defence reach out because of the social isolation, trying to offset that, trying to offset some of the loneliness, trying to find some connectivity or the understanding that they potentially do not currently have through civilian friends and family (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

These comments reinforce the desire of ADF partners to connect with people who have similar lived experiences. Social media groups were considered by participants to be especially useful for developing these communities with other partners. This was demonstrated here as participants offered the above comments in reference to questions which asked why they consider social media valuable for military partners.

This section has discussed the first sub-theme of community, which was connection. It outlined participants desired community connections with both their local community as well as with other ADF partners. This expression was also made in regards to the enhanced ability of social media to provide information and support links, which will be explored further in the following section on the next sub-theme of community, information and support.

5.2   Information and Support

This section will explore a second sub-theme of community: information and support. This was a strong sub-theme which emerged during analysis. This section firstly discusses participant's perceptions that social media communities provided them with necessary links to information.

Previous research, explored in Chapter One, confirmed partners desire information during deployments (Foreman 2001), as well as demonstrating partners are unhappy with communication they do receive (Defence Families of Australia 2014b; Orme & Kehoe 2011). The analysis of focus group and interview transcripts indicated ADF partners use Facebook groups to seek information. Participants specified they desire information which is timely and relevant, two elements which virtual communities on Facebook deliver increasingly efficiently. Information was considered especially important in the event of deployments and relocations. For example:

> *Every time you move, it is a great way to make those connections before you move. I think that is the main reason people use social media, to share information about what they are up to, and to find out more information about what other people are up to* (Female, 31-50, Army partner)

> *The Facebook groups for me, when my partner was in basic training was like, a lifesaver. A friend of mine added me to the group and it was like every question I ever wanted to know was on there, someone had already asked it* (Female, 23, Army partner)

Participants in interviews and focus groups indicated they used social media groups for seeking out information associated with the ADF member's service, particularly in regards to accessing entitlements. One participant, the partner of a recently enlisted Army member, outlined a situation where the member was unsure about a leave entitlement. Rather than directing their questions to someone in the member's chain of command, the participant suggested she could use the social media groups to quickly and easily receive an answer. The participant offered this example to demonstrate why she finds the Facebook groups valuable:

> *We were talking about remote locality leave travel, and I asked, 'which one did you claim?', and he said, 'I have no idea, I do not even know who to ask to find out which one is which' and I told him that I can find that information out in five seconds* (Female, 23, Army partner)

Participants explained they sought information on behalf of the member from both Facebook groups and the ADF itself because it was faster and often more efficient for them to do so. Participants explained the member was frequently too busy to follow up with issues, or frequent absences from home disrupted their availability for such tasks. For example:

> *At the end of the day it is the member's entitlement, but it does affect us. It does filter down to us, as the wife and our kids. I can see, in my case now with my husband's work, he does not have time for this stuff. The only way I am going to know is if I learn it myself because he is not* (Female, 38, Army partner)

Participants identified timely access to relevant and specific information was essential to them, and not a strength of support organisations like DCO. Social media channels allowed participants to access information quickly. As members of a late-modern society, ADF partners typically expect expedient delivery of information and reduced response times from organisational channels. Social media facilitates these demands, delivering partners immediate access to other networks, including friends, family, news, and business. Their demand is not only for fast responses but also information which is delivered efficiently and meets their specific situational needs. Examples of comments to support this perspective include:

> *I do not think that DCO are doing what they are supported to do, so families are finding support online and through the various groups. And probably getting the information a little bit better* (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

> *In the group, we have people go, 'We are in a defacto relationship and we have not been recognised yet', we go to them and say, this is what you have got to do. It is just easier to talk to other people than DHA* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

One interview participant reflected on the process she undertook to access information from DCO, and while she acknowledged the useful programs and resources available to ADF partners, she critiqued the delivery method of that information:

> *They have good information there. They have got programs, they have good ideas, and it is just getting that information to people and being responsive when people get back to them… There is quite a few steps between what you need, for example, the deployment pack, and how you go about finding it. Unless you know exactly what you are looking for, it becomes a bit of a challenge and I can see why a lot of people give up and walk away* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

Through Facebook groups, partners can also access a network of other partners who can link them with the specific information they need at any point. The strength of this network is explored more in the following chapter through an investigation of a Networks theme.

Analysis of a community theme also revealed partners use social media groups for accessing support. ADF partner Facebook groups provide much desired social support:

> *The groups are like a support network, where people go to get something off their chest or share some news* (Male, 32, Navy partner)

Participants acknowledged the support provided by ADF partner Facebook groups was both online and offline. One participant discussed the support she received as part of one ADF

partner support group, explaining the members of the group would respond to the needs of partners in practical ways:

> *It was the biggest support group I've ever been part of. Flowers, roses, massages, gift vouchers. I posted, 'I am having a bad day and my husband has just gone away', I received a bunch of flowers, a box of chocolates on my doorstep. A partner's husband had cancer and they got a thousand dollar Visa card, a massage and a holiday. The support was amazing* (Female, 38, Army partner)

Participants considered this practical display of support valuable. This support was specifically tailored to the individual needs of the partner who was struggling. Support was not limited to gifts, as in the above example, but was also given through childcare relief, transport to medical appointments, and assistance with maintenance items. Practical support was not the only type of support which partners found valuable in virtual communities. Participants reflected on how they were able to build friendships within the virtual communities. A focus group participant shared how she met one of her closest friends via a Defence partner Facebook page when she responded to a post from a partner relocating into the area:

> *That is how I met one of my best friends. She posted 'I am just moving over soon'. We just started talking, and we clicked like that, before she even moved over. Within a couple of days of her arriving, we'd met up, I had taken her out for coffee, shown her places, and like that we have become best friends* (Female, over 22, Navy partner)

One focus group participant demonstrated a connection between friendships established on virtual communities and access to support. This participant explained how her online friendships were a source of support during a crisis. The friends she had created on social media had linked her with Defence support services, such as DFA, DCO, and veterans networks, upon the news that her husband, the ADF member, had a serious illness:

> *If it was not for Facebook groups, I would not have met so many friends, I would not have gotten any of the help I did last year, because it was my friends I knew through Facebook who went to DFA, who then coordinated everything. So if it was not for Facebook I would not have known* (Female, 40, Army partner)

Participants also used social media groups for accessing social support and building friendships for their children. For example:

> *I joined the local Defence family Facebook group, and said, 'Who lives in this area, does anyone want to catch up at the park with the kids for school holidays so we can get to know each other?' And there were about forty of us that turned up, and there were quite a few new people with kids, so we got to know them and they got to know*

us. The kids had friends before they even started school, so it worked out for them too (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

Participants discussed their frustrations with DCO and the lack of practical support provided, particularly on a daily basis. While participants acknowledged that DCO and associated networks responded well in crisis and emergency situations, participants noted the daily support they desired, such as childcare relief, is unavailable through official organisational channels:

> *That is the number one thing, 'I am having trouble with my kids, and I am tearing my hair out, and I have no family around, I want someone to come to my house now'. And this is the sort of thing they cannot provide you* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

Participants also discussed their preference for being able to seek out friendships and community in a comfortable, safe place, before investing significant amounts of time and energy. In some instances, participants explained they investigated new connections before meeting with them face to face. For example:

> *You have to get out of your comfort zone to meet people, so you can become familiar without having to leave your lounge room. That is probably why I really like social media too, because I do not have to put myself out there socially* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *It is easy, it is just this day and age, especially if you have kids, you can just go on quickly, especially on your phone. It is a good way to connect with people, particularly if they have any sort of anxieties or depressions or anything like that, they can still stay connected with people without actually having to see anybody, or get out and about* (Female, 34, ex-Navy partner)

Participants said they valued the ability to interact socially with less effort. They considered this valuable particularly for people in high-stress situations, or those with heightened anxiety. This section has discussed the second sub-theme of community: information and support. It identified participants valued the types of support and information which was available to them through the interactions with partner Facebook groups. The following section discusses the third sub-theme of community, which is social media as a tool for transitions.

5.3   Social Media as a Tool for Transition

The previous section explored the sub-theme of information and support, demonstrating participants valued Facebook groups for the support they offered, and the way they presented opportunities for lower energy social interactions. This section moves on to investigate the third sub-theme of community: tools of transition. It demonstrates the activity

of the ADF community during transitional periods and displays how partners use social media for alleviating difficulties associated with transitional periods. During analysis, it became clear that the ADF community, both the virtual and the physical, is most active during times of transition. Participants discussed reaching out to virtual communities, as well as organisational channels such as DCO during transitional periods, which included partner deployment, relocation, as well as changes in status, such as the arrival of a child or the departure from full-time employment

Participants in focus groups and interviews gave numerous examples of reaching out to social media groups, organisational channels (or both) during transitional periods. The most frequently cited situation in which participants connected was deployment. Participants discussed all stages of deployment, from planning to reunion, which confirms previous research which found deployment is a transitional stage for families (Karney & Crown 2007). Participants also discussed relocation, and these two events are widely acknowledged as being a source of stress and upheaval for members and their partners (Aducci et al. 2011; Atkins 2009; Karney & Crown 2007). Less frequently mentioned but still significant events were new parenthood, illness, and enlistment. For example, one interview participant discussed how she had not engaged with the ADF community until her child received a special needs diagnosis:

> *I did not have much to do with Defence supports or services at all until my son was diagnosed. So it is really only been since that point that I started seeking help and involvement* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

Another interview participant stated she did not engage with ADF communities on social media before relocating to Defence housing, and giving birth to her first child. The participant explained that she felt as though the changes in her life, of becoming a parent, leaving the paid workforce, and relocating had an impact on her decision to engage:

> *It was the combined timing of becoming a parent and therefore having kid-related questions, moving into Defence housing and not working full time, and therefore spending WAY more time on social media* (Female, 29, Navy partner)

A focus group participant also discussed how the change to parenthood, and leaving the workforce, led to her engaging more with organisational channels and social media groups. This participant said that before the arrival of her children, she primarily established friendship and support networks through her workplace:

I stopped working once we had the kids. Before that, I had never done Facebook or Defence. It has only been recently that I found the unit page for Defence families (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

A second participant in the same focus group agreed with her, saying that her departure from the workforce due to the birth of her daughter led to her engagement with the Defence community:

I was the same. It was not until I stopped working that I thought, I had better do something else (Female, over 22, Navy partner)

Enlistment is another time of transition for partners, as the partner supports the member through initial training and onto their first military posting. One participant discussed her experience of using social media to meet her informational and community needs during her partner's enlistment and initial job training. This participant appreciated the advice other partners gave her. She perceived this advice was more accurate than the advice she received from official sources. At the time of her partner's enlistment, the participant was not a recognised dependent and as such, could not access services available to other partners in ADF recognised relationships. Social media groups were critical in providing a community to this partner during the transitional period of enlistment. This participant also expressed that she felt her experience was not unique, and many other young partners have similar experiences and needs to hers:

The Facebook groups were a lifesaver while my partner was in basic training. It was really helpful because nobody I knew had a partner in the Army, and so it was really good to see a bunch of people going through the same thing. Some of the things I was told, like, 'you are never going to see your partner'. All these people saying what Defence life is like, prepared me for what it is actually like, so I am really grateful for those people (Female, 23, Army partner)

Comments such as the one above reinforced the role social media plays in connecting partners with information, support, and community during times of transition.

This section has explored the third sub-theme of community, which demonstrates social media and community is used during times of transition. These transitional times include deployment and relocation, as well as changes to employment and parental status.

5.4   Disconnection from the ADF Community

This section will explore the final sub-theme of community: disconnection. It identifies times when participants felt the ADF community did not meet their needs, leading to

a persistent disinterest in connection. These participants attempted to engage with the military community during times of transition in their lives, including the arrival of a first child and a particularly challenging deployment, but did not find the support they were seeking. These incidents led to their disinterest into further connection with the ADF community.

One interview participant was a currently serving Army member in a dual-serving relationship. After the arrival of their first child, the participant visited a local DCO new mothers group. She discussed in the interview her negative experience at this group, which she linked to a difference in values, but she also considered her negative experience was related to her status as an ADF member. She felt the other, civilian partners treated her differently:

> *I attempted to visit DCO, and it was not a good experience. I do not know, maybe because I am not really an Army wife. Well I am, but I am also not. Because we are both enlisted. I do not really fit in* (Female, 30, Army, dual serving partner)

This participant stopped attending the DCO mothers group, feeling that her existing friendship and support networks were sufficient for her needs:

> *I just did not like the vibe and so I stopped going. I do not need any of this. But I am sure there are mothers groups in DCO that are really good and really amazing. Some people have said that it depends on who is there each year* (Female, 30, Army, dual serving partner

Another interview participant had a similar experience. She moved with the member to a new location and struggled to find work immediately. In her previous home, she valued her role and her career, and frequently spoke through the interview about the aspects of her career she enjoyed. The participant attempted to engage with the ADF community on social media, and found it unhelpful:

> *I have my own life outside of Defence, and it was not until I realised that I needed that connectivity that I looked into it* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

Both of these participants identified the community was not helpful to them because it did not align with their values. For example:

> *There a lot of women that are very bitter, and hate the Army for having their husband away. They resent that. And I could not handle the vibe and this resentment towards Defence. Basically they were just, so bitter, and such a toxic kind of environment that I was like, 'I am not going back* (Female, 30, Army, dual serving partner)

> *I did not want to look at these forums where they slam Defence, and they talk about how shit it is for your partner to be away. I did not need that, I needed things that*

made me feel empowered and like I could get through the next few weeks of him being away (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

These comments reflect the participants finding ADF communities online and offline to be places where anti-Defence sentiment was openly shared, which neither of them found helpful, identified with, nor wanted to be part of. This theme was most obviously present in the participant who was in a dual-serving relationship. This suggests the needs of partners in dual-serving relationships may be different to that of partners in military-civilian relationships, particularly in relation to community and support.

This section has explored the final sub-theme of community, disconnection. It identified times when participants felt the ADF community did not meet their needs. Participants discussed how they felt their values did not align with others in the community. The examples used in this section related to both online and offline community interactions.

This chapter has explored the first theme which emerged following analysis of interview and focus group data: community. It has done this in response to the first research question, which seeks an understanding of how and why ADF partners interact in Facebook groups. The community theme revealed four sub-themes, which were discussed in sections within this chapter. The first sub-theme explored was a connection to a community, and demonstrated how partners desire interactions with their local community as well as with other ADF partners. The second sub-theme related to information and support. This sub-theme identified partners desire to receive information and links to practical and social support. Participants felt social media groups were particularly apt at delivering information and support. They also appreciated the lower-energy and lower-risk nature of social media interactions. This chapter then explored social media as a tool for transition, a sub-theme which demonstrated how partners interact with the ADF community more during transitional periods. The final sub-theme of this chapter was disconnection. This sub-theme discussed times when participants felt the ADF community did not meet their needs; this was most often related to differences in values.

Chapter 6.
Networks

If someone asked me to delete my social media profile, I would be like, oh my god. All of my friends I have collected over the years, they would be gone (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

The previous chapter focused on the online activities of ADF partners in Facebook groups as evidence of a community theme. This chapter explores the theme of the network which emerged during analysis. It considers ADF partner's use of social media sites more broadly, with a focus on their use of social media to create and maintain networks. Analysis indicated networks were distinctly separate from community. This chapter firstly outlines the online ADF partner network, describing the network and discussing how the network is different to communities. It then explains three strengths of this network. These include: the ability of the network to collate resources; to be easily accessible; and highly individualised. This chapter then investigates exclusion from the network. This chapter contributes to addressing the second research question, which seeks to understand what, if any, services and support online interactions provide partners. This chapter demonstrates one of the services and support provided to partners is a connection to a network. Participants perceive they receive advantages from being connected to the online network.

The first chapter of this thesis explored definitions of community, one of which was from Norlin and Chess, who stated community is 'an inclusive form of social organisation that is territorially based and through which people satisfy their common needs and desires, seek means to advance their well-being, and relate to society' (1997, p. 7). A comprehensive exploration regarding definitions of community, including critiques of Norlin and Chess, can be found in the introductory chapter. Importantly, the critical element of community is relationships, and a sense of belonging and membership. A network is a series of nodes and connections. In this network, the nodes and connections are instead people and resources. While the network has the potential to generate community, as is discussed in the following section, the network itself consists of predominantly dormant connections waiting to be activated and used.

6.1   The Online ADF Partner Network

This section explores the online ADF partner network. It outlines how this network performs a different role to a community. Participants in this study explained the benefits offered to them through connection to the online ADF partner network.

This study indicates the online ADF partner network is distinctly different from a community. While partners can be members of both a network and a community, they serve alternative purposes. The network, in its barest sense the connections themselves, is not a community. The network transitions to a community when need or circumstance activate it. This activation can take form in multiple ways. A partner can activate the network by asking a question, making a request for assistance, or by demonstrating they are in a similar situation to others. From this activation request, connections in the network bind together, forming a community. The community that forms from these network connections can be for an extended period, or for a shorter more specific purpose, such as deployment. An example of this was provided by an interview participant who created a Facebook group linked to a specific unit, before a major deployment. The participant stated she created the group shortly after moving to the area to make friends and help others, and noted activity in the group increased as the deployment date approached:

> *I created that group, and then it picked right up when they started leaving, and after they left* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

The participant felt the need for community would be best met by connections with other Defence partners:

> *They want a community of people who understand what they are going through, which is why I think the [unit] page works so well, because we are all going through it at the same time* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

When the situational need (for instance, deployment) has ended, the community withdraws; however, partners rarely disengage from the community entirely. Partners may cease visiting the space the community occupied, but retain membership in case they are needed again. This was reflected in Facebook groups by a person remaining a member of the group, but no longer creating new content, responding to the comments of others, or perhaps hiding content from their feed. The above interview participant reflected on the inactivity within the group following the end to the deployment which had prompted the creation of the group:

> *You can see it at the moment, the group has gone quiet, because our partners are back home, our lives have gone to focusing on everyone else and everything else, and we have adult conversation happening again within our own home* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

Despite a perceived reduced need for the group and the inactivity on the page, group membership numbers remained steady. People who left the group did so as their associated

ADF member relocated to other units, or discharged from the service entirely. The participant reflected on how, after a prolonged period of inactivity, the group became active again following the unit's return to active service. The participant discussed her understanding of the group's function as both a network and a community:

> *It makes sense to me that when we have that adult presence in the house, we do not need the group as much. I do not feel it is an issue. I feel it is still an open forum, and if there are people who want to reach out, they are still going to receive a response when they reach out, which you could see by the way people were responding to the posts. People are still active when they want to be. The group is just less needed when they are home* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

The transition from network to community is evident in this example. The connections within the group are a network when they lay dormant and inactivated. The network holds the potential for a community but is not a community in itself. It is important to make the distinction that the network is different from a community; the network is not a community because it does not meet the definition of virtual community established in chapter one, which includes regular communication. The network does not deliver organised, frequent communication between members. The network is passive. While the network should not be underestimated for its ability to build community, on its own, the network is a mere collection of connections. Having established that ADF partners use social media for engaging with a network, as well as with a community, this chapter now examines the strengths of the network, and the benefits participants perceived they receive from connection to that network.

6.2   Network Strengths and Advantages

6.2.1   Ability to Collate Resources

The previous section explored the online ADF partner network, which emerged as a theme from the analysis of interview and focus group data. It established that partners use social media for engaging with the network, and participants perceived receiving advantages from connecting with this network. This section will begin to explore the strengths of this network, and outline perceived advantages. The ability for partners to collate resources is the first strength discussed in this section. The network plays a primary role in collating resources available to ADF partners. The network includes ADF partner Facebook groups, as well as the individual ADF partner connections they have present on their social media 'friends' list. The

network also consists of people who are not ADF partners, such as non-ADF affiliated friends, family members, work colleagues, and business and community connections. This multi-faceted membership of the network builds into a critical feature of why the network is effective, which is the ability to have multiple uses. Anyone who has the potential to provide information and support to the individual in a time of need is considered part of the network.

Facebook, which has already been established to be the preferred social media platform for connecting ADF partners (Defence Families of Australia 2014b), functions exceptionally well at providing partners with space to not only collect existing resources, but also to generate more. For instance, based on the users existing groups, Facebook offers suggestions for new groups the user may be interested in. This feature allows partners to expand their existing networks with minimal effort. One of the critical features of the network is that it merges online and offline resources. It is common when a partner meets a person in an offline situation to gain their social media details so the partner can add that person to their 'friends' list, similar to the way a person in previous decades may have sought out a business card or telephone number to put into a phone directory:

> *I might connect with them to say, I will give you a call on Sunday. It is like a phone book, really* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

> *It allows connections in not just the same area as you, but spreads out across the entire nation. Facebook is great for keeping in touch with people I have met all around the world* (Male, 32, Navy partner)

It was evident the ADF partner network operates effectively due to several factors consistent with the key features of social media sites. One of these features is the low barriers to entry. Facebook use is dominant throughout Australia (Sensis 2017), and gaining access to the network is incredibly simple. Saturation of Facebook use in Australia is such that it could reasonable to assume a new ADF partner would already be a confident Facebook user before using the site for navigating their ADF partner role.

Partners can use the network for support and information-seeking related to their ADF partner identity, but at the same time can utilise social media for other social needs, such as connecting with family, entertainment, or employment:

> *I am sitting on that couch, watching TV. So why not be on Facebook talking and laughing and sharing ridiculously hilarious photos and videos* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

> *I very much used it for both work and social purposes* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

These comments demonstrate how the participant uses social media not just for connecting with the network, but also for entertainment purposes. Facebook offers a dual function here, while on the one hand, while the participant is speaking specifically to other ADF partners, getting advice and support, she is also watching videos, feeling entertained, and being social with others. This network strength was demonstrated aptly in an example provided by one interview participant. This participant gave a specific example of a time when she was able to utilise the network to receive urgent information. This participant was living in Sydney with her partner, the ADF member, at the time of the 2014 Sydney hostage crisis. Her husband regularly took meetings at the café where people were being held hostage and had mentioned to her on the morning of the crisis that he was going to be having meetings in the city. Following the media announcement of the incident, she could not contact her husband after several attempts:

> *I thought this is not like him, the siege is playing out over the media, so I was thinking, I need to find out what's going on. I had heard that the base was in lockdown. So I rang the Navy contact or something, and said, 'I am trying to get hold of my husband, I have a funny feeling he is in the city for the meeting, either in the café or near it, can you confirm whether he is on the base or not? And they were absolutely useless, could not help me at all* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

Following the unsuccessful attempt to gather information from organisational channels, the participant sought out help via her social media network:

> *I was thinking, oh right, who else do I know? So I jumped onto social media because I was friends with one of my partner's colleagues wives, so I private messaged her and said, 'Can you get hold of your husband and see if he is in the office with my (partner)?'. I knew they shared an office. She got hold of him, and anyway, they found him. He had gone to the gym and then he was kind of trapped in the gym and not allowed to wander around the base, and did not have his phone with him because he was at the gym. So, there was a great example where contact with the base was useless, I could not get any information out of them, and I ended up using social media to get someone to get hold of him, to find out where he was* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

This participant's situation provided an apt example of the value of the network for ADF partners and demonstrated the value of these networks being easily accessible. The examples provided in this section also demonstrate additional network strengths, which are low maintenance cost and easy accessibility. Partners can maintain their connections easily as one status update to their profile keeps them in touch with a wide variety of people, creating that feeling of connection. A simple 'Like' or comment on the post of somebody else strengthens their connection to the network in a limited time frame. Even the networks easy access via

mobile devices lends to its ease of use, where partners can seamlessly interact with the network no matter which device they choose to use. This accessibility was featured in the interview and focus group discussions and will be the focus of the next section.

6.2.2   Accessibility of the Network and its Resources

The network requires minimal effort to maintain a connection. Maintenance efforts were detailed earlier in explaining the features of the network. Requiring little effort for high return is one of the networks key strengths. Also, the effort required to maintain connections is efficient. The network is on one single platform and merges online and offline resources. With one post to a group or page, partners can maintain connections to a wide variety of people, which is not limited to their Defence friends, but includes family members and neighbours. There is a high reward for low-cost investment of time which is an attractive feature for ADF partners, who are often juggling many competing demands on their time and energy. Without the aid of social media, participants noted that maintaining connections would be a time-consuming role. For example:

> *It tends to be very suited for Defence families. It was not designed for Defence families, but it helps you to maintain connections with others no matter where you go, which is a very valuable tool when you are moving all the time. I think a lot of it comes down to maintaining connections when things keep getting broken because of the job and moving* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *Because you are moving around all the time you have friends in other places, and they move away, so that is how you keep in contact* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *I miss the girls from our previous posting location. They are away in Canberra, Sydney and Newcastle. We all left at the same time and so we use social media to keep in contact. We chat on a pretty regular basis* (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

The low maintenance cost of social media networks is also appealing to ADF partners because of the time and emotion that needs to be continuously invested in creating, and maintaining, their connections.

6.2.3   An Individualised Network

The previous section explored the theme of accessibility, which was evident in the data. Accessibility refers to the networks ability to connect ADF partners. It used the analogy of a telephone book to demonstrate this attribute. Continuing to discuss the strengths and advantages of the online ADF partner network, this chapter now addresses a third strength,

which is individualism. This strength reveals partners find appeal in the ability to manipulate the network to meet their own needs and identity, rather than aligning to a pre-determined identity.

Participants demonstrated one of the strengths of the online ADF partner network was the ability to individualise their network. The individualised network allows partners to connect with those they identify with. The network not only gives partners access to others in similar situations as them, but they can manipulate their network to be connected with others whom they feel associated. Participants discussed how by contrast, ADF-affiliated networks limit their connections based solely on their identity as an ADF partner. Several focus groups discussed how they do not always connect with other ADF partners based on their partner identity alone:

> *I think the reason you get teething problems, like any community, is that the point of commonality for all of us, is what our partners do. It is unlike any other kind of network, where you might be connecting through what you do, or what your hobbies or interests are, it is externally focused, and then we all try to find what we have in common beyond that. So it's a bit weird* (Female, 33, Air Force partner)

> *It took me a while to realise that it was okay, I did not have to be best friends with any other Defence wife just because our partners [work together]* (Female, 33, Army partner)

> *Because our partners do the same thing, yeah. That is why it causes a lot of drama, because Defence partners coming together, such a wide range of social backgrounds and it is very uncommon to find that group of such a wide range in the same area. So sometimes that has been good for me, I have become friends with people that if we were to have met in the street, I would have had nothing in common with them and we would never have spoken, so it has broadened my views on people a bit. But at the same time I have realised that we do not have to be best friends just because our husbands do the same job* (Female, 33, Army partner)

> *I use social media to stay connected with non-Defence friends, school friends, family. With DCO, it is just for connecting with other Army partners and other Defence partners* (Female, 30, Army partner)

Participants discussed how the social media network allows for more complex pairings of partners. Partners can connect with others based on their physical location, or the unit the member is serving on. Partners can also connect with others based on a specific need, such as employment or housing, or with others in similar situations, such as parenting status. Connections can even be made between those who have similar interests in pop culture and hobbies.

