

Military Spouses' Self- and Partner-Directed Minimization in the Context of Deployment

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Spousal Communication During Deployment

- In light of technological advances, service members are now able to communicate with their non-deployed spouses with ease and frequency not previously possible.
 - Frequent communication may make it easier for couples to maintain their emotional connection (Merolla, 2010); however, it also presents challenges, including the need to decide **how open to be** (Cafferky, 2014; Sahlstein, Maguire, & Timmerman, 2009).



RISK AND RESILIENCE IN MILITARY FAMILIES

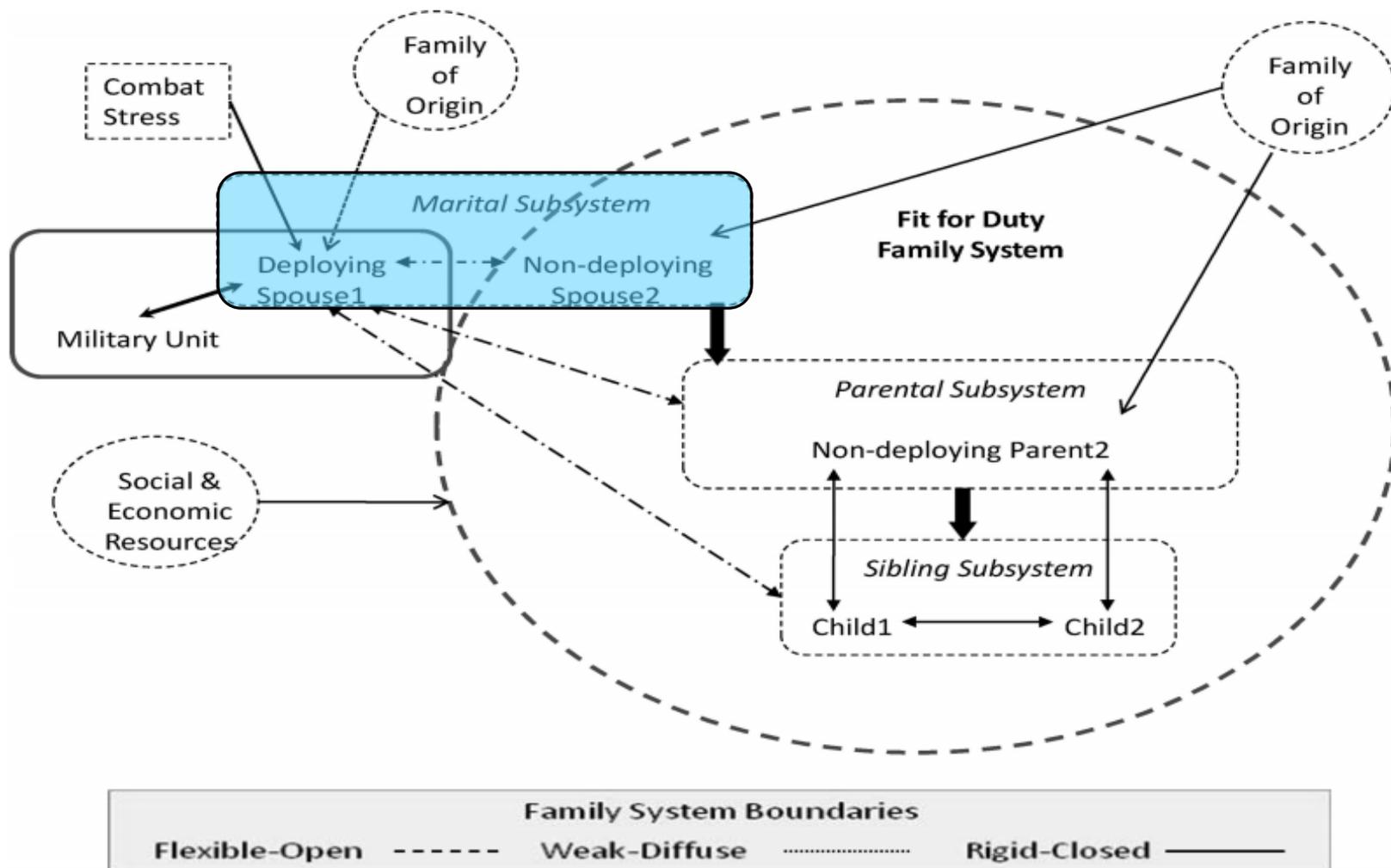


Figure 3. Deployment Adaptation: The Fit for Duty Family System adapts well to deployment separation from military spouse/parent.