An individualised network is also an informal one, and as such has little to no representation from ADF-related organisations, which means the quality of support and information received from the network relies on the quality of the connections within it. Participants closely aligned with ADF-affiliated support organisations were concerned this could mean partners do not receive information which could be useful or relevant to them from ADF-affiliated support networks. One participant, who at the time of the interview was also a Defence Families of Australia (DFA) representative, commented on the issue of misinformation on social media:

> *I feel from a Defence perspective is that there is a lot of information that is outdated, like people asking for advice about housing, and housing policies and things. That is why Defence Families Australia representatives are on these pages* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

This participant went on to explain recent efforts by DFA representatives to try to increase DFA's presence in the ADF partner network, by encouraging local DFA representatives to create Facebook pages, interact online with partners they'd met, and be active within Facebook ADF partner groups. The participant acknowledged in this comment that the effort to engage online was in part due to an attempt to deliver more accurate information into the network, where outdated or irrelevant information can circulate. A focus group participant who had previously been affiliated with DFA echoed these comments:

> *I think that is my biggest problem with these Facebook groups, when they crop up in the absence of having anything formal. So when there are no real services available for families, and they are creating them for themselves, they are not managed well, and they are not accountable. They are not anchored to anything. When you have an organisation or a formal group, they are registered and they have websites, you can find out who, who the board is or who is the committee is, so you have redress, and you have an avenue you can find a way to get the actual information. What happens when these groups are filling that void is that they are informal, which can be great, except on the flip side you get a situation where misinformation flies around* (Female, 45, Air Force partner)

While participants said they valued the network for its ability to deliver individualised connections, individual networks can be inherently flawed. As individuals can select what information and sources to include in the network, they exclude others. This can create a bias regarding what information is received. The above comments demonstrate this, as DFA representatives are concerned about partners received inaccurate information via their personal, individualised networks.

This section has reflected on the individualised aspect of the online ADF partner network, which participants in this study perceived to be a strength. Participants demonstrated the network's ability to offer highly individualised connections appealed to them, particularly in contrast to their interactions with ADF organisations where they perceived only their status as partners was acknowledged. This aspect of the network concerns ADF-affiliated organisations, who are wary about misinformation being distributed.

6.3   Exclusion from the Network

The previous section explored a theme of individualism, which participants identified as a strength of the online ADF partner network. The previous section also reflected on concerns held by ADF-affiliated organisations about the opportunity for misinformed to be distributed via the partner network. This section moves away from a discussion of network strengths to explore situations in which partners were excluded from the network. This involves the exploration of privacy issues and unfriendliness.

In aiming to build a comprehensive picture of the online ADF partner network, it is necessary to not only consider whom the network serves, but also who the network excludes, and the impediments of the network. One of the impediments of the network relates to the network's association with Facebook. Those who regard privacy highly, and choose not to have a Facebook profile due to these concerns, need to either surrender their privacy values or face exclusion from the network and its associated benefits. Some participants did not mind being excluded from the network. Only one participant did not have a Facebook profile which she explained was due to wanting to avoid social media distraction, privacy concerns, and her status as an ADF member:

> *I do not like the fact that your photos are then owned by Facebook. There is also the*
> *Defence aspect, of us not having our private lives accessible if they were to try. At*
> *various security clearances, they obviously do checks on your Facebook. Then there*
> *is just the privacy, we just don't like the lack of privacy* (Female, 30, Army, dual
> serving partner)

This participant identified she did not feel being disconnected from Facebook was a disadvantage to her and she uses other mobile applications to share content with specific friends and family. Privacy was a significant concern for this participant who uses alternate social media platforms which she perceives offer increased privacy and security. It is important to note this participant is part of what Defence terms as a 'dual-serving relationship', where both

she and her partner are currently serving in the ADF. If social media networks are used as a way for civilian partners to navigate some of the risks they face, as well as gaining support from others in a similar situation, this participant has a different need than that of non-serving civilian partners. This participant likely could obtain information directly from her unit or workplace.

Cliques can also impede the network. Several participants provided examples of situations where engagement with the ADF partner network was harmful for them. One interview participant reflected on her experience of being both included and excluded from the network. After being part of many different ADF partner support groups, the participant had a negative experience in one location:

> I got befriended by these girls that were in that particular group, and I went to dinner, went to the movies, sat around their place and had a drink, and then three days later they wanted nothing to do with me because I did not want part of their plan. Can you imagine, you've just moved to a new location, oh wow, I have these friends, but then they were only really using you so they can get some info? No. I don't work like that. Now I just can't trust anyone in this area. That is what social media can do, because it all started there. Social media can be disruptive. You know, I did not know these people, but I met them through social media. But they did not want to be my friends, they just wanted to use me for info. That was hard (Female, 38, Army partner)

Despite this negative experience, the participant continues to consider social media an excellent platform in which to establish friendships, though she advises exercising caution:

> So (name of ADF partner), I have only met her once, it was last year, she came up to see her Mum, it was the first time I had ever met her, but for the last five or six years on social media, we were friends. Social media can create friends, the only problem is that you hope to God it is not a façade (Female, 38, Army partner)

A focus group participant also reflected on her negative experience seeking support through online ADF partner networks. The negative response she received impacted on her willingness to engage with the network in the future:

> I am now very resistant to posting in any of the groups because I once posted something that was more of a vent or a frustration. I had been told by one of my co-workers at the time, who is also a Defence partner, that basically I should stop thinking about my career, suck it up, you are never going to get a decent job, and you need to either quit your husband, or quit your career. You can't have both. I was taken aback and frustrated, so I posted in the [Defence partner group] that I cannot believe this is what another wife has said to me, oh my god, what is going on in the world. I was then told by another friend, who is far ruder than I am, that my post

had been screenshot, taken somewhere else, and torn to shreds. I was torn to shreds
as a terrible human being and the rest of it. So now I am kind of like, you know what?
Maybe I should not try and engage anyone else (Female, 38, Army partner)

Also, participants who did not feel as though they fit into the dominant group demographics discussed feeling excluded from the network. For example:

I feel a bit out of place being a guy, and I do not know that I would actually comment
or write anything. It seems so female based. I have already left one group because I
felt a bit silly being there (Male, 32, Navy partner)

Gender influenced the experience of the single male participant, who indicated he did not feel comfortable interacting in a group dominated by people from the opposite sex.

This section has explored a theme of exclusion from the network. This theme emerged during analysis where participants discussed not engaging with the network. In the first example, the participant chose not to engage with the network due to privacy concerns. In the second instance, participants disengaged with the network because of negative experiences relating to bullying behaviours. This section also discussed how participants who do not fit into the dominant group demographic could feel excluded.

This chapter has explored the second theme which emerged through analysis of the interview and focus group data: networks. The networks theme explains how partners use social media as a tool for managing their online network. This chapter explained the features of the network and how ADF partners use them. It contributes to addressing the second research question, which aims to understand what services and support are provided to partners through online interactions. This chapter specifically focused on the strengths and advantages of the network, which were identified as the ability to collate resources, the ease of accessibility, and the ability to individualise the network according to needs or preferences. This chapter then explored the issue of exclusion from the network. Some participants elected to be excluded from the network due to privacy concerns, while some participants excluded themselves from the network as a result of previous negative interactions with the network.

Chapter 7.
Trust

If I know who I am getting the information from, then I will trust that they are not telling me bullshit (Female, 27, Navy partner)

The previous chapter explored how participants used social media for connecting to a network. This network assists them to manage their lives as ADF partners. This chapter moves on to discuss the third significant finding, trust. Trust emerged as a clear theme in the focus groups and interviews. Initially, participants were not directly questioned by the researcher about trust concerning social media and Defence. After examining the primary transcripts, the researcher identified trust as an emergent theme and capitalised on this emerging theme by modifying questions during the remaining interviews and focus groups. Concepts of trust were indirectly mentioned in all focus groups and interviews; trust was also directly referenced by participants.

This chapter therefore explores the trust relationship between partners and the ADF. Firstly, this chapter discusses the use of the term 'Defence' in the research. It explores how 'Defence' is used as an umbrella term which could relate to one of three categories- Defence Support, Defence People, or Defence Governance. This chapter then examines factors which participants indicated influenced trust. These were the accuracy of information, trustworthiness, bias, credibility, and risk. The chapter then discusses the reasons participants gave for decreased trust in the ADF. These were the inherent nature of military service, instances of inconsistent service delivery, past examples where trust was broken, and considers the role of reputation. This chapter then considers the influence of rank on trust, where participants identified 'pillow talk' as an issue.

7.1   Trust in 'Defence': Who?

Who exactly is Defence? It is worthwhile considering who or what is referred to when the researcher and participants used the term 'Defence'. The researcher's analysis of her field notes identified she was using the term Defence when talking to participants, but without further specification, which is evidence of the researcher's insider status in action. All participants accepted the term without question and responded without asking for further clarification. Participants would likewise refer to interactions with 'Defence', as opposed to identifying a particular person or organisation. Participant's acceptance of the term 'Defence', in

consideration of the term's multiple meanings, is also indicative of the participant's trust in the researcher, and their acceptance of the knowledge afforded by her insider status.

The researcher identified it was necessary to evaluate the meaning of the term, particularly in regards to the links between the use of 'Defence' and the impact on trust. If interactions with Defence have an impact on the trust relationship, then having a clear understanding of what and whom participants are referring to when they use this term is important. All instances of the use of the word 'Defence' were coded under a category of 'Who is Defence' and analysed in order to generate an understanding of how participants used the term 'Defence'. The analysis of the 'Who is Defence' theme demonstrated participants tended to use the term Defence in two ways. The first was related to status. Participants used the term to categorise people who were associated with the ADF in some way. For instance, participants used terms such as 'Defence spouses', 'Defence members', 'Defence families' or 'Defence people'. The use of Defence as a categorising tool was also demonstrated by an interview participant in a dual-serving relationship when she indicated that she and her husband 'are Defence'. Several participants also talked about people who were 'not-Defence', to identify friends or family members who did not have strong links with the ADF. For example:

> *I know a few Mums up here that are Defence* (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

> *It is easier when you are Defence* (Female, 30, Army, dual serving partner)

> *You are Defence* (Female, 38, Army partner)

> *I only found out about that from another Defence friend* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

The second most common way participants used the term 'Defence' was to identify something related to the ADF, but non-specifically. For example, a participant was speaking about a time when she was advocating for an issue, and said, 'We went to Defence about it'. At the time, the researcher accepted her statement and did not ask the participant to clarify to whom they were referring. Following the interview, the researcher later made a field note questioning whom the participant meant when she used the term. Did the participant approach an official from the Department of Defence, or a representative from the Defence Community Organisation, or an officer from a particular unit? For example:

> *Defence does not know* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

> *That is the Defence for you though* (Female, 38, Army partner)

It was difficult to say with certainty in many interviews and focus groups whom the participant was talking about when they used 'Defence'; however, it could often be inferred. The analysis identified three categories in which references to 'Defence' could be organised. These were Defence Support, Defence People and Defence Governance. Defence Support includes Defence-associated organisations including DCO and DFA, as well as Defence Recruiting. Defence People referred to individuals within the ADF network, while Defence Governance indicates policy and decision makers. Several comments made by participants demonstrated these categories, including one from a focus group participant who referred to policymakers, or perhaps senior officers, in talking about a cultural change:

> *I think that is ridiculous. Social media is part of life, and Defence has to learn and adapt to that* (Female, 40, Army partner)

Another participant used the term Defence when referring to a time when she needed advice and assistance for her partner, a Navy member who was having difficulty adjusting after a traumatic deployment. There were many places this participant may have been referring to, most likely the DCO or VVCS helplines:

> *I called Defence and had an off the record chat, and said I feel like he is making some suicidal ideations, what do I do?* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

In many focus groups and interviews, the term 'Defence' could have applied to any number of organisations and individuals. Further investigations into the use of the term 'Defence' and the resulting impact on trust would be valuable, particularly regarding how the use of a blanket term effects considerations of the homogeneity of Defence.

This section has discussed how the researcher and participants used the term 'Defence' in this research, and identified that the term can broadly refer to many groups or people. It explored the use of the term in this study, identifying participant comments could be organised into three categories which were Defence Support, Defence People and Defence Governance. This section identified that further research in this area would be valuable.

7.2   Placing Trust in Social Media, rather than the ADF

Having examined the use of the term 'Defence' and identifying the term can be used in relation to three categories, including Defence Support, Defence People or Defence Governance, this chapter begins to examine the trust theme which emerged through participant comments. This section considers comments made by participants which demonstrate trust in

social media is higher than trust in the ADF. The literature links trust with member retention (Atkins 2009); therefore, understanding the trust relationship between partners and the ADF is critical. Participants in this study indicated lower levels of trust in the ADF and associated support organisations. Participants were directly questioned about whether or not they trusted Defence, and although participants predominantly supplied a positive answer, they would often qualify their answer by including additional information about how their trust is only given in particular situations. Several participants responded that they do not have any trust in Defence, which was in contrast to replies to the question, 'Do you trust social media?' in which participants were more likely to respond positively. Overall, participants trusted social media to provide them with trustworthy pathways to the information they were seeking.

In one particular focus group, all three participants immediately responded 'No' when questioned if they trust Defence. These focus group participants were a mix of Army and Navy partners. One participant was younger, her Army partner was on his first posting after completing initial training, and the ADF had recently formally recognised their relationship. By contrast, a second participant in this focus group had been in a relationship for a longer period, and had experienced many deployments, absences, and relocations with her Army partner of 16 years' service. The third participant in this group equally had an extensive history as an ADF partner, having been with her partner during his entire 14.5 years of service. All three, from the new partner to the more experienced, expressed a lack of a trust in Defence. Examples from this focus group are given in further detail during this chapter. The following section will expand this theme by examining the factor identified by participants as influencing trust.

7.3 Factors which Influence Trust

The previous section identified participants feel low levels of trust in the ADF. This section discusses the trust relationship between partners and the ADF. It does this by discussing factors which influence trust. Participants identified there were several factors, including the accuracy of information, trustworthiness, bias, credibility, and risk.

7.3.1 Accuracy of Information

Participants said they carefully assessed evaluated information accuracy before trusting that information. Participants were equally or more trusting of information they received on Facebook than of information received from official organisational channels.

Accuracy appeared to relate not only to the correctness of the information, but also to the relevancy of the information. Participants sought information that was not only correct and timely, but also relevant to their situation. Social media interactions on Facebook were trusted to generally be more specific and timely than that which was offered by official organisations. Participants also said trustworthiness, bias, and credibility influenced the trust relationship.

Official organisational channels were identified by participants to give misleading information. One interview participant responded to a question regarding trust and responded positively, saying she did indeed trust Defence, however, then went forward to clarify her trust was only given if the information was written, rather than verbal, suggesting verbal information was less trustworthy:

> *Oh yeah. Yeah. If it is in a written form* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

This participant went on to give an example of where Defence networks had given misleading information to partners in her local area about property maintenance. The participant explained that partners were using social media to disseminate the correct information, and encourage partners to contact the official organisation and receive the outcome they desired:

> *We go to them and say 'This is what you have got to do'. It is just easier to talk to*
> *other people than DHA* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

As with the above example, verification of information was also crucial for participants to place their trust in the information received from social media groups. Participants said information could be verified by providing links to the source of the information, such as a website or a screenshot of an e-mail:

> *I trust the information that I give, but I do not trust anybody else unless it has a link.*
> *I am big on, if you do not see it in writing, it does not exist* (Female, 38, Army partner)

Accuracy appeared to be an essential factor influencing trust. Participants said they carefully considered information accuracy before acting. The following section continues to discuss factors which influence trust by examining issues of trustworthiness, bias and credibility.

Trustworthiness, bias, and credibility were also identified by participants as having an impact on the trust relationship between partners and the ADF. Concepts of trustworthiness correlated with trust. Trustworthiness surrounded the provider of the support or information. Participants indicated they assessed source providers based on their ability to deliver correct

advice, free from an agenda or bias. Participants said they also examined the information a source had provided in the past as relevant to their current credibility.

A participant who indicated she trusted social media support groups rather than Defence believed ADF networks were unable to offer unbiased advice, and this explained her low trust in Defence. Authenticity was essential to this participant, who said she considered the Defence partner groups were more authentic. In response to a question about whether the participant trusted social media, the participant indicated that while she confirmed the validity of information, she generally placed trust in social media:

> *I would say about ninety per cent? Yeah. It is mostly trust, you always sort of double check things just in case* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

In response to a second question about whether the participant trusted Defence, her response was less favourable, and she explained her perception that Defence puts a lens on information for marketing purposes:

> *To be honest, less so. I know that everything gets put through a lot of PR and marketing, and it always looks a lot nicer on the PR side of it than the reality* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

Other participants echoed a theme of trust based on the reliability and background of the creator. This interview participant explained that other partners could be untrustworthy when providing information and she carefully considered information received from partners she did not know:

> *If I know who I am getting the information from, then I will trust that they are not telling me bullshit. But a lot of stuff in the other groups where I do not know anyone and have not had a chance to meet them and form an opinion of them, I take a lot of information with a grain of sand* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

In these comments, participants gave an indication regarding the role reputation and previous experience play in the trust relationship.

This section has explored accuracy, including trustworthiness, bias, and credibility, in relation to trust. Participants identified these factors influenced their trust relationship with both the ADF and social media. Having identified these factors which influence trust, the following section explores another factor, which is risk.

7.3.2 Risk

The previous section discussed factors which influenced trust, which included accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, and credibility. This section expands on this by examining participant comments which indicated risk was another factor impacting trust. Risk is crucial in the examination of a trust relationship. Giddens considers the concept of risk to be correlative to the concept of trust, believing it is impossible to have one without the other (Giddens 1990). Participants indicated their hesitation to trust information was based on the severity of consequences faced. Information such as local amenities and services was seen as low-risk, and participants trusted this information readily, whereas information linked to more severe consequences like payments and entitlements was less likely to be trusted. For example:

> *I guess it would depend on the sort of information, I would not trust anything particularly really important, I would double check. But for a hairdresser or things like that, yes* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *If someone tells me what night bin night is I will believe them, but if they say, Defence does XYZ, then I might not believe it unless they have something to back it up with* (Female, 29, Navy partner)

In situations where acting on the information given resulted in reduced risks, participants said they were more likely to trust the information, which aligns with Giddens' theories on trust and risk.

7.4 Reasons for Decreased Trust in Defence

Having established levels of trust between participants and the ADF is low, and trust is influenced by accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, credibility, and risk, this section now considers reasons why there may be decreased trust in Defence. Analysis of participant comments in regards to trust indicated several reasons why trust may be reduced. The first of these is the nature of military service, due to frequent change to information and restrictions on information that partners can access. The second of these reasons was inconsistent service delivery, where support organisations deliver inconsistent information and resources, which impacts their credibility. The final reason for decreased trust was previous experiences where trust had been broken, and was influenced heavily by rumour and reputation. Individual experiences were equally as important as the reputation of the support organisation. This section explains why trust in Defence may be reduced concerning these three factors, based on participant responses.

Participants indicated one of the reasons for decreased trust in Defence is related to the inherent nature of military service, where frequent changes take place. This was especially prevalent in regards to deployment information, where operational requirements demand that members may not leave or return home on dates initially prescribed:

> *I do not trust the information my partner gives me, because he has told me probably six different deployment dates, and so I stop listening, because I cannot plan my life around that* (Female, 23, Army partner)

> *When he comes home every second day and says something different to what the plan was before, it gets to the point where I do not want to hear it, I did not even trust we were moving here until I saw it written. I trust the organisations to an extent, I know that they would never provide us with one hundred per cent correct, honest, open information, but they cannot provide us with what we need to be provided with* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

Participants indicated they understood this was an inherent part of the military lifestyle. Despite this understanding, the nature of military life had a significant impact on the trust relationship between partners and Defence. One participant, when directly questioned if they trusted Defence, specifically referred to these frequent changes as a factor.

> *Generally, yes, though in my experience and from talking to others, things seem to change a lot* (Female, 29, Navy partner)

The inconsistency of service by support organisations such as DCO, as well as those who implement policy and procedure, was another factor which participants said impacted on trust. Inconsistency with service delivery included instances where entitlements were not given, either directly impacting on the service member, or the family more broadly. For example:

> *I take it with a grain of salt… Because they are just so, they are consistently inconsistent. With their own policy, so yeah. Absolutely not* (Female, 38, Army partner)

One interview participant discussed her experience in receiving inconsistent service delivery. The participant discussed receiving poor service from Defence Housing Australia and being denied a housing entitlement payment. The participant attempted to discuss the entitlement with her partner's unit but felt she was dismissed due to her status as a partner. Eventually, the partner escalated the issue and received the housing entitlement, but the behaviour of the unit reinforced her belief that ADF networks are inconsistent and partners need to be vigilant. The participant identified that as a result of these two experiences, she carefully monitors and ensures her husband receives the correct entitlements. Also, in her role as a Defence Facebook group

administrator, she encourages others to be vigilant about monitoring for mistakes in their entitlements. Similar to other comments, this participant said she values information accuracy and validity:

> *You get screwed over, you want to know your entitlements. If I post anything, it is a fact. I do not like it when people go, 'Oh, but this happened to me'. I really hate it, it gets me really angry. Arm them with knowledge. At the end of the day it is the member's entitlement but it does affect us. It does filter down to us, as the wife and kids* (Female, 38, Army partner)

As previously discussed, ADF-affiliated organisations are concerned about the presence of misinformation on social media. They have made recent attempts to increase communication between partners and the ADF, such as regarding policy changes impacting partners.

Previous negative experience with ADF-affiliated organisations impacted the trust relationship. Participants discussed previous situations in which they perceived their trust has been betrayed by an organisation, and used these examples to demonstrate their reduced trust. The first of these examples is the breakdown of trust regarding information given by organisational channels. This lead to one focus group discussion about the role of ADF recruitment and the perceived promises which were made upon enlistment. When these perceived promises are broken, there is an immediate breakdown of trust. Similarly, organisational channels like DCO are perceived to break trust when they are unable to provide services and support as per the expectations of partners. Rumour and reputation play a critical role in this regard.

Participants said they desired correct, timely, and specific information. Trust is impacted when information is not delivered to partners in this way. A focus group participant provided an example where unrealistic and incorrect information provided by Defence had led to a breakdown of trust. She discussed how this situation had also happened to other partners, which was confirmed by another participant in the same focus group who explained that in her Facebook group administrator role, she had seen other examples of this experience. In this example, she described the difference between what new members, and by association their partners, were told during the initial recruitment and enlistment process, and what they discovered was true once they had finished initial training:

> *I know a lot of other people have the same thing, that their partner/husband goes off to Kapooka, and their only avenue of information is what Recruiting told them, which is very, very different to what actually happens. And that is what you see a lot of*

people really struggling because they get told that they will get posted to their hometown, they are told that 'this will happen, oh he is not going to deploy, and it is basically a 7am to 4pm job with the occasional weekend'. Or the occasional going away. So a lot of people freak out when they are presented with the reality (Female, 33, Army partner)

The participants considered Defence, in this instance Defence Recruiting, had an alternative agenda and could not be relied upon to give accurate and unbiased advice. The example below is one where social media was perceived to be more trustworthy, and participants saw members on the Facebook groups simply 'telling it like it was':

I do not want to be mean, I say, This is what will actually happen when they ask questions. (My friend) messaged me and talked to me said, 'I am really glad I had someone who could give me the right advice instead of telling me, oh yeah it will be okay, or oh yeah, you could get posted to his hometown and that is a possibility and not end up in Darwin'. I often wonder, well I know what it was like when I first moved away with my husband, I was only twenty, and I really wished I would have had Facebook groups then, because I was a country Queenslander and moved to Melbourne, and I was clueless with everything. I would have liked to have something like Facebook groups back then (Female, 33, Army partner)

Life in a remote part of Australia is very different to that in a major capital city, with impacts on employment, family support, and access to amenities. Participants indicated the struggle of partners to cope in the posting location, especially those who were younger, had small children, or had invested significant time in their careers. They discussed examples of partners who had seemingly been promised the ADF member would remain in a major capital city close to the partners support networks and job prospects. This experience of broken trust was pivotal in setting up the relationship between the ADF partner and Defence, where recruitment had failed to deliver on what partner's had perceived to been promised, as was demonstrated in the previous example.

While participants gave many indications of their experiences with organisational channels like DCO during the focus groups and interviews, viewing these interactions through a trust lens was especially helpful. Participants indicated they have an expectation support organisations will be able to assist in a time of need. Participants discussed how they had perceived the Defence community to be more active, and were surprised to find the experience was not what they had initially anticipated. When support organisations are unable to meet the needs of partner's, as per the partners expectation, this represents a breakdown in the trust relationship. A focus group participant discussed how her experience in reaching out to DCO

regarding advice on coping with her infant during her partner's deployment made her hesitant to engage with them again:

> *I just went to DCO and asked for some advice, and she just said, 'you are just tired, you are just overreacting'. I am not overreacting. They told me, 'you are just a tired new Mum'. Get over it, pretty much. They gave me the number for a sleep nurse and sent me away, pretty much. After that, I was like, not again, not unless I really need you. But yeah, that was my experience with DCO, and then since then I just do not use them* (Female, over 22, Navy partner)

Participants identified reputation was critical. Several participants discussed how the negative experiences of other partners, shared via various networks, led them to have decreased trust in those support organisations. They felt less willing to approach the organisations or expect them to offer support. These comments demonstrate the role that rumour and reputation play in regards to trust:

> *A lot of it is bitchy and a lot of them do not help. From all the experiences I've heard, they do not help at all. I would not reach out to any of these people. I would go get myself on anti-depressants before approaching any of this lot. I fly home when shit gets too hard because, I am out* (Female, 29, Army partner)

One focus group participant with a positive experience relating to DCO discussed hearing the negative experiences of others:

> *I have seen on the Facebook pages that some people say, ring DCO, and then... all the, 'do not, do not, do not' comments. And then I am like 'oh my god, I am one of out of 20 that have a good thing to say'. They are meant to be our first point of call, and that is really saying something. Something needs to be sorted* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

Partners also indicated they retain negative interactions for an extended period.

> *Some people have an expectation that DCO will do this for me, and if that does not happen, then they have a chip on their shoulder. And so every little thing that does go wrong for them about DCO, is just another chip, crack in the glass. People have a long memory, and they have been burnt by DCO for whatever reason* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

These findings align with those of the 2016 Defence partner survey, which found reputation influences the willingness of partners to seek support (Brown & Wensing 2016). The survey stated that previous instances of inadequate support discouraged partners from engaging with support organisations like DCO (Brown & Wensing 2016). This section explored the reasons given by participants for decreased trust in the ADF which included the inherent nature of

military service, inconsistent service delivery, and past instances of trust being broken. This section also discussed how reputation contributes to decreased trust.

7.5   Influence of Rank on Trust

Having identified several factors which influence trust between partners and the ADF, this section discusses one specific sub-theme of trust, which is rank. Military rank emerged as a sub-theme of trust, and participants shared examples of where trust had been perceived to be betrayed in regards to rank relationships. Military ranking systems are a cornerstone of the entire organisation. To place participant's comments regarding rank in context, rank is condensed here into two segments- commissioned officers and enlisted members. Commissioned officers are those who have received higher levels of training and are perceived to hold a senior role, and are frequently placed in a position of responsibility for others, such as Lieutenant, Major and Wing Commander. Non-commissioned members have not received higher training, and do not hold the same levels of responsibility, such as Able Seaman, Corporal and Sergeant.

Rank was discussed more frequently during focus groups, where participants reflected a mix of different services and ranks in partnerships. In one focus group, the partner of an enlisted member discussed her discomfort relating to a recent social interaction with the wife of a commissioned officer, who was her husband's supervisor. Other partners of enlisted members validated her concerns:

> *I am a bit concerned, because my partner's boss's wife is a little bit chatty with me on Facebook at the moment, I am a bit concerned that's going to end badly* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

> *I think the rank thing is something that people get worried about too, when you are on Facebook groups. Obviously some people say that it does not matter, but ultimately when it gets back to work, it does matter. Like I have met a lot of people who are a lot higher than my husband, and they have been fantastic with us, but then I have just seen what can happen on the other side of things too* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

Following this interaction, the partner of a commissioned officer interrupted the group for clarification. This participant identified to the group her status as the wife of a commissioned officer, and indicated she was not aware of a divide between those of higher and lower ranks:

> *Can you give me an example, because I am a bit oblivious to this, I mean, I am an officer's wife* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

The participant who raised the initial concern responded, indicating it was her status as the wife of an officer which prevented her from being able to see the impact of rank:

> *That is why you are oblivious to it* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

The discussion continued, with the participant clarifying that she did not consider herself to be separate from the other partners because she was the wife of an officer, which she termed as 'the bosses' wife'. From here, a participant in the group raised the topic of 'pillow talk', which the group perceived to be partners sharing confidential information with their significant other, the member, which would then return to the workplace.

This term 'pillow talk' was used during another interview. In this interview, the participant was reflecting because information can be shared, it can be problematic to receive support from those in the community. This participant had previously been in a relationship with a member of an enlisted rank:

> *Like you are not going to go to a DCO barbeque and tell the Commanding Officers wife how upset you are because she will go home, and pillow talk with the CO, and it is going to have that effect. So it is having somewhere to go that is safe, and secure and educated and informed, without, with a sense of understanding, without effecting anything else* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

One focus group participant gave an example of pillow talk in action. She shared the story of someone who was struggling with her relationship with her enlisted member husband. In the example, the person confided to a friend about an issue her husband had at work. The friend was married to a commissioned officer posted to the same unit. The friend shared the details of the issue with her husband. Following this, the enlisted member was approached regarding his issue. This lead to a breakdown of trust between the original two friends, but also other partners who heard about the incident, who took it to mean that they cannot share personal information with partners of commissioned officers, at the risk of it impacting their partner in the workplace:

> *And now it is a big circle because they feel like they cannot trust partners of officers now. It is a vicious circle. And that is just the way it is* (Female, 22-30, Navy partner)

Rank, therefore, has an impact on multiple facets of the partner's lives, including the support available in terms of communication with the member:

He is an officer, he is allowed to have his phone. That is for obvious reasons. I do not call him, because he might be out on an exercise, so I let him call me first. Because I also do not want to call him if his solider sees- 'Oh, you have got a phone?'. He will often call me at night, we keep in contact. Not everyone has that access. Again, we keep that to ourselves. I certainly do not tell other wives, 'oh I have spoken to my husband every night', it is unfair (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

This section has explored the impact of rank on trust. Participants identified 'pillow talk' as an issue which impacts both trust, and how they interact socially within the ADF community. This section discussed examples from focus groups and interviews which demonstrate the sub-theme of rank.

This chapter has discussed the theme of trust, which emerged through the analysis of focus group and interview data. It started with an investigation of the term 'Defence', which the researcher identified could refer to a number of people or organisations. This chapter identifies that 'Defence' can be used to refer to one of three main categories- Defence Support, Defence People, and Defence Governance. This chapter explored the factors which influence trust, which was identified by participants to be the accuracy of information, trustworthiness, bias, credibility, and risk. Participants in this study identified trust in the ADF is low, and they more readily and freely place trust in social media. This chapter explored the reasons for decreased trust in the ADF, which where the inherent nature of military service, inconsistent service delivery, and past examples of trust being broken. This chapter also investigated the role reputation played in the theme of trust. Finally, this chapter discussed an emergent sub-theme of trust, which was the influence of rank on trust. It discussed concepts of 'pillow talk', and provided examples from a focus group where partners of lower-ranked, enlisted members perceived an issue with rank and trust.

Chapter 8.
Security

Peer-review publication associated with this chapter (Appendix J):

Johnson, A, Lawson, C, Ames, K (2018), 'Use your common sense, don't be an idiot: Australian Defence Force partners attitudes towards social media security', *Security Challenges Journal,* vol. 14, issue 1, p. 53-64.

The Facebook groups for me, when [my partner] was in basic training was a lifesaver. It was like every question I ever wanted to know was there (Female, 23 year old, Army partner).

The previous chapter discussed the theme of trust, which emerged from focus group and interview data. It considered what factors influence trust, and the reasons for decreased trust in the ADF and associated support organisations. It also discussed the influence of rank on trust. This chapter continues to explore the major findings which emerged from data, and discusses security. This chapter investigates sources of social media education and found in the absence of official advice, the predominant source of information is other ADF partners and concepts of common sense. ADF partners take social media security seriously and this research demonstrates how they already consider themselves security aware. They indicated awareness of instances where ADF members do not display appropriate levels of social media security. ADF partners are resistant to suggestions that further instruction is needed and participants indicated they would not accept restrictions on their social media activity. Importantly, partners want to avoid actions that compromise the safety of ADF members and their mission. In addition, partners are confused by the increasingly visible social media presence of the ADF.

8.1   Security in the ADF

Security emerging as a point of discussion for participants was not surprising. International military organisations, including the US Armed Forces, have attempted to offset the risks arising from the use of social media by developing appropriate policies directly aimed at military families, offering suggestions to keep both the member and their family safe. As yet, the ADF has no such policies or consistent messaging to families about online security. There are concerns related to cyber, operational and personal security which must be taken into consideration by the ADF (Cigrang et al. 2014; Karney & Crown 2007; Matthews-Juarez, Juarez & Faulkner 2013; Rossetto 2013). As one US military family support network stated, 'Today's military families and spouses are kept far more informed about troop movements, unit locations, unit activities and more than in years past, but have less training on how to maintain Operational Security' (BlueStar Families 2011, p. 5). Private Facebook groups, as well as individual social media pages more broadly, are forums where potentially sensitive information is shared. It can relate to operational security (OPSEC), such as information about deployment locations and dates, or personal security (PERSEC), such as the sharing of home addresses. In

addition, frequent changes to privacy settings by social media platforms make it difficult for users to maintain control of their online content (Brake 2014).

The ADF currently has no resources specifically targeted to families regarding safe social media use. One isolated article written for Defence families mentioned the importance of maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC but lacked detail on specific measures families can follow to maintain security (Defence Family Matters Staff 2013). The approach taken by the ADF appears to focus on training the serving member in social media safety, and then placing the onus on the member to share this information with his or her family. This is a complex issue for the ADF, where its members are required to submit to Defence policy regarding media interaction, but their family members are not, and yet have an increasing array of platforms in which to share their views (Ames 2014). Patterson (2011), as author of a review into the ADF's social media presence, highlighted the need for resources targeted to families. Patterson also considered the US example, and illustrated how the US Department of Defense, using a concept of values-based education which may be successful in an Australian context, engages military families by using 'pride and security as primary drivers to inspire families to follow the values and guidelines of OPSEC, rather than a strict set of rules, which would require significant resources to monitor, and be challenging to enforce' (2011, p. 87).

The US Department of Defense, as well as associated military support networks, have created a wide variety of social media support and information resources (Sherman et al. 2016). These resources overwhelmingly support the military family, including the enlisted member, to be active and engaged on social media networks. They provide practical and specific advice in regards to maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC. This includes cautioning against sharing important dates, and explains modern technology, such as geotagging, which may unknowingly share sensitive information. This contrasts to the experience of military families in Australia where despite changes to social media policy which are more accepting of members interacting online, a sentiment of being vigilant remains. Concerns over the security of social media data has resulted in claims that ADF members and their families should not maintain any social media presence (Mannheim 2015), however as normalisation of social media use increases, the practicality of restricting members and families entirely appears unfeasible.

8.2 Sources of Security Information

Currently, ADF members are provided with security briefings about social media as part of their annual mandatory awareness training. In an assessment of this training, the report by Patterson suggested there is a 'lack of training and an overt reliance on terms such as 'common sense''(Patterson 2011, p. xii). Patterson suggests this leads to misunderstandings on how members should interact online. The expectation appears to be that following this training the ADF member will then communication what they have learnt to their partners and family members. Despite the importance of families maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC, there are no consistent messages from the ADF directly to partners. Participants in this study indicated they had not received any information from Defence regarding social media security, though in some locations, participants reported social media advice and training is provided to units families at family days and pre-deployment briefings. These briefings are unit specific, and participants who have previously attended a briefing noted finding them generally helpful. Despite this, there is no regular program of pre or post deployment briefings across the ADF, with a larger number of participants reporting they had never attended, or been given the opportunity to attend, such an event:

> *I don't think I've ever seen a communication from Defence about social media*
> (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

Participants revealed the communication pathway from individual members to their partners is often fractured. Participants in focus groups stated their partner did not reliably pass on messages from the unit, even when those messages directly impacted the partner, such as community meetings and DCO events. Few participants said their partners were good communicators, and only one participant said she talked directly with her partner about social media behaviour:

> *We kind of talk about it. He's told me what's appropriate and what's not, because*
> *he's done the media course in the Defence. So we know what to do* (Female, 34,
> Navy partner)

This suggests the current model of social media education for partners, which is delivery via the member, is ineffective. Consequently, because partners are not receiving messages about social media security from either the ADF or the member, partners seek out advice from other sources. Participants reported receiving information about social media security from their workplace and from friends. Participants also made their own assumptions, including adopting

social media policies written for ADF members, as well as using 'common sense' when figuring out what to do:

> *If Defence are sending out a memo asking the media to be respectful to OPSEC, naturally that applies to all of us as well* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

> *You know, use your common sense, do not be an idiot. Pretty much. We know what we can and can't write. We are lucky to be in a position where we could write something that we probably shouldn't have* (Female, 38, Army partner)

Participants in both interviews and focus groups identified ADF partner Facebook groups as a source of information on social media security:

> *Most of the information I get about what you can and can't post on social media, I get from the Defence wives Facebook pages* (Female, 23, Army partner)

In the absence of official advice, the ADF partner Facebook groups are self- moderating, although the administrators of groups said considered it their responsibility to maintain OPSEC, and discussed sending out messages to partners who put sensitive information on group pages:

> *We will delete and then send them a message saying OPSEC. I understand you can do whatever you like [in some groups], but in our group, it's not allowed* (Female, 38, Army partner)

This section has discussed sources of social media education for ADF partners. Most participants in this research indicated they had never received information from the ADF regarding social media safety. In the absence of information directly from the ADF, participants said they referred to information gathered from civilian workplaces, ADF partner Facebook groups, and principles of 'common sense' when evaluating how to interact online. The next section investigates participant values in regards to online security awareness and the resulting impact on social media training.

8.3   Security Awareness and Social Media Training

The previous section discussed sources of social media for ADF partners, and demonstrated partners do not currently receive any training or information directly from the ADF, leaving them to use civilian and peer networks to evaluate their behaviour. This section investigates values of security awareness and outlines the resulting impact on the success of social media training.

ADF partners take online security seriously. Participants discussed being careful with what they post online, and they consider themselves to be 'security aware'. Participants were aware they couldn't share specific homecoming dates, and felt confident their profiles were restricted, giving them control of their content:

> *I'm quite careful with what groups I go into and what I put up there. I'm notorious for deleting old Facebook posts and old posts and things. So I do keep my privacy quite restricted and I will go through periodically every now and then and delete old stuff* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *A lot of us went through our pages and checked and made sure it was locked down. And most of us aren't so stupid that we overtly say, 'My husband is in Afghanistan at (location) compound', we say, 'My husband has been deployed* (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

One participant explained how she used a combination of common sense and prior knowledge to ensure her activities on social media didn't cause security concerns:

> *So we are fairly savvy, I'm not the one who sits at home and says 'Oh, my husband is going away for six months, Oh when does he leave? Oh, he leaves on the sixteenth of January on this flight? Oh, where is he going? Oh, he's going to here?'. No, that's not me. I'm smarter than that. I've been schooled in the way of how things work'*
> (42, Air Force partner)

While participants spoke positively about the prospect of social media training delivered by ADF representatives, the detailed analysis of comments revealed partner attitudes relating to social media security would influence the successful implementation of social media training. Participants contended they were confident social media users who successfully manage their online activity in consideration of OPSEC principles. Participants who were active online were supportive of the concept of training, but typically said they would not attend themselves, believing they have a sufficient understanding of social media security. This understanding appears to be built from a combination of information from various unofficial sources, as well as common sense. This was demonstrated directly by the comments of one interview participant who identified she did not feel she had any need for instruction, but understands other partners might:

> *I think it would probably be good. Like personally, I don't have any issues, I just use common sense, but some people don't seem to have (common sense)* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

This section has outlined participants perceived themselves to be security aware when interacting online. Accordingly, participants indicated they would likely not be receptive to social media training delivered by the ADF. The following section addresses comments in relation to social media restrictions for partners.

8.4   Social Media Restrictions for Partners

The previous section identified partners consider themselves security-aware. This section outlines participant comments where they indicated they were resistant to suggestions the ADF may request them to restrict their social media presence. Participants were asked to comment on whether they would be receptive to requests from the ADF to close their social media profiles. This question was prompted by a media article which claimed that public servants, including ADF members, should not have active social media profiles during service (Mannheim 2015). Participants were resistant to closing their social media profiles, though most could see why the ADF may be encouraged to instigate restrictions. The only participant who agreed that social media restrictions were necessary was in a dual-serving relationship and had already deleted her Facebook profile, citing security and privacy concerns.

Participants gave several reasons for their resistance to accepting social media restrictions from the ADF. The first of these reasons was that participants considered restrictions to be unrealistic. They explained how social media was an intrinsic part of life, and the practicality of policing restrictions would be incredibly difficult. Participants also questioned the authority of the ADF to make a request like this of civilian partners:

> *I can't see them being able to enforce that, if they did it. I can't see how they are going to enforce it, it sounds like a crazy thing to even attempt. I can see why they'd want to do it, but that would just make people make up an alias, and they'd just be online but under an alias rather than their real names, and that would just cause more issues* (Female, 42, Air Force partner)

> *You are going to keep stripping them of normal life, once again. You are going to just keep creating conflicts. What we actually need to do is recognise that there are certain aspects of society we can't control, like social media* (Female, 30, Ex-Navy partner)

Another reason participants identified that restrictions on social media for ADF partners would not be advisable was because it would isolate partners further, and place unfair restrictions on partners who use social media for employment. One participant spoke passionately about how

social media gave her a valued social and community outlet while she was caring for her young family, away from support networks:

> *I would end up killing my children and myself. It's my only form of contact with the outside world that is not my little bubble of…children and baby. They could charge my husband before they could get rid of my Facebook* (Female, 29, Army partner)

In addition to facilitating connections with friends, family and networks, participants discussed finding social media useful for communicating with their partner, especially during deployments. Several discussed how the member was previously absent from social media, but created Facebook profiles during deployments so they could interact with their family at home. Issues surrounding access to e-mail enabled computers and restrictions of e-mail file sizes were also reasons that partners would communicate with the member using social media rather than e-mail:

> *It was my daughter's birthday last week so I tried to send a photo via e-mail, and it came back because the file was too big for one photo…Whereas with Facebook I can send hundreds, tag him in things, and he's a bit the same, 'Yeah, we just pulled in and I've got Wi-Fi, how are you going?'. It is awesome just to know that* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

This section investigated participant's reactions to suggestions they need to restrict their social media behaviour. The participants in this study were resistant to those suggestions and questioned the practicality of such requests. The following section will discuss the only situation in which participants were receptive to changing their online activity; in order to protect the member's safety.

8.5 Protecting the Member and the Mission

Despite considerations of being already sufficient at managing social media security, a consistent theme was the partners' concern for the safety and the wellbeing of the member. Participants expressed their concern that their actions, or the actions of others, could have a negative impact on the mission, or compromise safety. This was the only situation in which the participants were receptive to changing their social media habits:

> *I do not want to be the reason that anyone else gets hurt. I do not want to post a picture, and be the reason that, really dramatic, someone gets bombed. I do not want to be the reason for that, so that's why I will not do it. Not because Defence told me to* (Female, 33, Army partner)

I sure would be [expletive deleted] if something happened to my partner because someone else's partner from the same ship decided to go, 'Oh my god, they are coming home at this time in three days', and the ship gets delayed because you just ruined the whole (thing).There's an unlikely chance that will happen, but I do not want to run that risk (Female, 27, Navy partner)

8.6 Confusion about the ADF's activity on social media

Overwhelmingly, participants spoke positively of Defence's recent increased activity on social media networks. Participants said they enjoyed being able to see parts of their partner's life they might not usually. Participants with children enjoyed being able to show them the posts and used these images to strengthen the relationship between member and dependants:

> *It is really good, and the kids love seeing him do stuff, in vehicles, holding weapons, whatever, the kids love seeing him, so I love that they do that here* (Female, 33, Army partner)

> *You know, seeing photos of the boats sometimes, if you can't talk to them or whatever, you can see a picture on there and think, Oh, you're on there, you're alive* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

Despite enjoying reading the posts, participants reported feeling confused about privacy and security implications. The interactions of Defence on social media, including photos of members in uniform, is in contrast to the actions they perceive as restricted on social media networks:

> *It would be interesting to explore a little bit the inconsistencies with the Australian Army posts, like ...they've posted (photos) in uniform, fighting, names. It's very inconsistent with the expectations* (Female, 33, Navy partner)

> *But then what is the line? If they are allowed to post it, are we?* (Female, 23, Army partner)

Participants commented on how the members themselves were not always security aware, despite being the ones who receive the training. Participants in one focus group referenced Exercise Hamel, where the planned training event was reportedly compromised by soldiers posting content on social media networks that enabled opposing forces to ascertain the location of deployed forces:

> *People post photos, and they are all geotagged, so then the other party can find them, which is what happened at Exercise Hamel. They were all posting photos, they were all geotagged, so their opposition found them* (Female, 40, Army partner)

In other focus groups and interviews, participants shared examples of times when members had contravened OPSEC principles online. A number of participants said they managed the members' social media profiles, which included changing security settings, adding or removing content, and editing personal information such as display names. These participants felt they were more aware of the risks resulting from activity on social media, both from a security and a reputational perspective, than their partner, and they took an active role in managing this risk for the member.

This chapter has presented a discussion about social media security in relation to the activities of ADF partners online. It noted that partners do not currently receive consistent instruction or advice about social media from the ADF. The current method of social media training is an expectation that members will discuss issues of security with their partners, although this is clearly not always happening. Partners who were able to attend pre-deployment or similar briefings where social media instruction was given found these briefings helpful. In the absence of social media instruction from Defence or members, ADF partners are receiving social media advice primarily from other ADF partners, as well as incorporating aspects of training received from civilian workplaces and other sources. Participants generally considered themselves security aware, and generally in control the content they place online. Many participants reported that social media safety was primarily about 'common sense', and suggested that the majority of operational security issues on social media happened to people of certain demographic groups, such as younger partners. Despite this, partners reported being receptive to social media training from the ADF, with one participant reporting that training should be compulsory for partners.

Participants were aware of the negative implications of posting sensitive information about the military online, and they wanted to avoid behaviour that would place their partner, or the wider ADF in danger. Participants also reported feeling confused about the ADF's activities on social media, and highlighted differences between what the ADF post online, and what partners perceive they are and are not allowed to post. Participants also gave examples of ADF members posting inappropriate content on social media. Social media security is an important issue, and there is cause for concern regarding the social media interactions of ADF partners.

Chapter 9.
Identity

I do not want to be a Navy wife. I do not want to be related to that. I am a human being, I am a (occupation), I have friends, I have a completely separate life. I did not want to be a Navy wife. I think sometimes as a partner we lose our identity of who we are, and that is not fun. That is not fun for anyone involved (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

The previous chapter discussed the online security attitudes of ADF partners. Participants said they rejected the authority of the ADF to request modifications to their online activity, except in the instance that their actions could place the member or the mission at risk. This chapter draws evidence from the data which demonstrated the existence of identity. It outlines how ADF partners self-identify into distinct categories and discusses the impact of these identities on how partners access support and engage with official support organisations. In every interview and focus group, the partners of ADF members revealed many different, yet firm, sentiments related to identity which were: fierce independence; a sense of belonging; self-reliance; a desire to help others; belief in fairness; and pragmatism. These sentiments shape how ADF partners see their role and how they interact with other ADF partners.

Firstly, partners either accepted or rejected the identity of a military partner. Many participants either self-identified as a partner or made it clear they preferred to disassociate themselves from the identity of a partner. This chapter discusses how the presence of the researcher may have activated this identity or the rejection of one. Identifying descriptors were able to be taken and built upon to construct five different partner types, or identities. Participants were not directly questioned about attributes. These categories are the Entitled Whinger, the Suck It Up Sunshine, the Milspouse, the Helper and the Mean Girls. The first of these identities is the Entitled Whinger, who is believed to be asking for support and resources above and beyond what is considered reasonable. The second identity is the Suck It Up Sunshiner, which refers to the partner who is intolerant of others seeking support, believing partners chose their situation and this choice reduces their right to complain. The third of the identities is the Milspouse, which refers to a partner who appears focused on the member's rank, entitlement, and status for building his or her sense of identity. The fourth identity is labelled the Helper. The Helper identity was present amongst Defence Facebook group administrators and describes the partner who believes in the responsibility of partners to assist and support other partners. The last identity is the Mean Girls. This identity addresses the bullying behaviour which occurs in many ADF partner social media groups. This chapter also outlines how participants perceived the expectations placed on them in their role as partners. These participants expressed

frustration with these expectations and said they did not want to lose their individual identity. Further to this chapter, analysis revealed a further two identity profiles, the Disengaged Partner and the Perfect Partner. These two additional profiles are explored in Chapter 10. This chapter will first discuss the way in which participants orientated to being a military partner, then explore the above categories in more detail.

9.1   'I am a Military Wife'

An analysis of comments related to 'I am' or 'I am not' statements revealed a theme in which participants either adopted or rejected a Defence partner identity. Many participants referred to terms such as 'Army Wife', 'Defence Wife' or 'Navy Girlfriend'. Whether they rejected or accepted the term for themselves, which some did explicitly, participants frequently referred to others in the community as 'wives' or 'girlfriends'. These terms could be service or rank specific. Examples included:

> *I am an officer's wife* (Female, 31, Navy partner)

> *I am a sailor's wife* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

> *So I am a Defence wife, my husband joined at seventeen and a half and I met him at the same age, so we have been in for a while now, I say we because it has kind of taken over everything* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

> *I do not see myself as a Defence force wife. I just happen to have a husband who is in the military* (Female, 43, Navy partner)

The apparent eagerness of participants to either accept or reject a military partner identity for themselves is in keeping with literature, which suggests research participants activate specific identities when asked to by researchers during the interview or focus group (Van De Mieroop, Miglbauer & Chatterjee 2017). The researcher requested to speak with participants based on their status as the partner of a serving ADF member, and participants were aware of their selection based on the status. Participants, therefore, commenced the interview or focus group conscious of their military partner identity, which they then sought to either confirm or reject. Participants also specified roles they held in the Defence community, such as Facebook group administrators, Defence Families Australia delegates, and Defence Community House representatives. Participants also frequently referred to their non-Defence roles, including employee, student, or parent. One emergent theme related to the position of the partner in the ADF organisation. Despite having clear identity links and perceiving themselves as having a necessary role in the broader military network, participants considered themselves to be

separate. They regarded their civilian, non-enlisted status as crucial. Participants made comments in relation to instances where ADF representatives would make requests of partners. Participants perceived this was beyond the authority of the ADF:

> *We are not the member. We do not have to comply* (Female, 38, Army partner)

> *They were speaking to the wives like they were soldiers. Hang on, we are not soldiers. We are not military, do not talk to us like that. We are not a soldier* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

In addition to the acceptance or rejection of a military partner identity, some participants discussed their perceptions that expectations are placed on them as military partners, aligning with existing research which stated partners are expected to be supportive and caring (Garcia 2012; Jessup 2000). Previous research has demonstrated some partners reject the authority of the military over their lives (Jervis 2011), and conceive a loss of identity (Jessup 2000). One interview participant demonstrated awareness of the expectations of an ideal military partner, and explained her rejection of that role:

> *I am sure there's a person out there who is the perfect military spouse, but I am not that person* (Female, 34, Navy partner)

Another interview participant also rejected the military partner identity for herself. She believed embracing the military partner identity correlated with the loss of her own personal sense of identity:

> *I do not want to be a Navy wife. I do not want to be related to that. I am a human being, I am a (occupation), I have friends, and I have a completely separate life. I did not want to be a Navy wife. I think sometimes as a partner we lose our identity of who we are, and that is not fun. That is not fun for anyone involved* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

One interview participant discussed her perception that ADF-affiliated organisations do not understand the reality of life for partners. In this, she believed these organisations promote the image of the selfless, caring, patient, and supportive partner:

> *I do sign up to things like DCO and Defence families, to be honest, it just looks too glossy and too shiny and excited because Daddy is going away or Daddy is coming back, or Mummy is going away or Mummy is coming back. And the reality is in my particular situation is…we let the kids know that Daddy was going, but the idea of going to the ship and waving Daddy goodbye and looking all glossy and shiny while doing it, it would have ended up in the meltdown to end all meltdowns. So it is not something I can actually identify with, and it just looks too surreal to me. The reality*

is children distressed and crying with snotty noses because Daddy is going away,
and fed up partners because they are suddenly having to take on twice as much
responsibility (Female, 34, Navy partner)

Other participants also perceived ADF-affiliated organisations did not understand their situation. For example:

They just did not get what we were dealing with (Female, 34, Navy partner)

I did not want to go to a DCO barbeque, because I did not identify with that (Female, 30, Navy ex-partner)

This was also evident in many of the comments regarding social media security, where participants identified they would not remove or reduce their social media activity to satisfy ADF requirements. Partner autonomy in relation to social media security was discussed in the previous chapter on Security. This section has discussed how participants either accepted or rejected the identity of the military partner for themselves. It explored the influence of the research on the activation of that identity. It also discussed participants expectations about expectations placed on them in performing their military partner role, in alignment with previous research. Some participants resisted this identity for themselves. The next section will begin exploring the different identity categories which became evident in the analysis of participant comments.