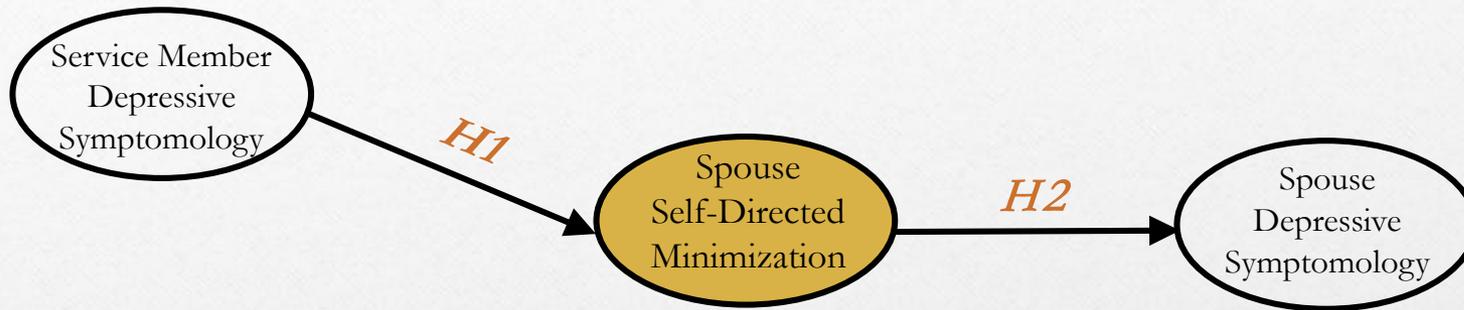
Restricted Communication

- Qualitative evidence suggests that non-deployed spouses restrict communication with service members in (at least) two ways.
 - **Restrict their own disclosures**, by acting like nothing is wrong, or hiding negative events from service members (Maguire & Sahlstein Parcell, 2015; Marini et al., 2016). This behavior is often well-intentioned with the goal of **protecting service members** (Joseph & Afifi, 2010; Maguire & Sahlstein Parcell, 2015).
 - **Restrict service members' disclosures**, particularly in relation to service members' combat- or work-related experiences (Maguire & Sahlstein Parcell, 2015; Rossetto, 2013; Sahlstein et al., 2009). Spouses have reported doing so for **self-protective purposes**, often to prevent themselves from worrying about service members.

Self-Directed
Minimization

Partner-Directed
Minimization

Self-Directed Minimization



- **Spouses may minimize their own concerns when service members are distressed:**