9.2   Partner Types

Identifying descriptors were able to be taken and built upon to construct five partner types, or identities. These types are the Entitled Whinger, the Suck It Up Sunshiner, the Milspouse, the Helper, and the Mean Girls. Participants appeared to identify most strongly with positively associated profiles such as The Helper, and disassociated themselves with negative profiles, such as The Entitled Whinger and The Milspouse. The next section will focus on the category defined as the Entitled Whinger.

9.2.1   The Entitled Whinger

A theme of entitlement emerged clearly during the analysis of participant comments. Participants discussed how they felt some partners held a sense of entitlement and demanded more from the ADF and support networks than others considered to be reasonable. Entitlements are conditions of service which ADF members, and their families, have access to including pay, housing, hardship payments and financial compensations for relocations. According to

participants, whinging, entitled partners are those who are seen to be asking for things above and beyond what the participants deemed to be acceptable. Interactions on ADF partner Facebook groups appeared to accentuate these identities, and participants frequently discussed content found online which promoted an Entitled Whinger mentality. Participants were keen to distance themselves from identifying as an Entitled Whinger, while labelling others with this identity. For example:

> *They only bitch, they are so entitled about nothing. 'I expected a six bedroom house', but there are only two of you. I think, honestly, some girls make issues for themselves by expecting more than they get. I just think some of them are little bit too entitled, if that makes sense* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Air Force partner)

> *You just think, can you just stop whinging over that please?* (Female, 38, Army partner)

> *I think there is an entitlement issue. It is like 'I am entitled to all this stuff and I don't get anything* (Female, 31-50, Navy partner)

Despite the existence of an Entitled Whinger identity, participants were generally encouraging of partners who understood and sought out entitlements owed to them.

> *If that is what they are entitled to, then that is what they are entitled to. It is a condition of service. If you are entitled to it, take it. Run with it. It is a condition of service. However, there are people out there who do believe they are entitled to something, but they have misinterpreted* (Female, 38, Army partner)

The Entitled Whinger makes demands for support and resources which are considered by others to be 'above and beyond' what is acceptable. What constitutes acceptable entitlements, and what is an entitlement beyond acceptable is a complicated and individualised concept. Levels of acceptable entitlements appear to be aligned with personal values and experiences. This was demonstrated by one participant who discussed access to specialist fertility treatment. Full-time serving members can access fertility treatments, like IVF, under the medical scheme. This is conditional on several factors, one of which being the ADF will only compensate the medical needs of the member, not his or her partner. Civilian partners of ADF members are not able to have their fertility treatments paid for. The topic caused a recent conversation in a social media group, which this participant commented on:

> *A lot of the wives, recently, there's been a lot of 'Defence will not pay for this, why not?'. Well, why should they? Why should they pay for you to go and have IVF? Why should they pay you to do that? 'Because my husband is in the military'. So what? There is a lot of 'Defence should pay. We should get entitlements, we should get this*

and we should get that'. Why do you think that? So there is certainly an entitlement thing going (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

After the participant outlined her position on entitlement, including her statement regarding an issue with partner entitlement, through the remainder of the interview she expressed frustration with other aspects of ADF pay and conditions. A different participant may have assessed this frustration as an example of being an Entitled Whinger. It is challenging to objectively assess whether or not there is an issue with entitlement amongst partners, and the impact social media has on an entitlement mentality, due to the close alignment of values and acceptable entitlements. This would be an area of particular interest for further study.

This section has explored the first identity category which became evident through the analysis of focus group and interview data, the Entitled Whinger. Participants identified partners in this category demand entitlements which are beyond what the individual considers appropriate.

9.2.2   The Suck It Up Sunshiner

The Suck It Up Sunshiner identity, which was a strong theme in interviews and focus groups, is connected with concepts of just 'getting on with it'. These partners are resilient and encouraging, but also intolerant of others who express frustration with aspects of the Defence lifestyle. The Suck It Up Sunshiner wants partners to focus on getting on with the task at hand, rather than dwelling on the negative. Participants who shared these sentiments suggested partners need to take responsibility for their situation and seek out support and resources without assistance from others. The Suck It Up Sunshiner copes by 'just doing it', and they expect others too also.

Comments which demonstrated a 'Suck it up Sunshine' sentiment also reminded partners they chose to be in a relationship with an ADF member, and they remain an active participant. One participant, while speaking about another partner who was struggling with the increased operational tempo of her partner's unit, noted her feelings about the expression of discontent with the situation:

> *And this is what I do not get. You signed up for this. Before you meet them, or when you met them. You signed for it* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

This participant expanded on her position and explained her more lengthy experience as an ADF partner may have increased her ability to cope, but she believed approaching situations

with positivity is key to coping as a partner. Partners who identify with a Suck It Up Sunshiner attitude expressed beliefs the choice to remain in a relationship with an ADF partner reduces the partners right to complain:

> *We have to keep reminding ourselves that we chose this. And we really like it, but we chose it. It is hard, when you have a screaming baby in the middle of the night and we are both sick. It was my first week back at work, and it was really hard, but I was like no, we both chose this* (Female, 30, Army, dual serving partner)

> *I am a firm believer that yes, you choose to be in, like yes, it is hard, it does not make it any easier because you chose it, but you do not get to complain when you chose it, and you still every day choose it* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

Participants shared they felt this sentiment was expressed to them by other ADF partners, family members, friends, and ADF-affiliated support organisations. Suck It Up Sunshiner attitudes appeared to be especially prevalent online, as was expressed by one focus group participant, though undoubtedly present in offline situations also. Overwhelmingly, comments made to partners in the Suck It Up Sunshiner sentiment were considered to be unhelpful, and participants who had received these comments felt they did not encourage or build resilience. For example:

> *There was a comment the other day (on social media), 'My partner has gone out field when we had a holiday booked'. The next minute there was twenty comments saying, 'This is your life, this is what you signed up for* (Female, 23, Army partner)

Participants discussed how associated support organisations like DCO may promote the Suck It Up Sunshiner identity. One focus group participant specifically shared about how she found the DCO Defence Family Helpline service helpful, for getting support from people who understand, unlike members of her family who make unhelpful comments, but went onto clarify she also believes the ultimate message from DCO supports this identity:

> *I have called the helpline a few times as well. I think they are helpful in the sense that you can get something off your chest, and you are not talking to your Mum and it's, 'Oh, you knew what you were getting yourself into', or that sort of thing. But I think they sort of toe the party line. Because ultimately they bring everything back to that, 'You are very important person because you are supporting your husband to do his job which is very important'. And so sort of now, after having called them a couple of different times for a couple of different reasons, I think, I am almost going to get the same thing that I was going to get from my Mum, just more subtle* (Female, 33, Navy partner)

This section explored the second identity category, the Suck It Up Sunshiner, which emerged from the interview and focus group data. People identifying with this category believe that

partners 'chose' their role as an ADF partner, and their choice reduces their right to complain. There is a strong attitude to 'just get on with it'. Participants identified these comments were generally unhelpful and did not build resilience. Participants also said they felt they had received 'Suck It Up Sunshine' comments from ADF-affiliated support organisations in the past.

9.2.3   The Milspouse

The Milspouse profile consists of partners who closely tie their personal sense of identity with their partner's military status. The term 'milspouse' is adopted from US military culture. It is not an official phrase, but a slang label adopted by the military community to identify a person married to a military member. It is used in this study to categorise partners who are perceived to fixate on the entitlements and status of being in a relationship with a military member. The Milspouse profile identifies partners who use their partner's military identity to build his or her own. The rank of the member was discussed in relation to this identity:

> *Air Force wives I have found tend to wear their husbands ranks on their shoulders,*
> *for the most part* (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

As previously discussed, participants said rank underpins many community interactions. Not all participants gave an indication as to the rank of their partner, though participants gave information about their partner's length of service, posting locations, and unit associations which provided a guide for other participants to the potential rank of their partner. One participant identified how displays of rank appear to be featured on social media groups, perhaps more prominently than in offline partner meetings:

> *I think that sometimes, Defence forums can be quite rank orientated, they can be led*
> *by rank* (Female, 30, ex-Navy partner)

As with the other negatively-associated partner categories, participants were keen to distance themselves from this identity. One way participants did this was to demonstrate they did not consider rank relevant, therefore differentiating themselves from the identity of The Milspouse. For example:

> *So one of the woman's husbands was an officer, and she was trying to get chummy*
> *with me when she found out my husband and I were officers, she was all like, 'Oh,*
> *my husband is an officer too', and I am like, it has really got nothing to do with rank*
> (Female, 30, Army, dual-serving partner)

I am not a rank person, my husband is a major and that is all I know (Female, Age Undisclosed, Army partner)

Partners demonstrated awareness that others were members of this category, equally in online and offline interactions with ADF partners. This section has discussed the Milspouse identity which emerged through the analysis of interview and focus group data. The Milspouse refers to a person who closely aligns their own sense of identity with their partner's military status.

9.2.4   The Helper

The identity of The Helper emerged as a strong theme. Many participants said they found assisting others in the military community important; however, the participants who identified most strongly with this identity were those who had created or were currently administrators of Defence partner Facebook groups. These participants frequently referred to their positions as group administrators throughout the interview. For example:

> *I am not employed, I am not a delegate for the Australian Public Service. Not really a volunteer to do it either. Pretty much do it out of the goodness of my own heart. And I think that is all it should be for* (Female, 38, Army partner)

The Helper identity believes ADF partners should offer assistance and advice to one another through online and offline channels. They not only actively participate in social media groups, but also in offline activities related to Defence. Some of these partners aim to improve the ADF community through various self-initiative programs and events. These actions appear to come from a sense of duty and service to those newer to the ADF lifestyle. These partners appear to be lynchpins or influencers in the ADF community and are often skilled at connecting people and resources:

> *Being helpful and compassionate and having empathy, so much greater, so much greater. You get so much out of it. You are helping somebody, better than telling somebody to swallow some concrete, I tell ya* (Female, 38, Army partner)

> *In a way I feel like that is your obligation, to other Defence families, if they are new, help them out. You have done your time, offer what you have* (Female, 38, Army partner)

Participants aligned themselves within a Helper identity, and also demonstrated awareness that others were situated in this category. This section has explored the identity profile of the Helper, which emerged during data collection and analysis. The Helper refers to a partner who has a developed sense of obligation towards assisting other ADF partners.

9.2.5   The Mean Girls

The identity of the Mean Girls is constructed from participant reports about bullying behaviour, often online in social media groups, although participants also identified bullying occurs in offline situations also. Participants discussed how they were cautious about posting online, because of the reactions from people who might read and respond to the groups in a negative way, defined here as the Mean Girls. Participants shared stories about where they had witnessed or experienced bullying behaviours online.

The participants in one focus group recalled the events of a recent series of interactions on a local Defence Facebook group, where a Defence partner had posted what they considered a genuine and harmless question on the group page. The question asked the group for their opinions on which suburb was better, as she was going to move into the area shortly and needed to choose a home. The responses to the question became more argumentative and quickly escalated into bullying:

> *One chick said, 'you should do your partner a favour and off yourself'. Over one*
> *suburb, because that person thought it was awesome, and another person said, 'Oh*
> *no, my friend lives there and has been broken into twice'. That is literally it (Female,*
> *33, Army partner)*

As participants in the focus groups shared these examples, they warned each other about them and offered cautions about what, and what not, to post. These warnings included identifying which Defence partner Facebook groups had more prevalent Mean Girl behaviour. Participants commented about one previous event where *Northern Territory News* ran a story about 'The Cage', a Facebook group for Defence wives known in the community for its' particularly unhealthy behaviours, which the media at the time described as an 'online fight club' (Turner 2013). Participants said 'The Cage' closed down shortly after the news article was published.

Participants indicated the presence of The Mean Girls in a group impacted not just on how partners interacted within the Facebook group, but also perhaps with how they interacted with broader Defence networks and accessed Defence entitlements. Participants were wary of encountering this identity and said they intentionally withdrew from Defence community interactions to avoid these behaviours. For example:

> *It can get pretty bad. A girl I sold some baby stuff to said that they chose to go private*
> *rental rather than live in (a Defence patch) because of the nastiness on the (Defence*
> *patch) Facebook page* (Female, 29, Navy partner)

Participants were also aware these attitudes and behaviours were not unique to Defence partner groups on Facebook, but also featured in other online Facebook groups, such as mothers groups or local community groups. A few participants considered this to be related to gender and gave the suggestion these behaviours happen because the majority of members in the group were female. Indeed, gendered words were used to describe these behaviours and attitudes, including terms such as bitchiness, drama, and cattiness. For example:

> *I see the Defence community or Defence wives as being much the same opinions of mothers groups, bitchiness, cattiness, typical, a whole bunch of uteruses in one room, and it just kills me, I cannot deal with it. It is too much hormones. I want nothing to do with it, I do not want to be around anyone* (Female, 27, Navy partner)

The participants in the research were keen to distance themselves from this identity. For example:

> *Yeah, I am not interested in this shit, too much carry on* (Female, 31+, Navy partner)

> *I am sort of a lurker, I sort of ask questions and then read other people's questions and then read the catty shit fights they are having, but I do not get myself involved* (Female, 29, Army partner)

In these comments, participants indicated gender influences the social interactions of ADF partners. Various chapters in this study highlighted a strong presence of gender politics. Links between gender and ADF partner needs, behaviours, and social interactions would be worthy of further research, however, is out of scope for the current study.

This section has explored the identity category of the Mean Girls which relates to bullying behaviour as participants had witnessed online. Participants identified they were careful when posting content to online Facebook groups, so they did not attract Mean Girl style comments. Participants also identified this identity category was present in offline situations also.

This chapter has outlined how partners self-identify into distinct categories. These categories emerged through the analysis of focus group and interview data. This chapter demonstrated how these categories impact the way ADF partners see their role and also how they interacted with other ADF partners, both in online and offline situations. This chapter firstly discussed how participants either accepted or rejected a military partner identity. Participants also discussed their perception that the military partner role comes with identity sacrifices. This chapter then explored the five self-identification categories. These categories are the Entitled Whinger, the Suck It Up Sunshiner, the Milspouse, the Helper and the Mean

Girls. Each of these categories was individually explored in detail in this chapter. Analysis revealed a further two identity categories, the Disengaged Partner and the Perfect Partner. The analysis associated with the identification of these two additional categories and the implications of these categories to support and relationships with ADF-affiliated networks will be outlined in Chapter 10.

This chapter concludes the five findings chapters, which started with the exploration of community. The following chapter investigates the five findings chapters together and aligns these individual findings with existing literature and Giddens late-modernity theory. In doing so, the following chapter outlines the significant findings of this study. It also addresses research question four, by making potential recommendations for the ADF and affiliated organisations regarding the needs and behaviours of partners.

Chapter 10.
Discussion

Peer-review publication associated with this chapter (Appendix J):

Johnson, A, Lawson, C, Ames, K (2018), 'Use your common sense, don't be an idiot: Australian Defence Force partners attitudes towards social media security', *Security Challenges Journal,* vol. 14, issue 1, p. 53-64.

This chapter now collates the findings in the previous chapters and discusses the implications of these findings in consideration of existing research and current theory. This chapter starts by revisiting the study's aims, objects and research questions. It then outlines three significant findings. These are: the abstract nature of the ADF means support networks are access points, ADF partners use social media for connecting to support communities and networks, and partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. This chapter then offers recommendations for the ADF and affiliated support organisations based on the findings of this study.

Before discussing the significant findings of this study, the first section of this chapter revisits the research aims and objectives. It confirms the study aimed to investigate social media use by ADF partners to learn more about the needs and behaviours of this community, which was necessary in consideration of the limited literature available regarding ADF families, as was discussed in chapter two. The following section also reminds the reader of the four research questions which guided this study.

10.1   Aims, Objectives and Research Questions

This research aimed to investigate social media use by ADF partners to learn more about the needs and behaviours of this community. The aims and objectives of this study were detailed in chapter one, and are revisited here to frame discussions in the remainder of this chapter regarding how this study has met these aims, objectives, and research questions. The aims and objectives outlined in Chapter One were ultimately achieved. This study aimed to collect qualitative data about social media use from ADF partners in different locations around Australia, which it did through focus groups and interviews. This data was then transcribed and thematically analysed using a digital (social media) ethnographic framework, as was outlined in chapters three and four. Themes were extracted to generate five main findings chapters, which explored themes of community, networks, trust, security, and identity. From these findings, recommendations were generated for the ADF, Department of Defence and associated support organisations. This research aimed to generate qualitative findings about ADF partners because research regarding ADF partners is necessary, due to the vital role partners perform in the wider ADF organisation, including enhancing member retention and operational preparedness (Atkins 2009). As recent research indicated partners are interacting online to receive information and support (Defence Families of Australia 2014b), this study aimed to investigate how partners use social media in conjunction with their military partner roles. Four

research questions led this study. These research questions were developed to meet the aim of the study. These questions impacted on the structure of the study, including the methods chosen to generate responses to these questions.

5. How do partners interact online in Facebook groups?
6. What, if any, services and support do online interactions provide partners, and how does interacting on Facebook impact relationships with ADF-sponsored support providers?
7. What can be learnt about the ADF community from the interactions of ADF partners online?
8. What recommendations can be made to ADF-sponsored support networks, like the Defence Community Organisation, regarding the interactions of ADF partners on social media.

This study addressed each of these research questions. The first question was designed to guide the rejected social media content analysis method, and as such was not directly addressed. Despite this, this study addresses this question by demonstrating in Chapters Five, Eight and Nine that partners interact online in accordance with their needs and values. This study answers the second research question, showing how online interactions provide partners with relevant links to information and support. This was outlined in Chapter Five and Chapter Six. The second part of this research question sought to understand how interacting on Facebook impacts relationships with ADF-affiliated organisations. This study shows that online interactions impact relationships particularly in regards to trust, as was demonstrated in Chapter Seven. The third research question was addressed in Chapter 9. This chapter contributes to answering the research question by exploring a theme which emerged through analysis, which was the self-identification of partners into categories. Through an evaluation of values and social media security, Chapter Eight also contributes to answering Research Question Three. The fourth and final research question sought recommendations for ADF-affiliated organisations, like DCO. The current chapter addresses this question by offering several recommendations.

This section has revisited the aims, objectives and research questions which were outlined in the first chapter of this thesis. The findings which are discussed in the following section address and deliver on these. The first finding explored in the following section is: the abstract nature of the ADF means support networks are access points. It applies Anthony Giddens' theory of late modernity and abstract systems to the ADF and demonstrates how partners interact with and within this abstract system.

10.2   Findings

10.2.1   Support Networks as Access Points to the ADF

This section outlines the first finding, which is that the abstract nature of the ADF means support networks are access points. It applies theories of late modernity and abstract organisation to the ADF and demonstrates how partners interact with this abstract system.

The military has been previously established to be a greedy (Segal 1986) and a total (Callan 1984) institution, demanding vast levels of energy and commitment. This study applies Anthony Giddens' theory of late-modernity to the findings, and in doing so has found the military can be considered an abstract organisation, impacted by trust, risk, and the separation of time and space. Giddens builds the concept of abstract systems from expert systems. Expert systems, as described by Giddens, are 'systems of technical accomplishment or professional expertise that organise large areas of material and social environment' (1990, p. 27). Expert systems require trust, and the inherent makeup of the system mean that a person does not need to understand the system in its entirety to operate within it. Often an individual does not have sufficient technical knowledge to completely comprehend the risks they face when engaging in the system. Giddens frequently uses the analogy of an airline system, where he states that an individual does not need to know how to fly a plane to be able to travel with the airline (Giddens 1990). The traveller instead trusts in the pilot and the airline, training requirements, and industry regulations to deliver them safely to their destination. Expert systems which are complex and demand trust from the individual are considered abstract systems. This study finds the ADF organisation, comprising of the Department of Defence, individual units and command teams, ancillary and affiliated support organisations, is an abstract system. Those who operate within the system, both members and families, are unable to comprehend the complexity of the system, and do not have the expert knowledge required to understand the risks associated with their involvement. Thereby, trust becomes essential.

Having adopted the position that Defence is an abstract system, it is then logical to consider Defence support networks, such as DCO, act as an access point into that abstract system. According to Giddens (1990), access points are connections between individuals and abstract system representatives. Access points are the face-to-face connection and are considered representatives of the broader abstract system. As in the case of the ADF, access

points are the places where individuals interact with the system, being that the broader abstract system is too large and complex to interact with directly. As was discussed in chapter seven, participants accepted and used the term 'Defence' without specification. Participants said they were speaking to 'Defence' when they were interacting with ADF-affiliated organisations, such as DCO, or even Defence sub-contractors, such as Toll Transitions, who manage logistics around relocation on behalf of the Department of Defence. This demonstrates that partners consider their interactions with Defence-affiliated organisations as representative of their interactions with the more extensive ADF network.

The experience a person has with the access point directly impacts the trust relationship they have with the abstract system. For instance, consider the analogy of the health system. A person may not have the expert knowledge to understand the complete risks faced, but they may trust in the abstract system because of the calm, confident attitude of the nurse at the hospital. Giddens says this trust exchange occurs even though 'everyone is aware that the real repository of trust is in the abstract system' (1990, p. 85). Analysis of trust in the health system provides a useful comparison for analysis of trust in the Defence network. Giddens is clear in demonstrating that access points act as intersections where trust can be developed, maintained, or broken between a person and the abstract system (Giddens 1990). This can be a point of vulnerability for the abstract system and means each time a partner interacts with DCO, DFA, or any other ADF representative considered to be an access point, they perceive they are interacting with the abstract system, with Defence, and their trust relationship is influenced. In fact, Meyer et al. use Giddens' and Fukuyama's work on trust to argue that 'trust in the system is dependent on trust in the systems representatives' (2008, p. 178). Considering some of the perceived access points are ADF sub-contractors, such as Toll Transitions, this is a significant finding.

Having accepted the ADF is an abstract system, and partner interactions with ADF-affiliated organisations such as DCO are access points to that abstract system, then the role social media plays can also be examined in the context of Giddens and trust. It has already been established that the trust relationship can either be positively or negatively impacted by experiences at access points. Giddens also credits access to information as having a significant impact on the trust between an individual and the abstract system (Giddens 1990). Social media is, at its core, a tool of information exchange. Giddens explains that having access to information, such as that which is available to partners via social media networks, allows individuals to expand their knowledge of the abstract system, and even bypass it entirely.

Individuals may decide to manage the risk of interaction with an abstract system by simply choosing not to interact with it at all. Giddens states 'In some cases, a person who has an unfortunate experience at a given access point, where the technical skills in question are relatively low-level, may decide to opt-out of the client- layperson relationship' (1990, p. 91). Social media offers information and support to partners without the need to interact with the ADF or its support organisations directly. The findings in this study indicate interactions between DCO and support organisations that operate as access points into the ADF network have a resulting impact on trust. These access points are critical to building or undermining the trust relationship between partners and the ADF. When trust is broken between the partner and the access point, trust is also reduced between the partner and the ADF. The impact of this finding is that the ADF needs to carefully monitor the performance of subcontractors and access points to sustain trust levels. Although ADF members and policymakers may not consider sub-contractors such as Toll Transitions as being part of the ADF, this study demonstrates that partners perceive them to be.

A critique of Giddens' theory on abstract systems and trust is made by Meyer et al. (2008) who argue that Giddens' theory fails to provide modern, real-life examples that take into account factors including new communication technologies. This study, however, provides a modern example by applying Giddens' theory of trust to the military institution. Sociological studies of the armed forces have typically focused on discussions of warfare, power, and gender (Giddens 2006), rather than the application of trust theory.

This section has reflected on the application of Giddens' theory of late modernity and abstract systems to the ADF, and demonstrates how ADF-affiliated support organisations like DCO act as access points to the abstract system, and how partners use social media to bypass the system. This is the first significant finding of this study.

10.2.2   ADF Partners use Social Media for Support Networks

This section discusses the second significant finding of this thesis, which is related to the way in which ADF partners use social media for connecting to support communities and networks. It re-visits findings explored in the previous chapters and applies these to existing literature. It also considers weak tie theory in an analysis of partner's online interactions. This study found, based on the analysis of participants interview and focus group comments, that partners use social media for building and maintaining communities and networks.

By using definitions of community and virtual community, as outlined in Chapter One, this study argues the interactions of partners online are that of a community. This addresses the first research question, which asked how partners interact online in Facebook groups, by providing the answer that partner's interactions online are in the style of a virtual community. The second research question asked what services and support do online interactions provide to ADF partners. This study has demonstrated membership in online communities provides partners with several things they consider valuable. The first provision of online communities is linked to practical and social support, as was explored in Chapter Five. Social media groups not only allow partners to seek practical support from other group members, but also facilitate the creation of friendships. These friendships, which are initiated within the group and then move offline, provide some of the strongest links to practical and social support for partners. Social support is one of the most common and most effective coping mechanisms for military partners (Fivek 2017; Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003). In addition, relocations associated with military life can fragment social support connections for partners (Borah & Fina 2017; Jolly 1992). This study confirms existing literature which demonstrates that social media connects partners together and supports social support networks fragmented by relocation (Borah & Fina 2017; Sherman et al. 2016; Wang et al. 2015). The experience of one participant, whose online friendships became invaluable in providing support during a difficult time, was discussed in Chapter Five and demonstrates this benefit of the online community. Membership of ADF partner groups also gives partners access to relevant information in an easy to access format, at a time which suits them. In addition, the responses they receive are from sources they consider trustworthy.

Online communities not only provide partners with links to information and support, but give these links in a way which supports their identity profiles. The self-identification of partners into distinct profiles was discussed in Chapter Nine. These profiles can be used to understand multiple aspects of ADF partner life, including online community membership. Partners who identify as Helpers, for instance, can activate this identity through their participation in online groups. Indeed, many of the participants who displayed the clearest Helper identity profile were administrators or creators of ADF partner Facebook groups. Also, partners who see themselves in the context of their status, for example, as mothers or business owners, can find groups which align with this aspect of their identity. This is in contrast to many activities run by support organisations like Defence Community Organisation, whom

participants perceived gather partners together only based on their shared identity as the partner of an ADF member, rather than the more multi-faceted identities which partners hold.

This study also found that ADF partners use social media for accessing the online partner network. Chapter Six outlined the features, strengths, and advantages of this network. Online community membership gives partners opportunities to build and strengthen their network through facilitating access to people and resources. Networks emerged in the analysis of social media use and community themes. This study found partners use social media to create and maintain networks which help them to mitigate the risks inherent in their transient lives, by giving them access to information and support. Several key features sustain the network. One of these features is the network collates all available resources in one space. Another is that it is time efficient, has a low maintenance cost, and delivers a unique and personalised network for a small investment of time. Moelker and Van Der Kloet (2003) found that partners calculate whether or not investments in relationships are worthwhile, considering the emotional cost they take to maintain, which the findings from this study support. The network can be used for dual purposes and has a lack of impediments. The integration of these features into programs and activities run by the ADF and support organisations can improve the relationship between official organisational channels and ADF partners.

A strength of the network is the ability to self-maintain. The necessary contact details of key people and groups are updated automatically through social media. Support organisations like DCO could use this strength to consider how to make ADF contacts easier to maintain. DFA's move to keep one social media profile for local area representatives and then pass on administration of the profile from representative to representative is a positive decision in consideration of this feature. Attempts that make resources more readily available to partners would be well-received by the community, which promotes the provision of individualised information specific to their unique situational need, which this study found was essential to partners. DCO attempted to replicate this feature with their 'one-stop' shop, the Defence Family Helpline. The Helpline has disadvantages and faults, a specific example of which is given below regarding the recent launch of the 'Defence Community Hub'. The Defence Community Hub is a joint project between the Department of Defence, DHA and DFA, and is a designated website which gives links to information and resources in a variety of posting locations. This initiative could be considered a step in the right direction. In writing this section, the researcher could not recall the name of the site, and proceeded to investigate both the DCO and DFA websites for information. Neither website could give the name, so the researcher phoned the

Defence Family Helpline. The social worker on the other end of the call was unfamiliar with the site, and after asking her colleagues, confirmed they also were not aware. They suggested continuing to search the DCO website for information. After an unsuccessful search, the researcher began to search within one of the ADF partner Facebook groups she is a member of and found the link to the site almost immediately. This is one example of the disconnection between official organisational channels and the network. The website is a useful resource and represents a significant investment of time, however, even a person who knows of the website found it challenging to locate, making it feasibly impossible for others to be introduced to it. As with many other resources, social media filled the gap here.

The focus group and interview data highlight that support organisations need to spend considerable time thinking about the end user when creating systems. How will they use it? What does it look like? Can it be accessed from a wide variety of different platforms? Does it appeal to a wide variety of users or just a select few? It is important to remember there is no longer a fragment between our online and our offline lives. One of the features of the network is that it allows for the integration of all available resources, both online and offline, local and distant, creating an incredibly personalised network that is of maximum usefulness to the partner. Organisational channels need to appreciate the desire of partners to collate all available resources, understanding the link between resources, risk-management, and support.

Support organisations need to demonstrate their understanding of the fluid nature of Defence life, which includes the needs of partners to emerge into and out of Defence networks continually. One of the features of the network on social media is the way it seamlessly allows partners to take what they need, and remove what they do not. Organisational channels would benefit from the creation of programs which facilitate shifting memberships, over the need for constant connection and community. DCO could also benefit from adopting a focus on establishing a secure network and allowing the creation of a community to flow naturally from those connections, rather than attempting to force a community. These suggestions are expanded further in this chapter, in the first recommendation to the ADF and affiliated support networks.

Applying Granovetter's weak-tie theory (1983) is useful to understanding the value of the network for ADF partners. Granovetter theorised that social networks are a mix of strong and weak ties. While Granovetter initially suggested strong ties provided social support, it has now been argued that weak ties are equally important. The argument for the usefulness of weak

ties is that a person's weak ties move in different circles, therefore connecting the person in need to many different networks and resources. Weak tie theory explains how people use their 'weak-tie' connections with people to give them advantages. The basic premise behind the theory is that having connections to a wide range of people gives perceived benefits in a time of need. This need does not always need to be significant, job-seeking is one example provided by Granovetter (1973). Within a person's immediate social and family network, they may not have anyone who understands the field of employment or know those inside that field. If the job-seekers network included weak-tie connections, which may be friends of friends, previous work colleagues' business connections, and so forth, then the opportunity for that person to get in contact with someone who can assist them in their job search is increased.

Consider the life of an ADF partner, who faces varying degrees of instability and needs each day. Where are they currently living? Will they be relocated soon? What local resources does the partner need to access, and what resources do they currently have in that area? Relocation is an example of the network in action. If weak ties, according to Granovetter, allow people access to a greater variety of resources, thus meeting a greater variety of their needs, then it is clear to see the importance and value of the network in meeting the complex and changing needs of military partners. Therefore, networks are essential to this community because they help this high need community to mitigate some of the risks of their life. The literature concludes that social networks are critical for the provision of support to military families (Cafferky & Shi 2015).

Relocations are frequent events for ADF members and their families. Results of a 2016 survey of ADF families disclosed 42% of families had experienced a Defence related relocation between one and three times. 24% of families had relocated four to six times, while 11% of families had moved over ten times (Brown & Wensing 2016). Relocation is a time of significant change for ADF families, where families have to navigate new roles and seek out the necessary services and amenities they require to manage their lives. Relocation can come coupled with other significant transitions, including increased deployment and operational absences for the member. Relocations can often be over significant distances, which may bring shifts closer to or away from support sources like family members and employment. In the survey, participants rated the most difficult aspects of relocation being re-establishing employment and support networks (Brown & Wensing 2016). The ADF partner heavily relies on the network during this time. The network enables them to get information and support to save time and relieve emotional labour. The network is also crucial in reducing some of the

risks of establishing their family in the new location. The 2016 Defence Families' Survey also identified the preferred method for accessing support services being the internet, other ADF partners, and existing networks (Brown & Wensing 2016), which confirms the value and importance of the network for partners. Facebook discussions in ADF partner groups, or posts on individual ADF partners pages, may appear to be ordinary and mundane, with questions such as, 'Where is a good hairdresser?', however, these questions are evidence of the network in action. When partners ask questions, they are activating their weak tie networks to find the support they seek.

This section has discussed the second significant finding of this study, which is that ADF partners rely on weak and strong ties, depending on context, to make use of social media for connecting to support communities and networks. It discussed how social media connects partners to social supports, as their connections are fragmented due to relocation. This finding confirms existing literature. This section considered Granovetter's weak-tie theory in relation to military partners interacting online, which is another advantage of social media for partners. The following section outlines the third significant finding of this thesis, which is that partner self-identification potentially impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation.

10.2.3   Identity Impacts the Relationship between Partners and the ADF

The previous section explored the second significant finding of this study, which is that ADF partners use social media for connecting to support communities and networks. It explored the previous findings chapters in relation to existing literature and theory. This section discusses the third and final significant finding of this thesis, which is that partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. A theme of identity has heavily underpinned this study. Identity was explicitly investigated in Chapter Nine, but also related to findings in other chapters. This theme addresses research question three, which asks, 'what can be learnt about the ADF community from the interactions of partners online?'. This study demonstrates concepts of partner identity can be seen through the analysis of ADF partner online activity.

This study both confirms existing literature and contributes new findings. Previous literature which has taken place in an international context has found expectations on military partners places them under pressure (Garcia 2012), and that partners are expected to be

supportive and caring (Borah & Fina 2017; Jessup 2000) and not show negative emotions (Aducci et al. 2011). In addition to the identity categories outlined in Chapter Nine, this study also suggests there is an additional category, that of the 'Perfect Partner'. Throughout the study, participants indicated traits and personalities they found favourable both in themselves and other Defence partners. These traits and personalities, when collated together and analysed, give a picture of the Perfect Partner. This identity has been built directly from participant comments during the analysis stage. Participants were not directly asked what qualities they consider The Perfect Partner to demonstrate.

The Perfect Partner is resilient and independent. The Perfect Partner can 'get on with the job' but does not take this attitude to the extreme of the Suck It Up Sunshiner and remains considerate of others' need for support. In a demonstration of their resilience and independence, they can source information and support systems and use this information to support others. One participant identified this when she discussed how partners play a key role in supporting the ADF member by accessing information on the members' behalf. The Perfect Partner engages with the ADF partner community but also has outside friends and interests. They are not a Milspouse, and while they have a sound understanding of their entitlements and they access those, the Perfect Partner does not ask for more than what meets their reasonable needs. Also, the Perfect Partner supports other partners to find their way. The Perfect Partner contributes to online group discussions by providing relevant information, uplifting others, and ensuring the questions they ask cannot be found through other networks.

The Perfect Partner facilitates the relationship between the ADF and the member, being encouraging and understanding of the member's ADF commitments and requirements. Participants placed value on partners who were supportive of the member's career, even promoting the ADF in times where the member may be apathetic and considering discharge. The Perfect Partner is a civilian female married to a male serving member. They have infant or school-aged children, for whom the Perfect Partner is the primary caregiver. If the Perfect Partner is employed, her job is flexible and does not cause interference with the member's ADF commitments, especially around relocation. Flexibility is crucial for ADF partners, and the Perfect Partner does not have unrealistic expectations in regards to posting and relocation.

The identity of the Perfect Partner is challenging to locate amongst partners in the ADF community. Many factors which make up the Perfect Partner identity are transitional, such as the age of children, though participants felt DCO projected and promoted the image of the

Perfect Partner. The perception that DCO promotes this image of the Perfect Partner, of whom participants did not identify with, impacts on the relationship between the partner and DCO. Participants commented that DCO does not understand their situation or their needs. Participants frequently used phrases such as, 'DCO does not get it'. This perception of DCO being disconnected from the life of the partner is related to their demonstration of the Perfect Partner identity. This is a key finding as it contributes to addressing the second research question. The second research question asked how interactions on Facebook impact traditional support providers. This study demonstrates that online interactions allow partners to bypass interactions with ADF-affiliated support organisations, like DCO, who they perceive promote the Perfect Partner identity, and instead be connected with support options they feel are more closely aligned with their identity. This is an example of Giddens' late-modernity theory in action, where online networks give individuals access to information they would previously not have been able to access. The identity of the Perfect Partner appears in current literature about military partners, particularly in publications following the Second World War. In a critical analysis of publications for military spouses such as *The Officer's Guide* published in 1942 and *The Army Wife* published in 1966, Hamilton (1986) identifies multiple comments in alignment with the Perfect Partner identity outlined here, such as compliance with relocation requests and providing support to the husband (the military member) in accordance with military values. This work found 'most books written for the service wife subscribe to the image of the Army wife who accepts her military responsibilities and duties' (Hamilton 1986, p. 23). Further research related to the identity of the Perfect Partner would be valuable, including research which tests for evidence of a Perfect Partner identity in DCO communications. Hamilton (1986)

There also appears to be an additional identity profile that was not present in this study, the Disengaged Partner. The identity of the disengaged partner differs from the previous identities, in that its creation was formed when analysis revealed a gap. The disengaged partner refers to the partner who is not engaged in the military community at all. The disengaged partner does not interact with ADF community organisations in any way, does not identify as a military partner, and is absent from a variety of social interactions. Perceivably, they receive all their information and support externally from the Defence network.

Further research about this specific identity would be valuable. The absence of this partner in this research identifies their presence, but cannot reliably give insight about why these partners disengage from Defence, their attitude towards the military, or where they receive their information and support. The methodology of this research may have played a role in not

collecting more specific detail about this partner identity. This identity type would not have approached the researcher for two reasons. Firstly, the language of the request would not have attracted this identity. Requests for participants asked ADF partners to come forward to discuss social media, however, the Disengaged Partner does not consider themselves an ADF partner. Secondly, Disengaged Partners would not have been active in any of the online or offline channels in which the research project was advertised, as all of the material generating participants for this research was circulated through Defence networks.

A sense of anger was evident during participant interviews and focus groups, found in the manner participants discussed a range of issues. This anger varied from a mild sense of frustration to direct hostility towards the ADF and associated networks. Understanding the source of frustration and its impact is important because it forms a basis for better understanding partner attitudes towards the ADF. It may also aid understanding of how partners shape their identity particularly in relation to the identity profiles outlined in this thesis. The thematic analysis applied in this study did not explicitly reveal these emotions as they were not overtly stated. Rather, a sense of anger emerged as a sentiment underpinning participant comments. Investigation of underlying emotions are more suitably analysed using alternative analysis methods, such as discourse analysis. This is a potential area for future research and exploration.

Identity was also shown in this thesis to impact online security. Chapter Eight demonstrated that partners reject the authority of the ADF to request partners to modify their online behaviour. A key finding of this research is that it might be futile to place restrictions on the social media activity of ADF partners. Restrictions would be unsuccessful because partners feel a distinct identity outside of the ADF. In addition to comments that highlighted how restrictions would be difficult to enforce, participants were forthcoming in stating they were not enlisted military members, and as such did not need to comply with instructions from the ADF. Indeed, efforts to educate partners about social media could be perceived as control, and negatively impact on the relationship between partners and the ADF. This finding aligns with previous research which states partners operate in a challenging place, being that they belong completely in neither civilian nor military spaces (Jervis 2011).

This section has discussed the third and final significant finding of this study, which is that partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. It outlines a profile of The Perfect Partner and the Disengaged Partner and discusses the role of these two identity types in relation to interactions with ADF-affiliated support organisations.

The following chapter uses these findings to generate recommendations for the ADF and support organisations. These recommendations include aligning programs and materials aimed at partners with identities and values outlined in this study.

10.3   Recommendations

The previous section discussed the three significant findings of this study. These were: the abstract nature of the ADF means support networks are access points; ADF partners rely on weak and strong ties, depending on context, to make use of social media for connecting to support communities; and partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. This section uses the findings from this study, which emerged from the interview and focus group data with ADF partners, to make recommendations for the ADF and affiliated support organisations. These recommendations predominantly suggest aligning programs and material more closely with participant values. In offering these recommendations, it is prudent to acknowledge that qualitative data, generated through an ethnographic framework with reduced sample sizes, does not aim to be broadly representative. Qualitative research does not make any claim to representativeness (Sarantakos 2005). In contrast to the goals of quantitative research, which aims for statistical representation of the issue, qualitative research is less concerned with the generalisability of the research findings. Qualitative research relies on purposive sampling to identify cases which will provide a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Liamputton & Ezzy 2005). Qualitative research offers naturalistic generalisability by selecting a typical case study and arguing for the relevance of its application to wider society (Sarantakos 2005). In this study, the richness of the data collected demonstrated the key themes in sufficient detail to be able to posit the following suggestion recommendations.

Research question four asked what recommendations can be made to ADF-affiliated support networks, such as DCO, regarding the interactions of partners on social media. This study has found partner social media interactions demonstrate the role of identity, late-modernity, and trust. As such, recommendations made by this study align with these concepts. ADF-affiliated support organisations should work to align their aims, messages, and programs with partner values. This includes recognising the 'in-between' space they operate in, where partners are neither completely civilian, but neither are they part of the military. This also includes embracing previous research which demonstrated that while partners require support, they also prioritise their individual, independent identity (Jervis 2011). ADF-affiliated organisations should work to demonstrate to partners they understand the unique situation

partners are placed in, as well as the associated challenges. In demonstrating to partners that they 'get it', this will also build trust between partners and the ADF. As was demonstrated earlier in this chapter, organisations like DCO are access points to the broader ADF organisation, and building trust between partners and support organisations, will build trust between partners and the ADF. Reduced trust in the ADF affects partners' willingness to engage in the ADF community and may ultimately impact the partner's decision to support the member's ongoing enlistment. This finding, which links trust in the ADF and ongoing member retention, is new. The 2017 Defence Families Survey investigated influences on ongoing service retention. The participants in this study highlighted the impact of service on family life, inability to access childcare, and frequent absences from home influenced decisions to leave the ADF (Atkins et al. 2017). The findings of this research contribute to this understanding, offering lower levels of trust as an additional influence on service retention.

This study suggests the ADF needs to acknowledge the role partners play in the military system, incorporating values which partners find crucial, such as acknowledging their separate, autonomous identity. While these values should be incorporated into as many partner interactions as possible, this study discusses two examples of where the ADF and associated support organisations could apply this finding. The first is in the delivery of social media education to partners, and the second is within DCO. Partners would likely benefit from specific training regarding online security, particularly as this study indicates partners can take an active role in managing the ADF member's social media profiles. Partners being excluded from conversations regarding the current online environment may encourage false feelings of confidence in their ability to maintain online security. Despite the value in providing social media security information, the ADF faces challenges in successfully delivering this training to partners. Participants in this study were supportive of social media training; however, their support is given on the expectation that others would benefit, as most do not perceive a personal need to receive advice or instruction.

A key finding of this research was that it would be futile to place restrictions on the social media activity of ADF partners. In addition to comments that highlighted restrictions would be difficult to enforce, participants were forthcoming in stating they were not enlisted military members, and as such did not need to comply with instructions from the ADF.In light of this, efforts to educate partners about social media could be perceived as 'control', and negatively impact on the relationship between partners and the ADF. In planning and delivering social media training to partners, a more effective approach would be to align the training with

partners' strong sense of willingness to avoid danger to the member. Training focused around 'Keeping your Defence member safe' would align to the values that ADF partners hold. Successful advice and training would also be that which acknowledges the partners' separate, civilian identity, and offers suggestions improve on their existing social media security knowledge. This value-based education fits with the model of partner education and training offered to US military families, where 'educational material focuses on instilling pride in the family members by letting them know they are as much a part of the military community as their soldier, with their own responsibilities for keeping the soldier safe'(Patterson 2011, p. 87).

One of the most significant challenges would be disseminating the message to partners. The Patterson report suggested the Defence Community Organisation and associated support organisations could be responsible for distributing training and information to partners; however, participants in this research identified breakdowns in communication between those organisations and partners. For this reason, organisations like DCO may not be well-positioned to deliver this training to partners. Participants who attended pre-deployment briefings found them valuable, so the extension of these briefings to more units across the ADF would appear to be beneficial. The placement of engaging and relevant social media security advice at these events would be key. In addition, information which can be easily shared on social media networks by ADF partners, who already do the majority of self-education regarding online security, would take advantage of these already strong pathways. For instance, social media graphics which give instruction on how to interact online may be well received by partners. Partners who are active in their communities could share these graphics to others, which encourages others to engage in better practice.

There are also recommendations for DCO in consideration of the findings of this study. This study suggests that DCO needs to shift away from promoting images of the Perfect Partner, instead demonstrating an understanding of the many different partner identities. DCO needs to show they understand and value the partner's separate identity, and value partners as individuals with more skills and ability than just their role in supporting the member. This study finds there is a gap in services and support as provided by ADF-affiliated organisations like DCO. This study suggests there are two significant gaps: an information gap, and an identity gap. Both gaps correlate with trust.

The first gap represents an information gap. Support organisations like DCO have not maintained a position of being reliable and trustworthy sources. Patterson (2011) in a report on

social media use and the ADF, identified the possibility of what he terms 'knowledge voids'. A knowledge void, according to Patterson, is where the organisation vacates a space, allowing for 'unofficial presences to expand and grow'. While Patterson referred to Defence's inactivity on social media networks, the concept applies to DCO's activities online and offline. During a knowledge void, 'gaps will be filled by someone with a receptive audience, ready to believe unofficial and potentially incorrect information' says Patterson (2011). Participants in this research gave many critiques of DCO, especially when it came to the delivery of information. DCO was identified as being slow to respond and giving inconsistent, non-specific, and generally unhelpful information. The second gap is an identity gap. Participants critiqued DCO for not understanding the challenges of military life. As previously discussed in this section, the comment 'They do not get it' was a strong and recurrent theme in the research. Participants also perceived that DCO was more likely to give biased advice, based on their presumed objectives. As Patterson outlined in saying that knowledge voids allowed for the creation of unofficial sources, this has occurred with DCO, ADF families, and social media groups. Having lost, or perhaps never having built in the first place, a position as a trusted source, social media groups have been established to fill the gap. Social media groups fill the gap by giving partners access to information from a source they believe is trustworthy and allowing them to align both their ADF partner identity with other aspects of themselves.

Drawing on data from interviews and focus groups with partners, this study recommends changes to the way DCO delivers support services in the community. As identified, one of the challenges facing DCO is that it has ceased to be seen as a trustworthy reliable source of knowledge. In light of this, planned activities for DCO need to be assessed in the context of improving the trust relationship between DCO and ADF partners. This study suggests that DCO should reconsider their efforts regarding community building. DCO does not have the resources, either in time, costs, or training, to do this effectively on an ongoing basis. Partners desire a connection to others in a specific way that is difficult for DCO to provide; they want a community that is local and links to multiple aspects of their identity, not just their status as the partner of an ADF member. This study found partners interact mostly with the Defence community for a short period during transitional phases, which means community members are always changing and the needs of the community are continually being redefined. DCO events, while praised by participants for being a 'good day out', appear to be generally unhelpful in allowing partners to interact and strengthen relationships and

community links. Instead, DCO could focus on being an excellent resource manager, an organisation that is proficient at connecting people and resources.

Participants in this research, and in surveys of the ADF community, have undoubtedly said they desire information. Participants want this information to be local, specific to their situation, and delivered in a timely and convenient format. The DCO helpline, which operates 24 hours a day to connect partners with information is a good tool and moves DCO in the right direction, but this needs to be expanded. The helpline needs to be flawless in its provision of information. In centralising this information, care needs to be taken to ensure that localised content is not lost. This may involve the feeding of local resources into the larger system by regional representatives. Consistency is also key for the suggested improvement of DCO's services and the expansion of the Helpline.

The motivation behind the expansion of the helpline must also be to improve the trust relationship between DCO and ADF partners. This is especially important because, as explored earlier in this chapter, the trust relationship between DCO and partners is representative of the trust relationship between the wider ADF and partners. Interactions with support organisations like DCO influence the trust that partners place in the wider ADF network, as per Giddens' trust theory. This means that efforts to rebuild trust will also positively impact on the trust ADF partners have in Defence. The goal needs to be to re-establish DCO as a trustworthy authority, filling the knowledge gap.

To do this, DCO needs to operate with an intention for each caller to leave the interaction feeling as if their issue has been addressed. This does not merely involve problem-solving, as partners often call DCO for assistance with issues that are outside of their capacity and mandate, such as the provision of childcare or home maintenance. Instead, DCO helpline workers need to do more counselling with callers, hearing their requests not merely as problems that can or cannot be solved through DCO's services, but as an opportunity to meet with that partner and allow them and their needs to be heard. This is not outside of the scope of their ability, as the Department of Defence website states that the Helpline is staffed by trained professionals, including social workers and psychologists (Australian Government Department of Defence n.d.-c). In this, DCO will find partners not only begin to trust DCO to care for their needs, but will reduce comments that DCO does not 'get it'. Should partners come to consider DCO a reliable and worthwhile source, they will be more open to considering new ways to communicate with these organisations.

This section has provided recommendations for the ADF and ADF-affiliated support organisations. In doing this, this section has addressed the fourth and final research questions. These recommendations predominantly suggest aligning material and programs with ADF partner values as demonstrated in this study.

This chapter has collated and discussed the findings of the previous chapters and considered the implications of these findings in relation to existing research and current theory. This chapter revisited the aims, objectives, and research questions of this study, as were outlined in chapter one. This chapter then discussed the three significant findings of this study, which were: the abstract nature of the ADF means support networks are access points; ADF partners use social media for connecting to support communities and networks; and partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF organisation. The chapter then offered recommendations based on the findings of this study for the ADF and affiliated support organisations, and in doing so addressed the fourth research question. The following chapter concludes this thesis and provides an overview of the previous chapters and significant findings.

Chapter 11.
Conclusion

This chapter summarises and concludes the study. It does this by revisiting the gap in literature in which this study aimed to fill and re-examining the research questions. It gives an overview of the previous chapters and discusses the implications of the study. This chapter also provides suggestions for future research and clarifies the original contribution to knowledge made.

Partners provide an important military capability, as they support the member to have increased mission readiness (Atkins 2009) and are more likely to re-enlist (Jessup 2000; Segal & Segal 2003). Also, partners assist to enhance the well-being of the member (Verdeli et al. 2011). The partners of serving personnel are significantly affected by military service. Existing literature has established military partners experience a range of impacts on their physical and mental well-being, including heightened levels of stress (Moelker & Van Der Kloet 2003), headaches, weight changes, and sleep disturbances (Van Vranken et al. 1984). Despite the important capability partners provide to the military, research regarding military partners is limited, particularly in an Australian context. Ongoing studies of ADF families by the Department of Defence and Defence Families of Australia established partners were using informal support sources, such as Facebook, over ADF-affiliated organisations such as DCO (Defence Families of Australia 2014b). Social support and quality communication aids partners to cope (Fivek 2017; Maguire & Parcell 2015), thus understanding the link between unofficial support services and ADF partners is critical. This study addressed four research questions to provide a qualitative understanding of ADF partners and social media. These questions asked how partners interact online in Facebook groups and what services and support these online interactions provided. This study also aimed to investigate how interacting on Facebook impacted the relationship between partners and ADF-affiliated support providers, and sought to understand what could be learnt about the ADF community from the interactions of ADF partners online. Finally, this study questioned what recommendations could be made to the ADF and ADF-affiliated support organisations, like DCO, regarding the interactions of partners on social media. It did this through the application of a digital (social media) ethnographic framework, where focus groups and interviews sought the insights and experiences of ADF partners.