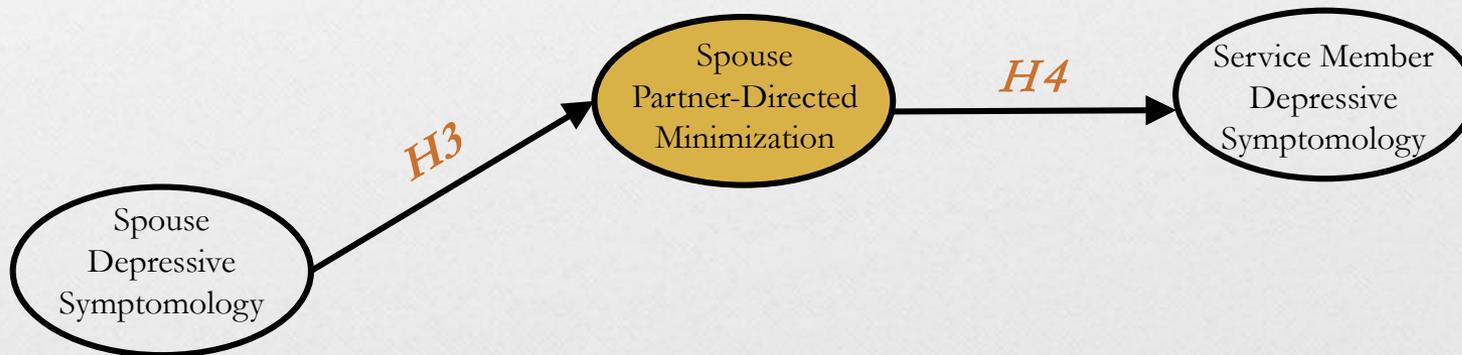
“There was times when I’d be really depressed and down, and I would have the intentions of telling him about it, but then when I got talking to him, he’d say well this happened and I’m upset...then I just wouldn’t tell him what I was going to tell him” (Marini et al., 2016).

- **Spouses’ self-directed minimization may be costly for their own well-being:**

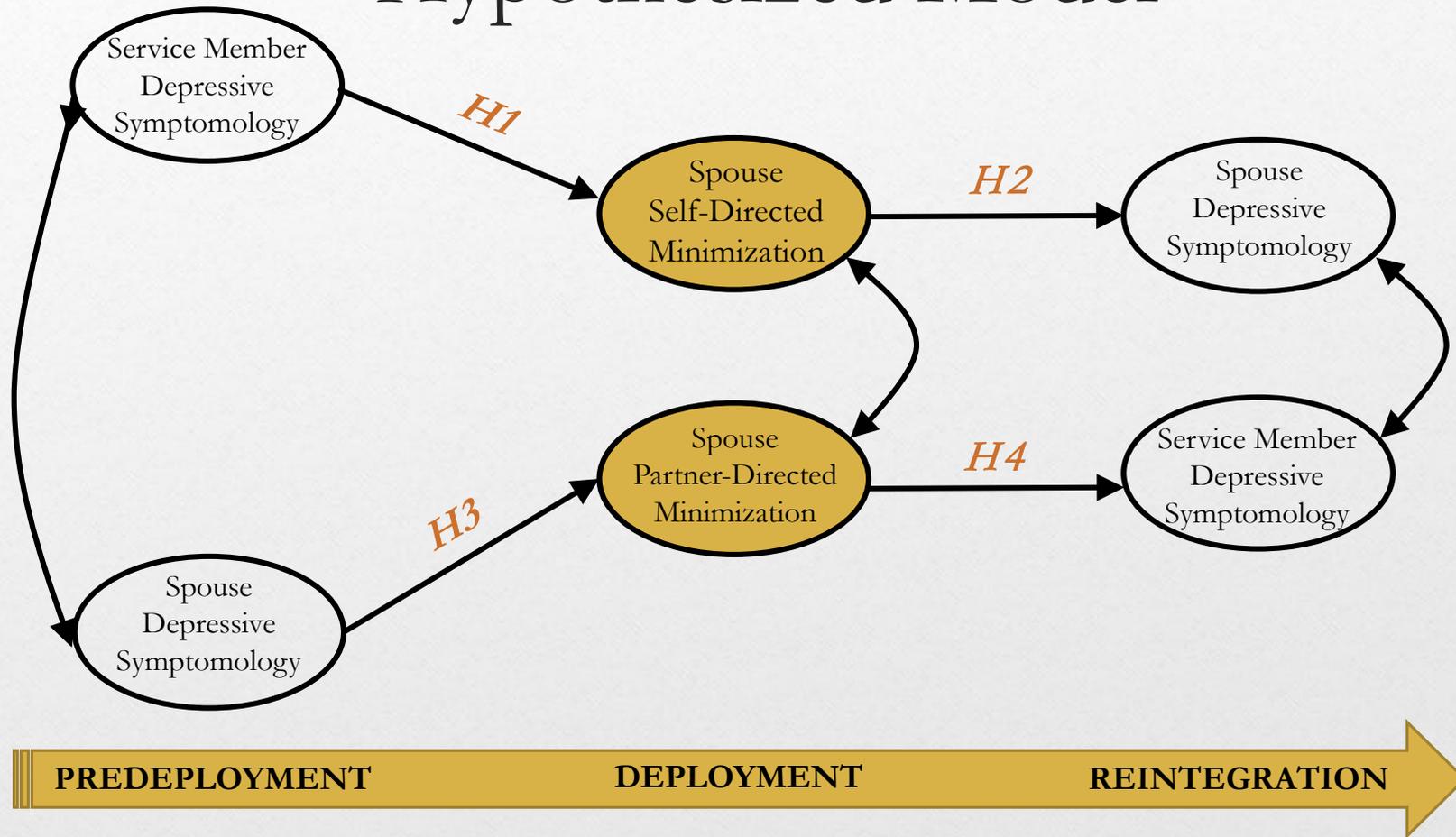
Holding back concerns from one’s partner has been associated with higher levels of individuals’ own psychological distress both among civilian couples (Zhaoyang, Martire, & Stanford, 2018) and military couples (Joseph & Afifi, 2010).