The data generated from the focus groups and interviews was transcribed and thematically analysed, which lead to five main themes. These themes were explored in this thesis in five individual findings chapters. The first of these, community, identified participant's desired connections to other people in the same situation. Participants in this study identified

they use Facebook for seeking out these community connections, and these communities provide them with highly desired information and social support. Chapter Five discussed how Facebook provides partners with low-risk social interactions, and participants use social media for navigating transitional periods. The theme of community was considered separate to the theme of networks, which was discussed explicitly in Chapter Six. This chapter identified the strengths and advantages of the online ADF partner network, including the ability to collate resources and the easy accessibility of resources. Participants in this research identified they privileged having a network which was highly individualised. Both chapters explored disconnection and exclusion, and investigated the experiences of participants who felt they were not part of the online community.

The third theme was trust, which was explored in Chapter Seven. This study found both the researcher and the participants used the term 'Defence' to refer to a variety of ADF-affiliated support services, which this chapter explored. This chapter also outlined participant comments which demonstrate higher trust in social media than the ADF, and investigate the influencing factors of accuracy, trustworthiness, bias, credibility, and risk. This chapter also explored the reasons for decreased trust in the ADF, and the influence of rank on trust. The fourth theme, security, was discussed in Chapter Eight, which investigated online security attitudes of ADF partners. One of the most significant findings was that partner identity, and perceptions of security awareness, impacts on online security behaviours. The final theme explored was identity. Identity, outlined in chapter nine, outlined participant's adoption or rejection of a military partner identity. From there, five identity profiles were generated, which were the Entitled Whinger, the Suck It Up Sunshiner, the Milspouse, the Helper, and the Mean Girls. These identity profiles reflected the critical link between partner self-identity and their role as ADF partners.

Chapter Ten discussed these five themes in relation to existing theory and literature. In doing so, it generated three significant findings. The first of these applied Giddens' theory of late-modernity to understand the ADF as an abstract organisation. As a result, ADF-affiliated support organisations, like DCO, operate as access points to that abstract organisation. This is a significant finding because it demonstrates how interactions between people and support organisations impact and reflect the relationship between the broader ADF organisation and individuals, particularly partners. The second significant finding is that ADF partners rely on weak and strong ties, depending on context, to make use of social media for connecting to support communities and networks. This finding concurs with existing literature and offers a

uniquely Australian context. The third significant finding is that partner identity impacts the relationship between partners and the ADF. It is this finding which influenced the recommendations made to the ADF and affiliated support organisations. Based on findings built from interview and focus group data, this study suggested the ADF and affiliated support organisations need to align partner communication and programs with the values participants demonstrated in this study.

This study generated many areas for future research. One of the potential areas for ongoing research include comparisons between self-identified and actual behaviour on social media in regard to security. The findings of this research in regard to social media security, while insightful, are based on self-reported data which can be flawed. A more objective analysis of social media behaviour, perhaps with a lens of assessing social media security would increase understanding in this area.

Another area for future research would include the experiences of members of the ADF community who are not in a romantic partnership with ADF members. One focus could be mothers of serving personnel. Anecdotally, it has been suggested mothers provide cause for concern in regard to online security and social media activities, though this has not been tested in a research context. Finally, research which investigates what military members think about the social media behaviour of their partners would generate useful findings, and potentially reveal points of tension between members and partners.

This study provides current research which aligns the experience of Australian military partners with those internationally. It identifies partners are operating in a late-modern world, and demonstrate they interact with the ADF in the same manner. Partners have an increased desire for the ADF to acknowledge their individual and civilian status; they interact online due to social media allowing them to demonstrate their personal identity. This study has implications for those who work with ADF partners, including the Defence Community Organisation and Defence Families of Australia. It makes suggestions for improvements to programs and communications targeting families. It also has implications for the broader ADF organisation, as knowledge is sought on how the ADF operates in modern society. In consideration of the link between partners and military capability, the findings in this research contribute to the ongoing successful operation of the ADF.

Chapter 12.
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APPENDICES

Appendix A Information and Consent Form- Focus Group

INFORMATION SHEET

CQUniversity AUSTRALIA

BE WHAT YOU WANT TO BE
cqu.edu.au

Social Media and Australian Defence Force Families

This Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form tells you about the research project. It explains the processes involved with taking part. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary; there is no obligation to take part in the study. You do not need to provide a reason for not wanting to participate. There will be no disadvantage to you for not participating.

If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to sign the consent section. You will be given a copy of this Participant Information to keep. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Your decision to take part, not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the Australian Defence Force or CQUniversity. If you wish to withdraw from the project, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the bottom of this form).

Project Overview

The purpose of this study is to find out how and why partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members use social media, with a focus on Facebook. This will help us understand how social media helps partners who, through their frequent moves, may have less connection with the community.

Previous research has established that partners who are more connected with the community cope better with the challenges of military life. Families that cope better provide a crucial benefit in aiding service retention and combat readiness, which leads to a more effective Australian Defence Force.

The results of this research will be used by Amy Johnson to obtain a Doctor of Philosophy degree. This research is funded by CQUniversity, supported by the Commonwealth Government's Research Training Scheme.

Participation Procedure

I am interested to find out your thoughts and experiences about social media use by ADF partner, particularly in your experiences with social media in your role as the partner of a serving ADF member. Participation in my research would mean your involvement in a group discussion with 5 to 7 other ADF partners like yourself. This group discussion will take around two hours and will be audio recorded. The group discussion will take place at {location}, starting at {time}.

Benefits and Risks

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit military family communities in both Australia and overseas by providing understanding for Defence support groups about why ADF families are connecting online. This research will provide insights for these support networks into the needs of the ADF community.

There are no anticipated risks associated with your involvement in this project. Following our discussion, if you'd like to discuss further any issues raised, you can contact the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

The information you give in the group discussion will not be connected to your name or other identifying details. No one will have access to the group recording or written notes except the researchers listed on the bottom of this document. Your responses will be de-identified, which means you will remain anonymous in any published results. The audio recording, electronic and paper records will be stored separately from identifying information and kept in a locked and secure location at the principle researcher's study location for five (5) years after the publication date of the last publication based upon the data in accordance with the CQUniversity policy.

This project will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies. The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel- Protocol Number 016/16. This project also has approval from the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number H16/04-078.

Dissemination of research findings

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis. A summary of findings and final report will be submitted to the Department of Defence, as well as the Defence Community Organisation. A summary of findings will also be submitted for publication in academic journals, books and conferences. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.
A Plain English statement of results will be made available to you via e-mail at your request.

Questions/ Further Information

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Concerns / Complaints

Should you have any complaints or concerns about the manner in which this project is
conducted, please do not hesitate to contact

CQUniversity's Office of Research
Building 32, CQUniversity,
Rockhampton QLD 4702
Tel: (07)4923 2603
E-mail: ethics@cqu.edu.au;

or you may prefer to contact the Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel at the
following address:

Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel
Department of Defence
BP33-4-017
PO Box 7927
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610
AUSTRALIA
Telephone: (02) 6172 2177
E-mail: peopleresearch.ethics@defence.gov.au

**Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this section for
your information.**

Social Media and Australian Defence Force Families

CONSENT FORM

I consent to participation in this research project and agree that:

1. An information sheet has been provided to me that I have read and understood
2. I have had any questions I had about the project answered to my satisfaction by the Information Sheet and any further verbal explanation provided
3. I understand my participation or non-participation in the research will not affect my relationship with either Central Queensland University or the Australian Defence Force
4. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty
5. I understand the research findings will be included in the researcher's publications on the project and this may include conferences and articles written for journals and other methods of dissemination stated on the Information Sheet;
6. I understand that to preserve anonymity and maintain confidentiality of participants that fictitious names may be use in any publication(s)
7. I am aware that a Plain English statement of results will be available to me via e-mail if I request
8. I agree that I am providing consent to participate in this project

Signature: _____

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

If you wish to have a Plain English statement of results e-mailed to you, please provide your e-mail address below:

E-mail Address: _____

The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel- Protocol Number 016/16 and the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number H16/04-078.

Appendix B Information and Consent Form- Interview

Social Media and Australian Defence Force Families

This Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form tells you about the research project. It explains the processes involved with taking part. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research. Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary; there is no obligation to take part in the study. You do not need to provide a reason for not wanting to participate. There will be no disadvantage to you for not participating.

If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to sign the consent section. You will be given a copy of this Participant Information to keep. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage. Your decision to take part, not take part, or take part and then withdraw, will in no way impact your current or future relationship with the Australian Defence Force or CQUniversity. If you wish to withdraw from the project, please contact the Research Team (contact details at the bottom of this sheet).

Project Overview

The purpose of this study is to find out how and why partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members use social media. This will help us understand how social media helps partners who, through their frequent moves, may have less connection with the community.

Previous research has established that partners and spouses who are more connected with the community cope better with the challenges of military life. Families that cope better provide a crucial benefit in aiding service retention and combat readiness, which leads to a more effective Australian Defence Force.

The results of this research will be used by Amy Johnson to obtain a Doctor of Philosophy degree. This research is funded by CQUniversity, supported by the Commonwealth Government's Research Training Scheme.

Participation Procedure

I am interested to find out your thoughts and experiences about social media use by ADF partners, particularly in your experience with social media in your role supporting ADF families. Participation in my research would mean you being interviewed by me at a time and a place convenient to you. The interview will take around one hour and will be audio-recorded. You will be provided with the opportunity to review the interview transcript once completed.

Benefits and Risks

It is expected that this project will not directly benefit you. However, it may benefit military family communities in both Australia and overseas by providing understanding for Defence support groups about why ADF families are connecting online. This research will provide insights for these support networks into the needs of the ADF community.

There are no anticipated risks associated with your involvement in this project. Following our discussion, if you'd like to discuss further any issues raised, you can contact the Defence Family Helpline on 1800 624 608.

Confidentiality / Anonymity

The information you give will not be connected to your name or other identifying details. No one will have access to the audio recording or written notes except the researchers listed on the bottom of this document. Your responses will be de-identified, which means you will remain anonymous in any published results. The audio recording, electronic and paper records will be stored separately from identifying information and kept in a locked and secure location at the principle researcher's study location for five (5) years after the publication date of the last publication based upon the data in accordance with the CQUniversity policy.

This project will be carried out according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies. The ethical aspects of this research project have been approved by the Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel- Protocol Number 016/16. This project also has approval from the CQUniversity Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval Number H16/04-078.

Dissemination of research findings

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be used in the researcher's PhD thesis. A summary of findings and final report will be submitted to the Department of Defence, as well as the Defence Community Organisation. A summary of findings will also be submitted for publication in academic journals, books and conferences. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

A Plain English statement of results will be made available to you via e-mail at your request.

Questions/ Further Information

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ND.I Information/Consent form version number: v3
Dated: 4 May 2016

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Concerns / Complaints

Should you have any complaints or concerns about the manner in which this project is
conducted, please do not hesitate to contact

CQUniversity's Office of Research
Building 32, CQUniversity,
Rockhampton QLD 4702
Tel: (07)4923 2603
E-mail: ethics@cqu.edu.au;

or you may prefer to contact the Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel at the
following address:

Defence People Research- Low Risk Ethics Panel
Department of Defence
BP33-4-017
PO Box 7927
CANBERRA BC ACT 2610
AUSTRALIA
Telephone: (02) 6172 2177
E-mail: peopleresearch.ethics@defence.gov.au

Thank you for helping with this research project. Please keep this section for your information.

Social Media and Australian Defence Force Families

CONSENT FORM

I consent to participation in this research project and agree that:

1. An information sheet has been provided to me that I have read and understood
2. I have had any questions I had about the project answered to my satisfaction by the Information Sheet and any further verbal explanation provided
3. I understand my participation or non-participation in the research will not affect my relationship with either Central Queensland University or the Australian Defence Force
4. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without penalty
5. I understand the research findings will be included in the researcher's publications on the project and this may include conferences and articles written for journals and other methods of dissemination stated on the Information Sheet;
6. I am aware that a Plain English statement of results will be available to me via e-mail if I request
7. I agree that I am providing consent to participate in this project

Signature: _____

Name (please print): _____

Date: _____

If you wish to have a Plain English statement of results e-mailed to you, please provide your e-mail address below:

E-mail Address: _____

Appendix C Call for Participants

Seeking people to come and chat about how you use social media to navigate life as a Defence family.

I'm currently doing a PhD research project on social media and Australian Defence Force families. A small group of <service> partners are getting together in <location> on the <date>, and we are looking for more people to join us.

There will be a free childminding service for the little ones (limited spaces) and a great morning tea to thank you for your time. It should be a nice morning to get together with other <service> partners in the area.

If you are interested in coming along or have any questions, please send me a Facebook message, or e-mail amy.johnson@cqumail.com (Posted with admin approval).

WHERE DO YOU FIND SUPPORT?

ADF PARTNERS

COME AND CHAT ABOUT SOCIAL MEDIA AND DEFENCE LIFE.

BRISBANE, 28 OCT
TOWNSVILLE, 01 NOV
DARWIN, 04 NOV

FOR MORE INFO: AMY.JOHNSON@CQUMAIL.COM

Appendix D Focus Group Prompt Sheet

Defence Community Organisation (DCO)	
Defence Families Australia (DFA)	
Veterans and Veterans Families Counselling Service	
Partner Groups on Facebook	
RSL DefenceCare	
Alongside	

Appendix E Focus Group Questions

1.   Tell us your name, and describe your very first Facebook profile photo

2.   I'm going to present you with a list of places you can get information, advice and support as an ADF partner. Some of these are funded by Defence, others are not.

    a.   Give list. Have intentionally left ADF member off the list

    b.   Are there any that you think are missing from the list? If nobody mentions the ADF member (their partner), offer prompt. "What about your partner? Should they be on this list? Are they a source of information and support?".

    c.   Are there any services on this list that you are unaware of?

3.   I want to explore a few of these in a bit more detail. Let's talk about

    a.   DCO: What has been your experience with DCO, especially in regards to them offering you support and information?

    b.   FB groups: What has been your experience with the Defence spouse Facebook groups, especially in regards to them offering you support and information?

4.   How many times a week do you engage with other ADF partners on social media?

5.   Tell me about the last time you read, or posted, something on an ADF partner group on Facebook

6.   If you met someone who was a new Navy spouse, and they didn't know anything about where to go for support, advice and information, what would you tell them?

7.   There are some comments that ADF members and their families should not have social media profiles. How do you feel about that statement?

8.   Today we've talked about XYZ. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

Appendix F Coding List: Initial Codes

Trust
Risk
Member/Partner Communication
-        Access (ie: types of communication, reliability, frequency)
-        Member communication abilities/skills
Any mention of DCO and DFA, Community Houses, VVCS
Rank
"Pillow Talk"
Use of the word "we" (related to Defence enlistment, etc)
"Entitlement"
Any information about participants (study, education, children, etc)
Social media as a conduit to the formal organisation
Inconsistent messages from Defence
Gender
Drama
Change in situation (ie: parenting status, job loss, deployment, etc)
Support
-        Sources
Information
-        Sources
Service type – "segregation"
Social media training for spouses
Community
-        Need for community
-        Signs of Community?
Facebook group admin role
Reason for social media group use
Benefits of social media for spouses
"OPSEC"
Security
"You chose it"

Appendix G Coding List: Secondary Codes

Why Use Social Media

Community

Networks

Trust

Security

Category- 'I am a' statements

Mention of DCO

Appendix H Peer Reviewed Publication

Are you really one of us? : Exploring Ethics, Risk and Insider Research in a Private Facebook Community

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ABSTRACT

Researchers have only just begun grappling with the ethical implications of social media research, since more research is conducted online in virtual communities. Ethical review boards may not have the understanding or training to advise on projects with elements of social media research. This paper is a reflexive account that explores the author's decision to undertake research in a private Facebook community, of which she was already a member. This paper details the negative response that was received from community gatekeepers, and explores the research decisions which elicited this response. This paper uses Lee-Treweek & Linkogle's four-part framework for understanding researcher risk, and presents in this instance that the risk of social isolation faced by the researcher was too significant to proceed with the study. Insider research, and netnography are two complicated areas of research. This paper contributes to ongoing learning in this growing field.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Social and professional topics~Codes of ethics** • **Networks~Social media networks**

KEYWORDS

Online community, netnography, ethics, researcher risk

1 INTRODUCTION

"How do we even know who you are? Maybe you are the media, trying to get another article about catty military wives? I feel betrayed." Accusations came flying across the screen less than half an hour after sending a request to conduct research in a closed Facebook group. The aim of the research was to capture the social media interactions of the partners of those currently serving in the Australian Defence Force (ADF). At the time of study's design, the concept appeared simple. If the focus of the study was to discover how ADF partners use social media to meet their support and information needs, why not examine the interactions directly, by conducting a content analysis of posts in a Facebook group populated by ADF partners? As an insider in the community, there was no issue of access, and certainly, research on social media platforms is not a completely new phenomenon. Researchers are drawn to social media methods for the advantages these methods offer in investigating naturally occurring behaviour, particularly in difficult to reach communities [1].

Moving into the data collection phase of the research, it was immediately apparent that it would not be so simple, and the established ethical debates around social media methods become increasingly complicated when additional layers of insider research and closed communities were added. This paper offers a reflexive account of the researcher's experiences and decision-making process while undertaking her Ph.D. study of the social media interactions of ADF partners. Reflexive accounts are important for continuing discussions about the risk researcher's face while undertaking fieldwork across all forms. This is especially

important as researchers from a variety of fields engage more with participants in new places, such as the online space [2]. This paper offers a unique perspective in that many discussions around social media research and ethics focuses on the risk to the participants, rather than offering perspectives on risk faced by the researcher.

2 BACKGROUND

Undertaking qualitative research on social media places researchers into a new, relatively unexplored methodological field. The study of online interaction and behavior is still emerging. The concepts and norms accepted in other methods of research have yet to be established in this field, yet the consequences —to both participants and researchers— are unique and significant [3]. Ethical review committees can be inadequately prepared for applications that include a social media research component [3, 1, 4]. In the absence of advice and monitoring from ethical committees, the emphasis is instead placed on the researcher to identify areas of potential risk and adequately plan to overcome these. In a systematic review of 17 studies that used social media as a data source, Golder et al. [5] found researchers worried that risks were not 'taken seriously' by International Review Boards. While ethical standards often change, the change is even more marked and rapid in the field of online research. For instance, while groups have been a feature on Facebook since its inception, the way people join and interact in these groups has rapidly changed [6]. The examination of ethical issues in regards to online research is especially prevalent, as more researchers engage with participants online [2].

The willingness of others in this field to share their experiences, both their successes and challenges, researchers have already begun to generate best practice with regards to prevalent issues, such as participant recruitment methods [9]. In spite of this, published material infrequently reflects on the process researchers undertook when making ethical decisions while forming their research plan [3]. It is important that work is published on these decisions and continue to pave the way for upcoming research in this area. This is especially prevalent with the added component of insider research. Greene [10] defines insider research as "that which is conducted within a social group, organization or culture of which the researcher is also a member." Indeed, the number of insider research projects are increasing [10, 11] and increased understanding of the experience of insider research, especially in online environments, is needed. Reflexive accounts are a suitable way of exploring not only the impact of insider status, but also increasing the robustness of the research. Reflexive accounts which monitor the impact of insider status on the researcher offer the additional benefit of improving objectivity [12].

The intent of the aforementioned research project was to monitor posts in a Facebook community populated by ADF

partners. This was planned as a content analysis, which would collect and analyze posts made in the group over a short period of time, seeking examples of how partners used groups on the popular social networking platform for social support and information. Despite the stated importance of families to the ongoing activities of the ADF, research into the needs of families is limited. Quantitative surveys of the ADF community indicated that partners may be rejecting official support networks, such as the Defence Community Organisation, favoring peer support networks on social media instead [13]. In domestic and international studies, military family well-being has been linked with increased mission readiness, ongoing member retention, and even decreased symptoms of post-traumatic stress syndrome following deployment [13, 14].

In the study of military partners' online interactions, the research of High et al. [15] is one of few published works that address the online interactions of military communities. Their research analyzed 1,233 posts from an internet discussion board dedicated to US Marine families. High et al. [15] notes that permission was sought from the website administrator prior to proceeding with the collection of data from the internet discussion board, but does not mention what access was required by researchers. This research used data collected by fellow online researcher Jennings-Kelsall et al. [16], who also neglected to mention how access to the information was sought, and what considerations might have been made surrounding the ethical decision to engage in research online. Indeed, Henderson, Johnson and Auld [3] found, in an analysis of thirty published works on one aspect of social media research, few provided details of ethical considerations taken. By specifically outlining the ethical challenges encountered in online research, this reflexive account contributes to filling the gap in literature.

3 DISCUSSION

3.1 But is the Group Public or Private? Who Decides?
One of the most significant ethical challenges being debated by internet researchers is the decision to consider the research space as open or closed- that is, whether to consider the data public or private [5]. As with ethnographic studies, a strong argument can be made that data collected in a public space does not require individual consent from each participant in the study. To date, published research in online communities has frequently taken place in publicly accessible platforms such as Twitter and Reddit, where the content is open and available, even to those without a user account. By contrast, when a researcher needs to create a user account to gain access to an online community, the decision to declare the data as public or private is less obvious. While some researchers argue that the internet is rarely a private space, others identify that there are many factors which must be taken into consideration, including the community's expectation of privacy [2].

This debate is ongoing [17] and complicated, as Henderson, Johnson and Auld [3] state: "In the context of social media, it becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to ethically claim a dichotomy of private and public." Therefore, one of the most important decisions was to consider the private or public status of the community being researched. This decision was approached in the context of deciding whether or not consent was required from participants, rather than an attempt to evaluate the groups' willingness to be approached, or gauging their potential reaction to a researcher in the space. As is common in content analysis methods, the review of publicly available text often does not required consent to be obtained. The researcher, perhaps naively, assumed the online community would be as warmly accepting and open as others had been until that point. The insider status of the researcher may have played a role in giving a false sense of confidence about the groups' likely reaction to a request for research.

The community under study in this account, ADF partners interacting in a Facebook group, has a number of unique features that led to the decision to define the group, and thus the research space, as private for the purpose of consent collection. There is a gap in literature where researchers do not offer detailed justifications for their decisions in considering the research space public or private. This paper fills this gap by specifically examining decisions made.

'Groups' are a feature on the popular social networking platform. Groups facilitate discussions between users, based on their commonalities [18]. Firstly, people seeking access to the group need to be added or invited by an existing member. At the time of research, the group under study was 'Secret'. Facebook groups that are labelled as secret do not appear in search engine results, and only current members can see the group's membership list. This means that incoming members need to have been made aware of the group through their networks. New members are vetted by group administrators, to confirm their association with the ADF. This intensive validation process aims to ensure that outsiders are not included, leaving the group with a clear peer-support focus. This community is one of many similar Facebook groups that offer links to information and support for ADF partners.

In addition, from the researcher's personal participation in the group, it was clear that the group has an expectation of privacy. While group members appeared to be realistic and appreciate that true privacy within internet groups is rare, access to the group by 'outsiders', or people using the group for their own gain-for example, businesses selling items- was discouraged, or outright disallowed through restriction of membership and deletion of posts. Despite frequent reminders from group administrators about the non-private status of social media platforms, people responded negatively to instances of perceived privacy

violations. Indeed, members had past experiences where content from the group had been shared externally, which will be explored in more detail later in this paper. The openly negative responses to these instances is a clear indication that members of the group perceived it to be a private space. Kantanen and Manninen [19] demonstrate that these expectations are present in social media communities, saying "Even on public forums, people may have expectations of privacy, or find it inappropriate that their inputs are read, collected or analyzed by external parties." Steinmetz [2] proposes that the feelings of the participants about privacy are essential in considering whether or not their space is private or public; Roberts [17] agrees, listing participant perception as one important component in the process of defining the privacy of a research space. "When making an initial assessment of whether an online community is public or private, consideration needs to be given to the accessibility of the community to the general public, the perceptions of members, community statements, topic and setting sensitivity, permanence of records and intended audience," argues Roberts [17]. It was the difficulty in gaining access to, or even awareness of, the group, as well as the group's clear intention of privacy that led the researcher to consider that the group operates in the private, not public space.

The decision to consider the space as private led to the conclusion that informed consent would need to be collected from group members. In spite of making the decision that the group's privacy status deemed informed consent necessary, the researcher did not anticipate a negative response to her request to conduct research within the group. While the group had a history of negative responses to perceived privacy violations, this was not in the context of research. Having received frequent support from potential participants about the importance and value of the research topic related to ADF partners, the researcher assumed the online community would be as accepting as it had been to others thus far.

The researcher approached administrators of the group, who act as community gatekeepers. There appears to be no consensus on whether or not researchers should approach administrators prior to commencing research in an online space [5]. Social media community research academic Christine Hine [34], in one of many experiences researching in social media groups, explored her decision to approach community moderators for permission prior to contacting group members. Similarly, in the instance of ADF partners, Hine aimed to gather the endorsement of group administrators to confirm the legitimacy of the research project to group members. The researcher was also considerate of the cautious control the administrators exercised in the group, and while the researcher appreciated the administrators concerns around privacy and external use of group content, did not perceive the administrators would

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be resistant to the researcher approaching group members for their consent. Informed consent be collected from each member of the group whose content (posts) would be included in the research.

Due to the sheer data load, and considerations about how and from whom to collect consent, the collection of informed consent from participants in a social media study can be overwhelming and incredibly time-consuming [5]. This may be a factor contributing to the decision of researchers to declare a space public and therefore not collect consent from participants. Hudson and Bruckman [20] highlighted this in their study of internet discussion boards, saying that a "waiver of consent is appropriate in most cases, as obtaining consent is impractical." Kozinets [7] feels strongly about this issue and states that a project cannot claim to use methods of netnography if informed consent has not been obtained from participants. He considers that the autonomy of the group must be respected in the first instance, and actively discourages identity deception. Identity deception is where researchers pose as community members to gain access to the space and elicit responses, as was the case in Brotsky and Giles' [8] project with pro-ana online communities.

Consent in this study was intended to be collected electronically, with the researcher sending the participant an individual private message on Facebook about the research and asking for their permission to use their comments from the group, then directing the participant to an online version of the research information sheet where the participant could be given more details about the research and their involvement.

3.2 Miscommunication and Feelings of Betrayal

Following the receipt of successful low-risk ethical approvals, the researcher sent the group administrators a private message on the social media platform as planned. This message outlined the research purpose, the intent to collect posts from the group following obtaining consent from members, and then asked for the support of the administrators for these activities.

The response to this message was very negative. The group administrators were protective of the community, and the privacy of the people within it. The group administrators used words such as 'betrayed' to indicate their feelings, not just about the research project, but the researcher herself. They went on to question the researcher's status as a member of the ADF partner community, suggesting the researcher may have gained access to the group under false pretenses, and accused the researcher of possibly being a member of the media. The group administrators' responses were not anticipated by the researcher, despite the experiences of other online researchers, particularly in consideration of links between privacy, autonomy, and concepts of territory. Kozinets [7]

examines issues of territory in his analysis netnography research methods. Claims over territory have always been important to groups in society, and these territorial actions are no less important to those groups that meet in a virtual space, he argues. It is important to consider the autonomy these online communities hold, and desire to maintain. As demonstrated by the reaction of the ADF administrators, perceived breaches of territory elicited territorial responses. Though with retrospective analysis the response from administrators could have been expected, this paper will clarify why, as an insider, the researcher did not consider the possibility of response to request being so negatively opposed. This includes the impact of the researchers' inexperience with social media research, and the methodological choice of a content analysis, rather than digital ethnography.

The researcher felt a strong impact from this negative response, not just professionally, but on a personal level, having had her identify as a military partner questioned. The group administrators asked for some time to consider the researcher's requests, and the researcher agreed that time would be the best option for de-escalating the situation. After re-examining the initial message and exploring further literature on digital ethnography, the researcher could see how she had ineffectively connected with the administrators.

Kozinets [7] demonstrates the importance of language in communicating with participants, providing an example of how online researchers can neglect to adjust their speech and tone to the group that they are talking with. This example closely aligns with the experience of the researcher in this case study. Kozinets was conducting research within an online discussion board, investigating online boycotting. Similar to the message that the researcher sent to the Facebook group administrators, Kozinets presented an introductory message that affirmed his researcher status and expertise. An influential discussion board member protested his presence in the group and petitioned for other community members to also exclude him. Kozinets [7] advises that the language of the message accounts heavily for the reaction of the community; by advertising his academic credentials and using advanced vocabulary he found that: "these rhetorical moves could be interpreted negatively, as signals of presumed superiority and outsider status." Negative responses from community gatekeepers are not uncommon in social media research [17]. "When the group is highly sensitive about its membership, and when it is formed for the purpose of a specific goal, the members may resent or even reject the (researcher) and his/her dual commitment" offers Adler, P and Adler [21].

In addition, the researcher had not accounted for the group's negative history in regards to content misuse. As previously highlighted, group members had either personally experienced or heard of experiences where

content had been removed from ADF partner Facebook groups, with negative consequences. This ranged from group posts being shared with military unit command teams and subsequent disciplinary action for the member to screenshots resulting in online bullying and even media attention. An article in the *Northern Territory News* in 2013 highlighted behaviors of some ADF partners in Facebook groups and caused the closure of the particular group identified in the article [22]. This history meant that there was the increased possibility for members to associate this request for research with other incidents in the past, where information was removed from the group and damaged personal and professional relationships. In not considering the group history applicable to her request for research, the researcher started the conversation at a disadvantage. Kozinets [7], in the context of the earlier example, also acknowledged his oversight in failing to account for the history the community under study had with outsiders and research.

Kozinets [7] experience of naivety, which aligns with the researchers, is not uncommon. Annette Markham [35] recalled the experience of commencing research online. She states "We were naïve enough to think that it would be relatively straight-forward to transfer research strategies developed for studying face-to-face context online." Likewise, Hine discusses the difficulty, even for experienced researchers in "adapting the already complex and tricky process of conducting ethnography" with computer-mediated communication" [34]. Markham [35] believes that continual discussion of the explicit challenges, issues and solutions in reflexive accounts such as this one, are essential for moving forward.

The original message sent by the researcher to group administrators also neglected to clearly identify the researcher's identity as a military partner. In highlighting the researcher status, the researcher minimized rather than utilized her insider status [11]. This demonstrated to the group administrators that she was indeed an outsider, made that way by her connection to a more privileged status, that of university researcher [23]. This was especially unhelpful considering the researcher had considered her insider status as key to gaining permission to conduct research. In a later message to the group administrators, the researcher clarified her background, family situation and the work her partner did in the military prior to discussing her research. This message was very well received, leading to the eventual repairing of the relationship. Though the social media analysis did not eventuate, the group administrators became supporters of the wider research project, which also included qualitative interviewing. This further confirmed it was the researcher's insider status which engaged participants.

3.3 Researcher Risk: Social Isolation

The negative reaction from the community administrators caused the researcher to closely reassess the decision to undertake research in the group.

When the negative responses were received from the group administrators, one immediate cause for concern for the researcher was that she would be removed from the group. This would mean removal from a community that is a personal resource, both socially and informationally. This fear is not unfounded. Hudson and Bruckman [20] were removed from 63.3% of the internet chatrooms they attempted to conduct research in when their status as researchers was revealed. This action would also have a sustained impact on personal reputation. Likewise, this was a consideration for Hine [34], who understood that a negative reaction from group members could be damaging to her future research prospects, and professional reputation. The ADF partner network is a small, closed community. The partners in these online groups are also active throughout the wider community, and accordingly the researcher risked isolation not just from online but also offline networks. The online space is no longer separate to the offline one [24]. The two worlds frequently shift and move between, and a person can feel equally invested in a virtual community, with the associated risks, as a traditional, geographically based one [25]. Particularly, online communities are places where the distinction between roles of researcher and participant, insider and outsider distort [26].

Researcher risk is a topic not frequently discussed in relation to social media research. It may be easy to dismiss social media research as not dangerous, especially compared to the physical danger some researchers face when undertaking fieldwork. It would seem that, comparing a researcher interacting with participants via a computer screen seems inherently less risky than a researcher conducting face-to-face fieldwork. Until recently, risk to the researcher was a concept limited to physical danger. Lee-Treweek and Linkogle [27] developed a four area framework for understanding risk to the researcher. Their framework argues that researcher risk includes four components; physical, emotional, ethical and professional. These aspects of researcher risk have been demonstrated by others in the field. One example of this is the work of Letherby [28], who wrote a comprehensive exploration of emotional work that can be faced by researchers. Her work, which was in relation to insider researchers interviewing women on involuntary childlessness, reflects on the difficulty faced by those engaged in research on emotionally charged topics.

The researchers' work within the ADF partner community was, by previous definitions, safe. While the researcher met with participants face-to-face to undertake semi-structured interviews and focus groups, precautions were taken to assure the researcher's physical safety. The classification of this research as low risk led to the decision to apply for a low-risk ethics application, which was

approved by two relevant ethical boards. The experience of the researcher engaging in online research provides an apt demonstration of how research projects that are initially considered to be low risk can still present a risk to the researcher. In this instance, the researcher faced professional risk, and additionally a type of emotional risk, social isolation.

In addition, the topic of the research was not considered sensitive or risky. Where researchers who engage in research on controversial or sensitive topics may prepare themselves for resistance, when the topic is not flagged as sensitive, there is no preparation for a negative reaction. A report establishing the best practice norms for researchers engaged in "risky research" provides advice to universities and researchers on how to respond to online harassment [36]. This report opens by stating that these recommendations are "practices for researchers engaged in risky research." The examples given in this report focus on more traditional understandings of risky projects and sensitive topics. The experience of the researcher in this reflexive account suggests that concepts of risk can be more nuanced and complex than they first appear.

The human need for community and the benefits of strong community connection have been well established. While studies on ADF partners are limited, existing research on military partners in both Australia and overseas demonstrates a clear link between connections with a strong community or support network, and the partner's wellbeing [29-32]. Additionally, recent surveys of the ADF family community indicate that community is being built online, both complimenting and replacing offline community links [13]. From the commencement of the research, the researcher had already begun to withdraw from the group. This trend towards withdrawal has been noted by other insider researchers, who found that researchers who are insiders tend to withdraw from the group in order assert their new researcher status, while outsiders tend to immerse into the group and distance themselves from their identity as a researcher [21]. The researcher noted that in the days following the decision to not pursue the social media analysis, the researcher began commenting on posts in the group again for the first time in months, responding to one group survey about military orders, and a second response providing local resource suggestions. Following these posts, the researcher noted in a fieldwork diary how the decision to not proceed with the social media analysis may be linked to her personal re-engagement in the community.

While researcher risk, specifically social isolation, was the primary reason for the withdrawal from the social media analysis following the negative reaction of group administrators, other factors contributed. These factors include the impact on the community and the protection of participant identity. The presence of a researcher knowingly collecting data from the group would have had an impact on the group, in part due to the group's negative association with outsiders and content removal, as was detailed above. The potential risk to participants was also carefully considered. The researchers considered the possibility of participants being identified, social media research carries with it an increased responsibility to protect the identities of participants due to the unique dynamic of social media sites [4]. In addition, it is worthwhile to consider the researcher's presence in the community could also betray the anonymity of the group, as Facebook allows for friends and others to search for groups that a person is a part of [33]. Consideration was also given to the researcher's desire not to alienate community gatekeepers in order to do future research in the community.

Ultimately, the decision was made not to engage in research directly within the group. The researcher's involvement in the group undoubtedly informed the wider research project, in assisting with the formation of research questions, the generation of interview questions, and later identifying themes from the data. Cote [33] also reflected on the indirect impact of social media on her research, stating that "data collected while conducting interviews are suddenly contextualized or challenged by reading a participant's latest Facebook posts."

3.4 Consequences of Methodology

In reflexively evaluating the decisions and outcomes associated with the social media analysis, the researcher became aware of the influence of the chosen methodology. The researcher approached the social media analysis as a content analysis, rather than a digital ethnography. In hindsight, a digital ethnography approach would have been a more appropriate methodological choice for framing the collection of data from the social media group.

The research was influenced by this as literature related to online content analysis generates different discussions and holds different norms than digital ethnography. This difference is evident firstly in the way that online content analysis tends to consider the data text, rather than human interaction. If the researcher had identified the methodology as a digital ethnography, the ethical review board may have applied their understanding of traditional ethnography, which alludes to challenges being present. A digital ethnography methodology may have prompted a search into ethnography, as opposed to online content analysis, which may have have led the researcher to literature by Rheingold, Hine and Pink [38, 34, 37]. Hine's 2015 experience in researching "Freecycle" social media communities would have been particularly helpful to the researcher.

This is an important finding, as more researchers from a wider variety of fields are attracted by the richness of the data on offer and engage in social media research.

4 CONCLUSIONS

In summary, the decision to remove the social media analysis from the research methodology did not have a negative impact on the outcomes of the research; the supporting methods of qualitative interviewing proved to be sufficient in providing robust findings. While challenging at the time, this experience has provided the researcher with rich insight to issues impacting social media, trust and online community.

This paper has provided a background into netnography and social media research methods. The paper also highlights that researchers neglecting to publish their experiences with planning and ethical components of social media research as a gap in the literature. This paper also contributes to discussions on what constitutes public and private spaces online by providing an example of a space where members demand privacy and are exclusive towards outsiders. These attitudes indicate to researchers that they should also consider those spaces private, and carry out their research accordingly. This paper is also unique, as unlike more prevalent research projects of open social media platforms such as Twitter or Reddit, the online space being research could not arguably be considered public, which complicated issues of consent and access.

This paper also discusses researcher risk, using Lee-Treweek and Linkogle [27]'s four-part framework for understanding risks beyond the immediate physical. Ethical committees and researchers alike are perhaps ill-equipped for assessing the risks faced by online researchers as they engage people on modern communication platforms.

In providing a reflexive account, this paper has detailed the experience of one researcher who attempted to collect informed consent from the community under study. Aligning with Kozinets [7] theories on online territorial behavior, the community gatekeepers (Facebook group administrators) responded by, demonstrating their feelings of protectiveness towards the online space where members operated. The administrators questioned the right of the researcher to be engaged in the space, primarily as a researcher, but then secondarily as a person, doubting her status as a military partner. The researcher's following reflection on the experience demonstrates that researchers need to be considerate of their tone and language when engaging with potential participants on social media platforms. This is of particular importance for insider researchers, who have the unique challenge of balancing their dual identities.

More research is needed regarding supporting social media researchers, especially those engaged in insider research. This paper aims to contribute to this important discussion by sharing one example of a situation in which social media research presented a unique challenge, and perceived risk to the researcher.

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Appendix I Peer Reviewed Publication

Introduction

Less than three months after I officially became a 'military spouse', we received new orders and were moved to a new home, in a new state, where I did not know a single person. Thankfully, an innovative military spouse in a similar situation decided to take matters into her own hands and created an online Facebook group for women who were both new to the area and the Australian Defence Force (ADF) in general. This small online group created a community of new recruit's wives who were experiencing social isolation, and in doing so provided the starting point for friendships that continue to this day, both online and offline. This Facebook group is one of many that connect ADF partners and spouses together, and from my involvement in that first group, I am currently a member in over 15 Facebook groups that connect people based on their shared experience of being the spouse or partner of an Australian Defence Force member. The role social media plays in the lives of military spouses is significant, and the ADF appears to be unsure about how to interact with these online communities, over whom they have limited control. This is my 'backyard' (Taylor, 2011), the space in which my research plan was developed.

At the time of writing, ethical clearance was being obtained for the data gathering phase of my PhD research project, which investigates social media use by ADF spouses and partners. In preparing the ethics application, a question was raised: as an insider in a closed community, the potential for research participants with whom I have an existing relationship is highly likely. Should I utilise these connections by placing friends into focus groups? Seeing both the advantages and disadvantages, and finding limited guidance in literature, it was decided to explore the concept of friends in focus groups through this chapter.

This chapter will provide a background to insider research and friendship, along with a background to research within the military community. Following this, the chapter will explore the advantages and disadvantages of the use of friends in focus groups. I present the argument that in this study, the use of friends in focus groups is not ideal and submits the research and the researcher to unacceptable disadvantages. I also argue that while friends should not participate in focus groups, they still have an important role to play in the research process.

Insider Research and Friendship

It is worthwhile to explore the distinction between an insider and a deep or "intimate" insider in the context of my study. Dr Jodie Taylor is a research fellow at the Queensland Conservatorium research centre and wrote on her experience of friendship and insider status in ethnography. Taylor (2011, p. 5) defines insiders who have pre-existing friendships, both close and causal, with those inside the field as "intimate insiders". She discriminates the difference between "intimate insiders" from other insider researchers on the basis that intimate insiders are deeply embedded in the community on an ongoing basis beyond the research period, and that because of this involvement, 'the researcher is privy to undocumented historical knowledge of the people and the culture'. Insider researchers have to consider the fact their pre-existing relationships with those inside the field will influence and shape their work. Dwyer and Buckle (2009, p. 71) go on to enhance Taylor's definition by offering a description of a 'deep insider', which they consider is someone who has been a member of the group under study for five or more years. While my involvement in the ADF spouse community is less than this, at a little more than three years at time of writing, it is worth considering how the inherent migratory nature of military life may accelerate the depth of the community connection, and the friendships created within. The importance and positive influence of friends in the lives of military spouses has been explored in literature (Wang, Nyutu, Tran, & Spears, 2015). Since insider research is becoming more frequent (Greene, 2014; Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013), greater numbers of researchers will need to consider the issue of friendship in fieldwork. Shared experiences between the researcher and the "friend-participant", a term coined by Taylor (2011, p. 5), has an impact on the relationship. I adopt Taylor's definition of "friend-participant" for this chapter to identify when I am specifically discussing the potential focus group participant who is also a friend.

Research in the military community

To date, the majority of research collected on families of Australian Defence Force members has been performed by someone with an established connection to the ADF community, but who did not acknowledge themselves as insider researchers. Research about the ADF is customarily quantitative, with few exceptions. Research specifically focused on

ADF families is limited. Dr Phillip Siebler, whose PhD thesis was on the experiences of the families of deployed Australian peacekeepers, produced one of the few significant qualitative research projects on ADF families (Siebler, 2009). Sibeler situated his research within his experience and perspective as a social worker with the Defence Community Organisation. Other qualitative research on the topic of the ADF community has been conducted by physiologists and chaplains with no declared deep insider link (Atkins, 2009; Orme & Kehoe, 2011). In the United States (US), Masters student Rea engaged in research into social media use by military couples as a deep insider in the military community, being a spouse of a US Armed Forces member. Her qualitative study, which consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews, used a convenience sampling method. Participants were recruited through a Family Readiness Group leader, which are local military support groups run by spouses, as well as through her own social network (Rea, Behnke, Huff, & Allen, 2015). Rea did not identify which participants were known to her prior to the interviews, and did not account for any influence that friendship may have had on her outcomes, though she did acknowledge the results received in the research reflected her personal opinions.

Introduction to Focus Groups as a Qualitative Research Method

Focus groups are at their core about communication and interaction. Unlike other research methods, such as participant observation, focus groups do not aim to capture interactions as they would happen naturally, but instead create robust group discussion. This group discussion is concentrated into a single time frame (Morgan, 1998a). Focus groups are an effective research method in experiences where deeper understanding of an issue is sought, as is the case in my research. Achieving these objectives is highly dependent on the skill and experience of the moderator in handling the group. Morgan (1998a, p. 53) argues that the quality of the data that results from focus groups is directly related to the skill and ability of the moderator. I plan to moderate the focus groups with spouses. While I have no direct experience in moderating focus groups, I have attended several professionally run groups in the past, which allows me valuable understanding of how focus groups should be conducted (Krueger, 1998b). In addition, I will undertake formal focus group facilitator training prior to moderating the groups. The researcher performing dual roles of moderator and lead researcher is common in academic focus groups (Morgan, 1998b). There are mixed opinions on whether the best

moderator is one whom is deeply engaged with the topic materials and who knows the history and norms of the group, or if the ideal moderator is someone who is unfamiliar to the setting and thus able to ask more probing questions, which is an argument that takes place across insider research more broadly (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). While literature neglects to explore the issue of focus group moderators having social connections with participants, it is standard to accept that participants may know each other prior to the group. In fact, due to the size of the community in each area where the focus group is being held, this is highly likely in my focus groups. This is not necessarily a disadvantage (Krueger & Casey, 2015). An effective moderator is aware of the possibility of existing relationships between participants, and pays particular attention during the focus group to ensure that they are not being exclusive of other participants or having any other negative impact on the group dynamic.

My study adopts a triangulated approach with several different data collection methods. Critical to this chapter, there will be four focus groups with ADF spouses. There will be approximately 8 participants in each group, and each group will last approximately 2 hours, which is the time and size most frequently recommended in literature on focus group design (Krueger & Casey, 2015). The sampling method for the finding of participants will be non-random, purposive sampling. The focus group locations were selected due to their relative similarity, both in size and significance to the Australian Defence Force. Three of the locations share issues of geographical isolation, high operational tempo and reduced employment options for spouses. The fourth location is in a major metropolitan area, which relieves some of the pressures faced by spouses living in the other areas, and in doing so serves to provide balance to the extremities of the other groups.

Advantages of Friends in Focus Groups

The inclusion of friend-participants in group interviews provides some clear advantages to my project, especially in regards to lifting the time intensive burden of recruitment. People who are invited to focus groups by people they know and respect are more likely to attend the focus group (Krueger & Casey, 2015). It is difficult to not take advantage of this enhanced willingness, especially in my case where there is also significant travel cost in conducting the focus groups. This use of insider status to make contact with participants is

termed by Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2013, p. 252) as 'utilizing' the insider status. While other incentives are being considered to entice participants, including the use of a monetary incentive, having friends who are emotionally invested in the decision to participate in the focus group is an appealing factor in the consideration to include friends in the focus group.

Further, friends are more likely to be able to identify body language cues. In Taylor's experience in holding face to face interviews, being able to use her previous history to identify when a friend-participant was feeling uncomfortable, perhaps telling a false-truth, or withholding information, was a significant benefit. Taylor (2011, p. 6) noted that while the data received from non-friend participants was still useful, it wasn't to the same volume and depth as that which was gathered from friend-participants. This same benefit would apply in a focus group setting, where the moderator would be able to identify body language cues from friend-participants, including knowing when to prompt for further information. Although the topic of study isn't sensitive and it is expected that participants will be fairly forthcoming with opinions and enter freely into discussion, people in group situations can still be slow to warm to a group discussion. While a skilled moderator would create a relaxing environment which encourages the full participation of participants, the inclusion of friends in the group may hasten this settling in process. Having a prior knowledge of the friend-participants personality may provide an additional benefit in allowing the moderator to prepare. Krueger (1998b, p. 59) encourages moderators to spend time in identifying who is likely to be dominant and reluctant speakers in the focus group to enhance the discussion and avoid conflict in the group, with friend-participants this would be simpler. It is also worthwhile to consider that friend-participants may be more ready talkers overall, in that friends feel comfortable both agreeing and disagreeing on topics. This means that friend-participants may be more readily forthcoming with opinions, even if those opinions are at contrast with the rest of the group, which is desirable in a focus group.

Disadvantages of Friends in Focus Groups

In establishing a welcoming, comfortable environment where participants feel free to share views and opinions on the topic at hand, which is the ultimate goal of focus groups, the moderator needs to maintain neutrality amongst the focus group participants. Managing the

composition of the focus group is key to its success (Morgan, 1998b). Moderators are warned that when one participant may consider another participant to hold a claim to a more expert opinion or higher social status, as may be the case with military spouses on the issue of their partners rank, the participant may be less forthcoming with their own opinions and experiences, considering it less valuable than that of the other participant (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This can be a challenge for focus group moderators, who understand that all opinions are as valid as each other, and needs to create an environment where all participants feel able to share. Creating an open and comfortable environment starts from the commencement of the focus group, where the participants are arriving and already collecting cues about the focus group, their fellow participants and the moderator. An indication that the moderator has friends within the group may have a negative impact. Participants may identify the easier and more relaxed dialogue shared between the moderator and the friend-participant. This may be subtle, in the way that friends have a more relaxed body language with each other and others may subconsciously pick up on this (Edwards, 2002). Any messages that may indicate the moderators agreement with one opinion or idea may inhibit the willingness of others to contribute to the group discussion or may cause them to be defensive of their ideas in ways that may not be accurate to their position on the issue, having an impact on analysis.

The structure of focus groups demands minimal interaction between the moderator and the participants, the role of the moderator is to keep the conversation relevant and flowing. The intent of the focus group is for participants to interact with each other to explore the questions and issues posed by the moderator. Focus groups differ in this way to other interview methods, where direct interviewee/interviewer interaction is ideal. Similar to the situation where friends within the group revert to interacting directly with each other, rather than the wider group, the situation of the moderator and the friend-participant interacting with each other needs to be avoided (Krueger, 1998b). The friend-participant may naturally tend to address the moderator, rather than the wider group, as they are used to doing in their role as friends. This would have a negative impact on the dynamic of the focus group. Friend-participants may also use shared experiences with the moderator to confirm or highlight their argument. This exclusive dialogue alienates other participants and is unhelpful in analysis.

The inclusion of friend-participants in the focus group research is a concern in regards to validity, and the concern that my research may be dismissed as biased or anecdotal. Greene (2014, p. 4) confirms that insider researcher is frequently 'accused of being inherently biased'. The inclusion of friends as participants may strengthen this claim by others that the research

does not conform to standards of high objective rigor due to the 'personal stake and substantiative emotional investment' in the research (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). This is especially true for those readers who hold true to a scientific ontology, where the researcher is considered to be distinctly separate from the research. Researchers who subscriber to this ontology consider that the need for separation extends to the researcher's social network (Blake, 2007). While insider researchers are already challenged to be aware of their own bias, when that opinion is also shared by members of the focus group they may have even more difficulty in analysing and adopting conflicting views in the research (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Those who have engaged in insider research with friends acknowledge the potential for data distortion and lack of objectivity with the inclusion of friend-participants. Taylor (2011, p. 9) notes that "insiderness coupled with intimate knowledge and an emotional attachment to one's informant's makes objectivity incredibly difficult and leaves very little room for analytic distance" . Some of this is due to the fact that friends are more likely to share opinions and values (Taylor, 2011). This appears to have been a fact in Rea's research outcomes as discussed earlier, where her personal opinion was reflected in the research results, which may have been the consequence of her decision to include friend-participants (Rea et al., 2015).

As Taylor (2011, p. 9) found in her deep insider research in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer community, I wonder if I have shared too much detail with friends about my research plan, and have to consider the level to which these previous discussions may impact on my friend's knowledge of the subject. These friends may hold information regarding the topic they might not have known prior to discussions with me about my research. Morgan (1998b, p. 97) cautions researchers of the dangers of 'over-scripting' focus group participants. These friend-participants may bring this new knowledge into the focus groups, or they might bring up topics in the focus group that they know I hold an interest in, despite the fact they might not have done this naturally. Despite the early stages of my research project, this event occurred recently at a social outing where, upon a discussion arising about a local Facebook group, a friend shared the details of my research project, along with views about social media use by ADF spouses and members that reflects a discussion the friend and I had held a few days earlier.

A final disadvantage in the inclusion of friend-participants relates to maintaining confidentiality and privacy. Friend-participants may have difficulty understanding that I, in my role as the moderator, will not be able to discuss the focus group afterwards as we may have if we had been involved in the group discussion informally in my role as friend. Any discussion

arises afterwards can have an impact not just on confidentiality but on analysis. While declining to discuss the focus group afterwards protects confidentiality and the analsyis stage of the research, it risks offending or alienating the friend. Issues of confidentiality are shared by many insider researchers (Kerstetter, 2012). While few focus groups are truly anonymous (Morgan, 1998a), the protection of the participant's identity is just as important in focus group research as it is in other qualitative methods. The use of friend-participants limits confidentiality, especially in this situation where the participants have extensive connections through the small ADF community (Morgan, 1998a).