Partner-Directed Minimization

- **Spouses may minimize service members' concerns when they are distressed:**
Distress can interfere with motivation to help others (Dunkel-Schetter & Skokan, 1990). Distressed individuals are perhaps more focused on managing their own (rather than their spouse's) distress (Hinnen, Hagedoorn, Sanderman, & Ranchor, 2007).
- **Spouses' partner-directed minimization may be costly for service members:**
Spouses' partner-directed minimization may convey a lack of responsiveness (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Avoidance-based responses that discourage emotional expression within close relationships are maladaptive (Burlinson, 2003).



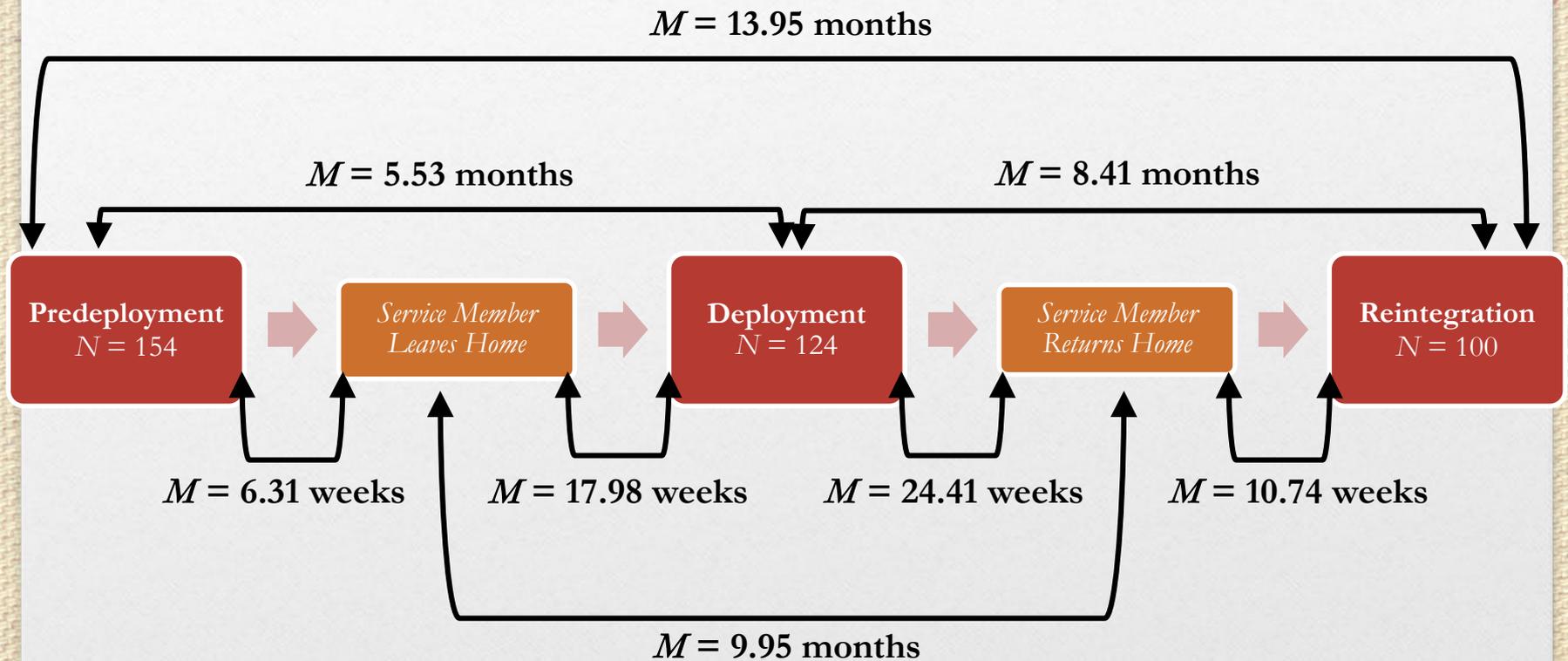
Hypothesized Model



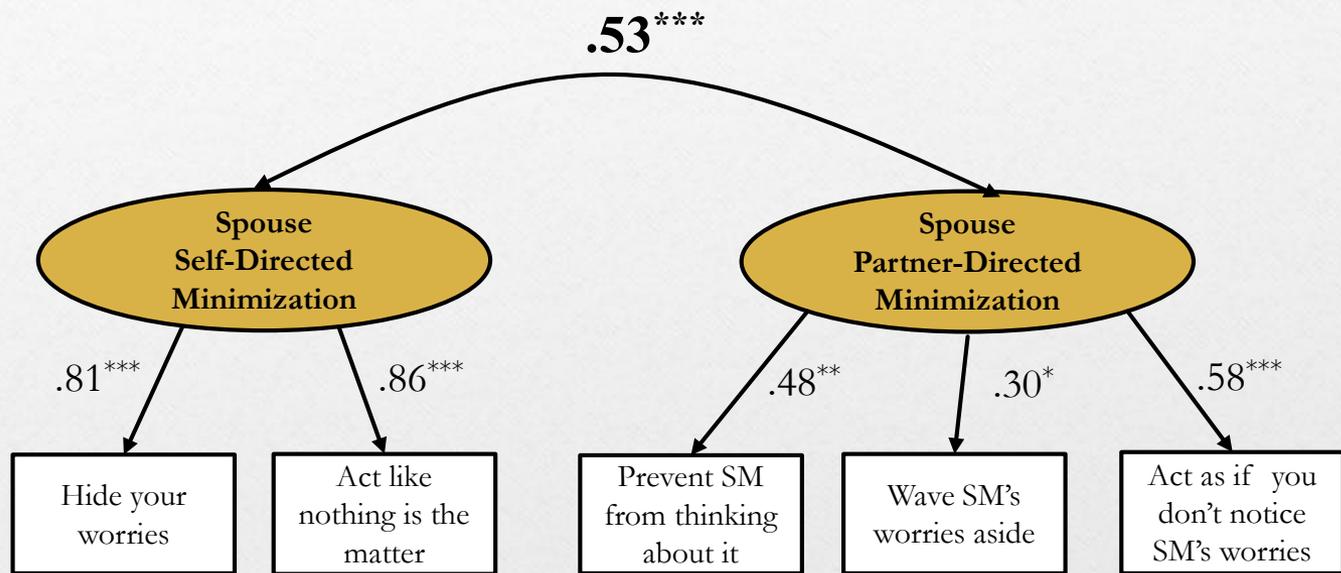
Participants

- Three waves of data came from **154** Army National Guard service members (all male) and their spouses (all female)
- Most service members were enlisted (75.7%), spent an average of **10.27 years in military service**, and **64.2% had previously deployed** in the previous 5 years
- Couples had been together an average of 8.66 years
- Data collection began in 2010 and is nearing completion
- Data were collected via in-person interviews and surveys