Discussion and Conclusion

Having explored the positive and negative outcomes of the use of friends as participants in focus groups, I present the argument that the benefits of friend-participants, including the ease of recruitment, does not outweigh the more significant disadvantages. This does not mean that friends cannot play an important and influential role in the focus groups. I propose using friends to suggest and recruit others, who are similar to themselves. Friends would recommend others who would be suitable for the focus groups, and provide contact details and an introduction to make recruiting smoother. As mentioned earlier, participants who are invited to focus groups by people they know and respect are more likely to attend the group (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Morgan (1998b, p. 89) terms this as the 'referral' method of obtaining participants, and argues it is often the best method of sourcing participants, especially because it considerably reduces the time spent on recruitment. This is a valuable role, which allows friends to be engaged in my research, which is a positive association for them, without potential negative impacts. Referrals are still screened for suitability according to the requirements of the research, in my case, the screening confirms that participants are spouses or partners of ADF members.

A second way that friends could be used for the benefit of the research is in testing focus group questions. Krueger (1998a, p. 16) recommends testing focus group questions with people who are similar to the planned participants, perhaps by inviting them for a coffee. The intention is that the friends give their impression of what the question means, and it is a chance for the researcher to identify before the focus groups any questions that are ambiguous,

misleading, or result in answers that do not meet the needs of the research. Being an insider in the community being researched makes this very simple, and I see many friends being enthusiastic about being asked to be involved in my research in this way. Friends, being more invested and emotionally connected, would be prepared to give detailed feedback about the questions.

Researchers who use friends in fieldwork must consider the ethical impact of their choice. Literature on inside researchers attributes insider status with resulting in an increased comfort level, so participants share information more willingly- this would be increased with friends (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Taylor (2011, p. 9) cautions insider researchers to be aware of the onus they hold for their friends 'Knowing when to not overstep the line between friend and researcher is a vital skill that the intimate insider must develop'. In the relationship between researcher and friend-participant relationship there is a power difference, unlike that of the friend-friend relationship, and the researcher needs to be conscious of this power difference (Taylor, 2011). While friend-participants may give consent, the researcher needs to be aware of their feelings and the value of their trust by establishing valid and robust ethical standards, which protect both the researcher and the friend-participant from future harm or discomfort. Over-disclosure is an issue in focus groups, moderators need to be cautious of personal and ethical boundaries that can be approached when people feel comfortable and turn the friendliness and open nature of the focus group into an almost cathartic opportunity to release their feelings on topics (Morgan, 1998b).

The trust developed in the friendship may be impacted on in the focus group, especially if the friend feels as though something they disclosed in the focus group has been falsely represented, whether this feeling is real or perceived (Kirsch, 2005; R. Labaree, 2002). Feminist researcher Whitaker encountered a situation where her friendship suffered because she, as the researcher, confused her friend and researcher roles (Whitaker, 2011). The suggestion of inside researcher literature warns making clear the distinction between friends and informant-researcher (R. V. Labaree, 2002). The format of focus groups aids the researcher in this regard, in that they have a clear start and end time, are often one time only, and the signing of consent prior to starting the group cues the friend-participant that this situation is different to normal interactions as friends. Interacting in a location different from where the friends would normally connect socially is helpful also. Focus groups naturally provide a boundary between the researcher and the friend, which helps in the management of expectations, confidentiality and trust (Kirsch, 2005). In addition, Greene (2014, p. 8)

recommends adopting safeguards throughout the research, keeping a methodological log in which any data gathering techniques or involvement with participants is recorded. One recommended strategy of balancing disadvantages of insider researcher status is to engage in frequent reflection with peers, of which this chapter forms part (Costley, 2010). As with everything, the suggestions to overcome any kind of potential bias is professionalism, an ability to be open and honest, and a focus on the protection and comfort of the research participants (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009).

Finally, others would argue that the disadvantages of friends in focus groups could be overcome with the use of an alternate moderator. In this study, the use of an alternate moderator is not ideal. Morgan (1998a, p. 48) argues that a moderator with a strong connection to the community can be a better choice than one with professional training. It would be a disadvantage of my study to lose the benefit of my insider research status in order to use friend-participants or gain additional objectivity. Further to this, the military family research community is very limited, and it would be difficult to find someone with both the background knowledge of the topic and the required skills to host the focus groups. In addition, arguably the purpose of a PhD program is to enhance and train research skills. The focus groups provide dual functions in not only collecting data for this project, but in training me for future qualitative research.

This chapter provided a background to insider research and friendship, along with a background to research within the military community. Following this, the chapter explored the advantages and disadvantages of the use of friends in focus groups. The advantages of including friends in focus groups includes having more willing and ready participants for the group, which lifts the time intensive burden of recruitment. In addition, as has been the experience of people holding interviews with friend-participants, the use of friends in focus groups may aid in being able to respond to body language cues and create a more relaxed and open focus group environment. Despite these advantages, I presented the argument that in this circumstance, and other circumstances where focus groups are used in an insider research project, the use of friend-participants is not ideal and subjects the research and the researcher to unacceptable disadvantages. I argue that friends should not be included in a focus group where an intimate insider relationship exists between the moderator and the participants, however researchers should utilize their friendships to benefit their research in other ways. I suggest that researchers can use their friendship networks to source non-friend participants, by asking friends to refer others like themselves, not already known to the researcher moderator.

This referral system allows the researcher to access the rich accessibility benefits afforded to insider researchers, while not encountering the difficulties faced by the inclusion of friends in the group. Focus groups are a rich qualitative research method, which provides deep understanding and data for researchers. With careful planning and consideration, focus groups pair well with insider research, due to the increased ease of obtaining participants and background information on the community that results in more effective focus group discussions.

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Appendix J Peer Reviewed Publication

"Use your common sense, don't be an idiot" : Social Media Security Attitudes Amongst Partners of Australian Defence Force Personnel

> *"The Facebook groups for me, when [my partner] was in basic training was a lifesaver. It was like every question I ever wanted to know was there"* (23 year old, Army partner).

Introduction

Partners of Australian Defence Force (ADF) members have increasingly been turning to social media platforms, such as Facebook, for information and support. These groups offer the opportunity to connect with other partners in similar situations, exchange information, make friends and receive support. However, the interactions of ADF partners on Facebook present unique security concerns. This paper discusses the attitudes and behaviours of ADF partners towards social media security, as researched in a recent study. International military organisations, including the US Armed Forces, have attempted to offset the risks arising from the use of social media by developing appropriate policies directly aimed at military families, offering suggestions to keep both the member and their family safe. As yet, the ADF has no such policies or consistent messaging to families about online security. This paper investigates sources of social media education and found in the absence of official advice, the predominant source of information is other ADF partners and concepts of common sense. ADF partners take social media security seriously and this research demonstrates how they already consider themselves security aware. They indicated awareness of instances where ADF members do not display appropriate levels of social media security. ADF partners are resistant to suggestions that further instruction is needed and participants indicated they would not accept restrictions on their social media activity. Importantly, partners want to avoid actions that compromise the safety of ADF member and their mission. In addition, partners are confused by the increasingly visible social media presence of the ADF. In closing, this paper offers recommendations to the ADF for how it can better engage ADF family networks on cyber and operational security, with a particular focus on social media.

Background

The use of social media provides numerous benefits to military families, including social support and information gathering. However there are concerns related to cyber, operational and personal security which must be taken into consideration by the ADF.[1][2][3][4] As one US military family support network stated, "Today's military families and spouses are kept far more informed about troop movements, unit locations, unit activities and more than in years past, but have less training on how to maintain Operational Security".[5] Private Facebook groups, created to facilitate discussion between ADF partners, as well as individual social media pages more broadly, are forums where potentially sensitive information is shared. It can relate to operational security (OPSEC), such as information about deployment locations and dates, or personal security (PERSEC), such as the sharing of home addresses. In addition, frequent changes to privacy settings by social media platforms make it difficult for users to maintain control of their online content.[6]

The ADF currently has no resources specifically targeted to families regarding safe social media use. One isolated article written for Defence families mentioned the importance of maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC but lacked detail on specific measures families can follow to maintain security.[7] The approach taken by the ADF appears to focus on training the serving member in social media safety, and then placing the onus on the member to share this information with his or her family. This is a complex issue for the ADF, where its members are required to submit to Defence policy regarding media interaction, but their family members are not, and yet have an increasing array of platforms in which to share their views.[8] Patterson, as author of a review into the ADF's social media presence, highlighted the need

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[8] Kate Ames, "Citizen Journalism', the Military and the Media', *Australian Defence Force Journal*, no. 193 (2014), pp. 20-25.

for resources targeted to families.[9] Patterson also considered the US example, and illustrated how the US Department of Defense, using a concept of values-based education which may be successful in an Australian context, engages military families by using "pride and security as primary drivers to inspire families to follow the values and guidelines of OPSEC, rather than a strict set of rules, which would require significant resources to monitor, and be challenging to enforce".[10]

The US Department of Defense, as well as associated military support networks, have created a wide variety of social media support and information resources.[11] These resources overwhelmingly support the military family, including the enlisted member, to be active and engaged on social media networks. They provide practical and specific advice in regards to maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC. This includes cautioning against sharing important dates, and explains modern technology, such as geotagging, which may unknowingly share sensitive information. This contrasts to the experience of military families in Australia where despite changes to social media policy which are more accepting of members interacting online, a sentiment of being vigilant remains. Concerns over the security of social media data has resulted in claims that ADF members and their families should not maintain any social media presence[12], however as normalisation of social media use increases, the practicality of restricting members and families entirely appears unfeasible.

There are currently a wide number of private Facebook groups populated by ADF partners. 'Groups' are a popular feature on the social networking platform which facilitate discussion between users based on their shared interests.[13] ADF partner groups are commonly created and managed by partners, who carefully screen new members to confirm their association with the ADF community. While some groups have a particular topic focus, such as partner employment or housing, others are more general.

Method

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[9] G. Patterson, *Review of Social Media and Defence*, Department of Defence, Australia (2011).

[10] Ibid., p. 87

[11] M. Sherman, M. Kuhl, L. Westerhof, A. Majerle, O. Cheatum, B. Smith, K. Hawkey, J. Rudi, D. Steinham and L. Borden, *Social Media Communication with Military Spouses*, report submitted to US Department of Defense, 2015, <
www.reachmilitaryfamilies.umn.edu/sites/default/files/rdoc/Social%20Media%20Communication%20with%20 Military%20Spouses.pdf >

[12] M. Mannheim, "Public Servants should get off social media': warning after Islamic State hack, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 August 2015, online.

[13] N. Park, KF. Kee and S Valenzuela, 'Being Immersed in Social Networking Environment: Facebook Groups, Uses and Gratifications', *CyberPsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, vol. 12, no. 6 (2009).

Participants in the aforementioned research study were partners of currently serving or recently discharged ADF members. Individual, semi-structured interviews and focus groups collected the insights of 35 partners across Australia. Participants were asked to share their opinions of security on social media and also to respond to comments made in the media in relation to ADF members and their families not being permitted to have social media profiles during the member's time of service.[14] Participants primarily related their comments to the social media platform Facebook, and included interactions in private groups as well as their use of the site more generally, such as private messaging. This supports previous studies which indicated that ADF partners predominantly use Facebook for interacting with others in the defence community[15]. These comments were collated and thematically analysed using NVivo software. The results presented in this paper form part of the lead authors Ph.D. thesis, which investigates social media use by ADF partners.

Sources of security information

> "I don't think I've ever seen a communication from Defence about social media" (Age Undisclosed, Army partner).

Currently, ADF members are provided with security briefings about social media as part of their annual mandatory awareness training. In an assessment of this training, the report by Patterson suggested there is a "lack of training and an overt reliance on terms such as 'common sense'".[16] Patterson suggests this leads to misunderstandings on how members should interact online. The expectation appears to be that following this training the ADF member will then communication what they have learnt to their partners and family members. Despite the importance of families maintaining OPSEC and PERSEC, there are no consistent messages from the ADF directly to partners. Participants in this study indicated they had not received any information from Defence regarding social media security, though in some locations, participants reported social media advice and training is provided to units families at family days and pre-deployment briefings. These briefings are unit specific, and participants who have previously attended a briefing noted finding them generally helpful.

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[14] M. Mannheim, ''Public Servants should get off social media': warning after Islamic State hack', online.
[15] Atkins, S 2009, A Picture of Australian Defence Force Families 2009: Results from the first survey of Australian Defence Force families, no. DSPPR Report 31/2009, viewed 29 July 2015, http://www.defence.gov.au/dco/documents/ADF_Families_Survey_2009_General_Report.pdf.
[16] G. Patterson, *Review of Social Media and Defence*.

Despite this, there is no regular program of pre or post deployment briefings across the ADF, with a larger number of participants reporting they had never attended, or been given the opportunity to attend, such an event.

Participants revealed the communication pathway from individual members to their partners is often fractured. Participants in focus groups stated their partner did not reliably pass on messages from the unit, even when those messages directly impacted the partner, such as community meetings and DCO events. Few participants said their partners were good communicators, and only one participant said she talked directly with her partner about social media behaviour.

> *"We kind of talk about it. He's told me what's appropriate and what's not, because he's done the media course in the Defence. So we know what to do"* (34, Navy partner).

This suggests the current model of social media education for partners, which is delivery via the member, is ineffective. Consequently, because partners are not receiving messages about social media security from either the ADF or the member, partners seek out advice from other sources. Participants reported receiving information about social media security from their workplace and from friends. Participants also made their own assumptions, including adopting social media policies written for ADF members, as well as using 'common sense' when figuring out what to do.

> *"If defence are sending out a memo asking the media to be respectful to OPSEC, naturally that applies to all of us as well"* (Age Undisclosed, Army)

> *"You know, use your common sense, don't be an idiot. Pretty much. We know what we can and can't write. We are lucky to be in a position where we could write something that we probably shouldn't have"* (38, Army partner)

Participants in both interviews and focus groups identified ADF partner Facebook groups as a source of information on social media security.

> *"Most of the information I get about what you can and can't post on social media, I get from the Defence wives Facebook pages"* (23, Army partner)

In the absence of official advice, the ADF partner Facebook groups are self- moderating, although the administrators of groups said considered it their responsibility to maintain

OPSEC, and discussed sending out messages to partners who put sensitive information on group pages.

> "We will delete and then send them a message saying OPSEC. I understand you can do whatever you like [in some groups], but in our group, it's not allowed" (38, Army partner).

Security Awareness and Social Media Training

ADF partners take online security seriously. Participants discussed being careful with what they post online, and they consider themselves to be 'security aware'. Participants were aware they couldn't share specific homecoming dates, and felt confident their profiles were restricted, giving them control of their content.

> "I'm quite careful with what groups I go into and what I put up there. I'm notorious for deleting old Facebook posts and old posts and things. So I do keep my privacy quite restricted and I will go through periodically every now and then and delete old stuff" (34, Navy partner)

> "A lot of us went through our pages and checked and made sure it was locked down. And most of us aren't so stupid that we overtly say, 'My husband is in Afghanistan at (location) compound', we say, 'My husband has been deployed' (42, Air Force partner)

One participant explained how she used a combination of common sense and prior knowledge to ensure her activities on social media didn't cause security concerns.

> "So we are fairly savvy, I'm not the one who sits at home and says 'Oh, my husband is going away for six months, Oh when does he leave? Oh, he leaves on the sixteenth of January on this flight? Oh, where is he going? Oh, he's going to here?'. No, that's not me. I'm smarter than that. I've been schooled in the way of how things work" (42, Air Force partner)

While participants spoke positively about the prospect of social media training delivered by ADF representatives, the detailed analysis of comments revealed partner attitudes relating to social media security would influence the successful implantation of social media training. Participants contended they were confident social media users who successfully manage their

online activity in consideration of OPSEC principles. Participants who were active online were supportive of the concept of training, but typically said they would not attend themselves, believing they have a sufficient understanding of social media security. This understanding appears to be built from a combination of information from various unofficial sources, as well as common sense. This was demonstrated directly by the comments of one interview participant who identified she did not feel she had any need for instruction, but understands other partners might.

> *"I think it would probably be good. Like personally, I don't have any issues, I just use common sense, but some people don't seem to have (common sense)" (34, Navy partner).*

Social media restrictions for partners

Participants were asked to comment on whether they would be receptive to requests from the ADF to close their social media profiles. This question was prompted by a media article which claimed that public servants, including ADF members, should not have active social media profiles during service.[17] Participants were resistant to closing their social media profiles, though most could see why the ADF may be encouraged to instigate restrictions. The only participant who agreed that social media restrictions were necessary was in a dual-serving relationship and had already deleted her Facebook profile, citing security and privacy concerns.

Participants gave several reasons for their resistance to accepting social media restrictions from the ADF. The first of these reasons was that participants considered restrictions to be unrealistic. They explained how social media was an intrinsic part of life, and the practicality of policing restrictions would be incredibly difficult. Participants also questioned the authority of the ADF to make a request like this of civilian partners.

> *"I can't see them being able to enforce that, if they did it. I can't see how they are going to enforce it, it sounds like a crazy thing to even attempt. I can see why they'd want to do it, but that would just make people make up an alias, and they'd just be*

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[17] M. Mannheim, "Public Servants should get off social media: warning after Islamic State hack'.

online but under an alias rather than their real names, and that would just cause more issues" (42, Air Force partner).

"You are going to keep stripping them of normal life, once again. You are going to just keep creating conflicts. What we actually need to do is recognise that there are certain aspects of society we can't control, like social media" (30, Ex-Navy partner).

Another reason participants identified that restrictions on social media for ADF partners would not be advisable was because it would isolate partners further, and place unfair restrictions on partners who use social media for employment. One participant spoke passionately about how social media gave her a valued social and community outlet while she was caring for her young family, away from support networks.

"I'd end up killing my children and myself. It's my only form of contact with the outside world that is not my little bubble of...children and baby. They could charge my husband before they could get rid of my Facebook" (29, Army partner).

In addition to facilitating connections with friends, family and networks, participants discussed finding social media useful for communicating with their partner, especially during deployments. Several discussed how the member was previously absent from social media, but created Facebook profiles during deployments so they could interact with their family at home. Issues surrounding access to e-mail enabled computers and restrictions of e-mail file sizes were also reasons that partners would communicate with the member using social media rather than e-mail.

"It was my daughter's birthday last week so I tried to send a photo via e-mail, and it came back because the file was too big for one photo...Whereas with Facebook I can send hundreds, tag him in things, and he's a bit the same, 'Yeah, we just pulled in and I've got Wi-Fi, how are you going?'. It is awesome just to know that" (31+, Navy partner)

Protecting the Member and the Mission

Despite considerations of being already sufficient at managing social media security, a consistent theme was the partners' concern for the safety and the wellbeing of the member. Participants expressed their concern that their actions, or the actions of others, could have a negative impact on the mission, or compromise safety. This was the only situation in which the participants were receptive to changing their social media habits.

"I don't want to be the reason that anyone else gets hurt. I don't want to post a picture, and be the reason that, really dramatic, someone gets bombed. I don't want to be the reason for that, so that's why I won't do it. Not because Defence told me to" (33, Army partner).

"I sure would be [expletive deleted] if something happened to my partner because someone else's partner from the same ship decided to go, 'Oh my god, they are coming home at this time in three days', and the ship gets delayed because you just ruined the whole (thing).There's an unlikely chance that will happen, but I don't want to run that risk" (27, Navy partner).

Confusion about the ADF's activity on social media

Overwhelmingly, participants spoke positively of Defence's recent increased activity on social media networks. Participants said they enjoyed being able to see parts of their partner's life they might not usually. Participants with children enjoyed being able to show them the posts and used these images to strengthen the relationship between member and dependants.

"It's really good, and the kids love seeing him do stuff, in vehicles, holding weapons, whatever, the kids love seeing him, so I love that they do that here" (33, Army partner).

"You know, seeing photos of the boats sometimes, if you can't talk to them or whatever, you can see a picture on there and think, Oh, you're on there, you're alive" (31+, Navy partner).

Despite enjoying reading the posts, participants reported feeling confused about privacy and security implications. The interactions of Defence on social media, including photos of members in uniform, is in contrast to the actions they perceive as restricted on social media networks.

"It would be interesting to explore a little bit the inconsistencies with the Australian Army posts, like ...they've posted (photos) in uniform, fighting, names. It's very inconsistent with the expectations" (33, Navy partner)

"But then what's the line? If they are allowed to post it, are we?" (23, Army partner).

Participants commented on how the members themselves were not always security aware, despite being the ones who receive the training. Participants in one focus group referenced Exercise Hamel, where the planned training event was reportedly compromised by soldiers posting content on social media networks that enabled opposing forces to ascertain the location of deployed forces.[18]

> *"People post photos, and they are all geotagged, so then the other party can find them, which is what happened at Exercise Hamel. They were all posting photos, they were all geotagged, so their opposition found them"* (40, Army partner).

In other focus groups and interviews, participants shared examples of times when members had contravened OPSEC principles online. A number of participants said they managed the members' social media profiles, which included changing security settings, adding or removing content, and editing personal information such as display names. These participants felt they were more aware of the risks resulting from activity on social media, both from a security and a reputational perspective, than their partner, and they took an active role in managing this risk for the member.

Discussion and Recommendations

Partners would likely benefit from specific training, particularly as this study indicates partners can take an active role in managing the ADF members social media profiles. Partners being discluded from conversations regarding the current online environment may encourage false feelings of confidence in their ability to maintain online security. Despite the value in providing social media security information, the ADF faces challenges in successfully delivering this training to partners. Participants in this study were supportive of social media training; however, their support is given on the expectation that others would benefit, as most do not perceive a personal need to receive advice or instruction.

A key finding of this research is that it would be futile to place restrictions on the social media activity of ADF partners. In addition to comments that highlighted restrictions would be difficult to enforce, participants were forthcoming in stating they were not enlisted

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[18] M.Ryan and M. Thompson, 'Social Media in the Military: Opportunities, Perils and a Safe Middle Path', < www.groundedcuriosity.com/social-media/in-the-military-opportunities-perils-and-a-safe-middle-path > [Accessed 31 August 2017].

military members, and as such did not need to comply with instructions from the ADF. Indeed, efforts to educate partners about social media could be perceived as 'control', and negatively impact on the relationship between partners and the ADF.

In planning and delivering social media training to partners, a more effective approach would be to align the training with partners' strong sense of willingness to avoid danger to the member. Training focused around 'Keeping your Defence member safe' would align to the values that ADF partners hold. Successful advice and training would also be that which acknowledges the partners' separate, civilian identity, and suggests to offer improvement on their existing social media security knowledge. This value-based education fits with the model of partner education and training offered to US military families, where 'educational material focuses on instilling pride in the family members by letting them know they are as much a part of the military community as their solider, with their own responsibilities for keeping the soldier safe'.[19]

One of the most significant challenges would be disseminating the message to partners. The Patterson report suggested that the Defence Community Organisation and associated support organisations could be responsible for distributing training and information to partners; however, participants in this research identified breakdowns in communication between those organisations and partners. For this reason, organisations like DCO may not be well-positioned to deliver this training to partners. Participants who attended pre-deployment briefings found them valuable, so the extension of these briefings to more units across the ADF would appear to be beneficial. The placement of engaging and relevant social media security advice at these events would be key. In addition, information which can be easily shared on social media networks by ADF partners, who already do the majority of self-education regarding online security, would take advantage of these already strong pathways. For instance, social media graphics which give instruction on how to interact online may be well received by partners. Partners who are active in their communities could share these graphics to others, which encourages others to engage in better practice.

Future research to compare participant's attitudes of social media awareness with their actual social media activity may reveal differences between partners' perception of their own social media awareness, and actual content they post online. Such research could be used to build education programs. Research comparing perceptions to behaviour would also overcome the

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[19] G. Patterson, *Review of Social Media and Defence*, p. 87.

bias present in self-reported data. In addition, investigations of ADF interactions on social platforms other than Facebook, such as SnapChat or Twitter, would increase depths of understanding on this issue.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a discussion about social media security in relation to the activities of ADF partners online. It notes that partners do not currently receive consistent instruction or advice about social media from the ADF. The current method of social media training is an expectation that members will discuss issues of security with their partners, although this is clearly not always happening. Partners who were able to attend pre-deployment or similar briefings where social media instruction was given found these briefings helpful. In the absence of social media instruction from defence or members, ADF partners are receiving social media advice primarily from other ADF partners, as well as incorporating aspects of training received from civilian workplaces and other sources. This paper also found that partners perceive ADF members as not being particularly security-conscious, and some participants managed the members' social media profile on their behalf.

Participants generally considered themselves security aware, and generally in control the content they place online. Many participants reported that social media safety was primarily about 'common sense', and suggested that the majority of operational security issues on social media happened to people of certain demographic groups, such as younger partners. Despite this, partners reported being receptive to social media training from the ADF, with one participant reporting that training should be compulsory for partners. A significant finding in this paper is that owing to the strength of conviction in their own security awareness, partners would not attend training if it was offered.

Participants were aware of the negative implications of posting sensitive information about the military online, and they wanted to avoid behaviour that would place their partner, or the wider ADF in danger. Participants also reported feeling confused about the ADF's activities on social media, and highlighted differences between what the ADF post online, and what partners perceive they are and are not allowed to post. Participants also gave examples of ADF members posting inappropriate content on social media.

In closing, this paper identified the challenges faced by those tasked to provide training and education on social media security to partners. It has argued the restriction of partners on social media networks is futile, due to the partners separate identity and sense of autonomy. It has also offered a series of suggestions, firstly to align training and education to the partner's strong sense of danger avoidance. Participants in this research strongly contended they did not want their actions on social media to be responsible for placing their partner, or the broader mission, in jeopardy. Training that aligns with this value will be effective. This paper also suggested pre-deployment briefings, which currently only take place on a limited number of unit deployments, could be supported across the wider ADF, and social media training could take place at these briefings. Finally, this paper suggested that given the evidence the majority of information regarding social media security is generated by and shared amongst ADF partners themselves, education from the ADF would be beneficial in a format that can be disseminated via social media platforms. This would take advantage of already strong ADF partner networks.

Social media security is an important issue, and there is cause for concern regarding the social media interactions of ADF partners. This study reported in this paper provides a unique view in that it identified the sources where partners received information and training, and the challenges associated with the ADF providing training on social media.

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