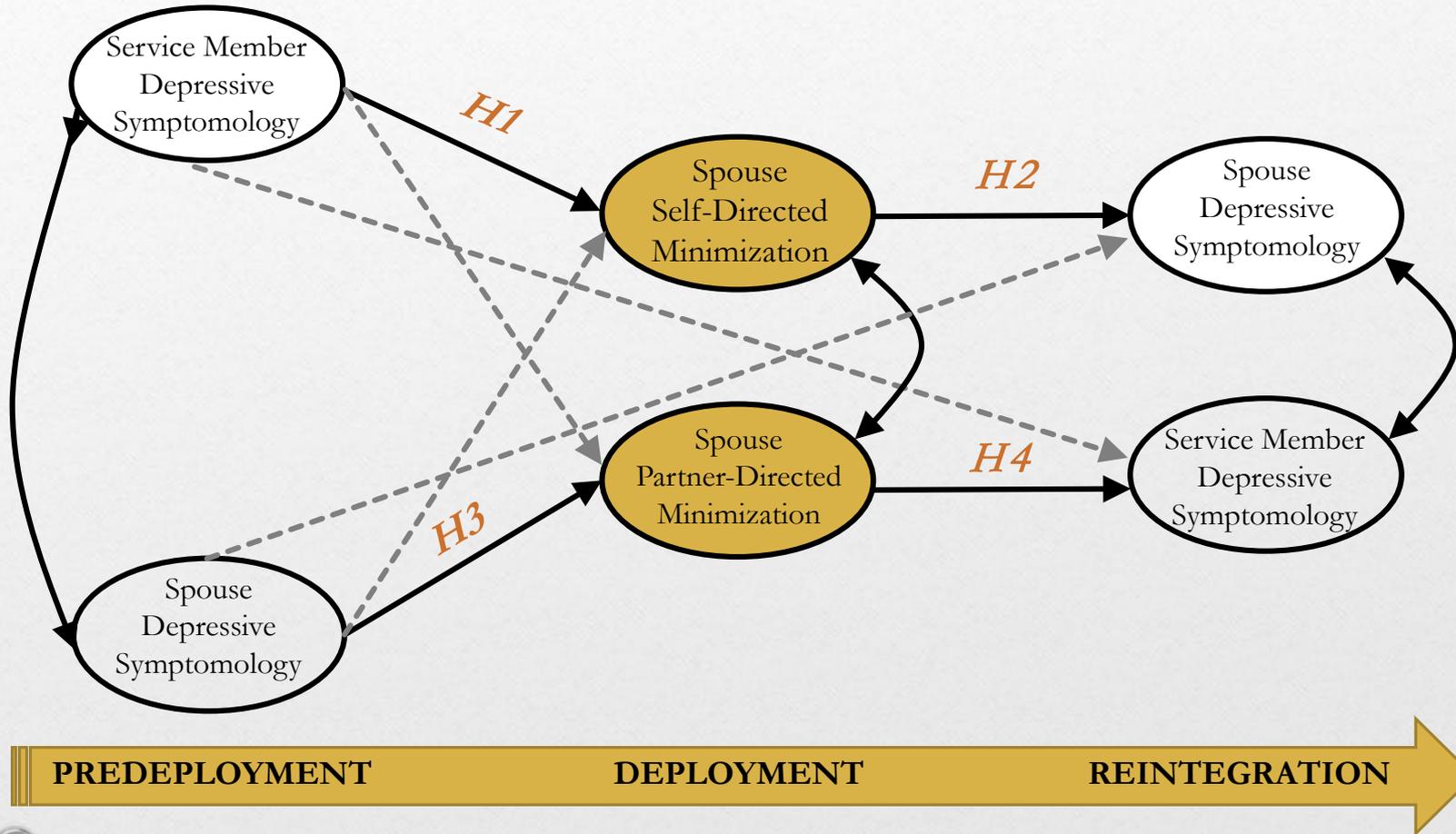
Data Collection Timeline



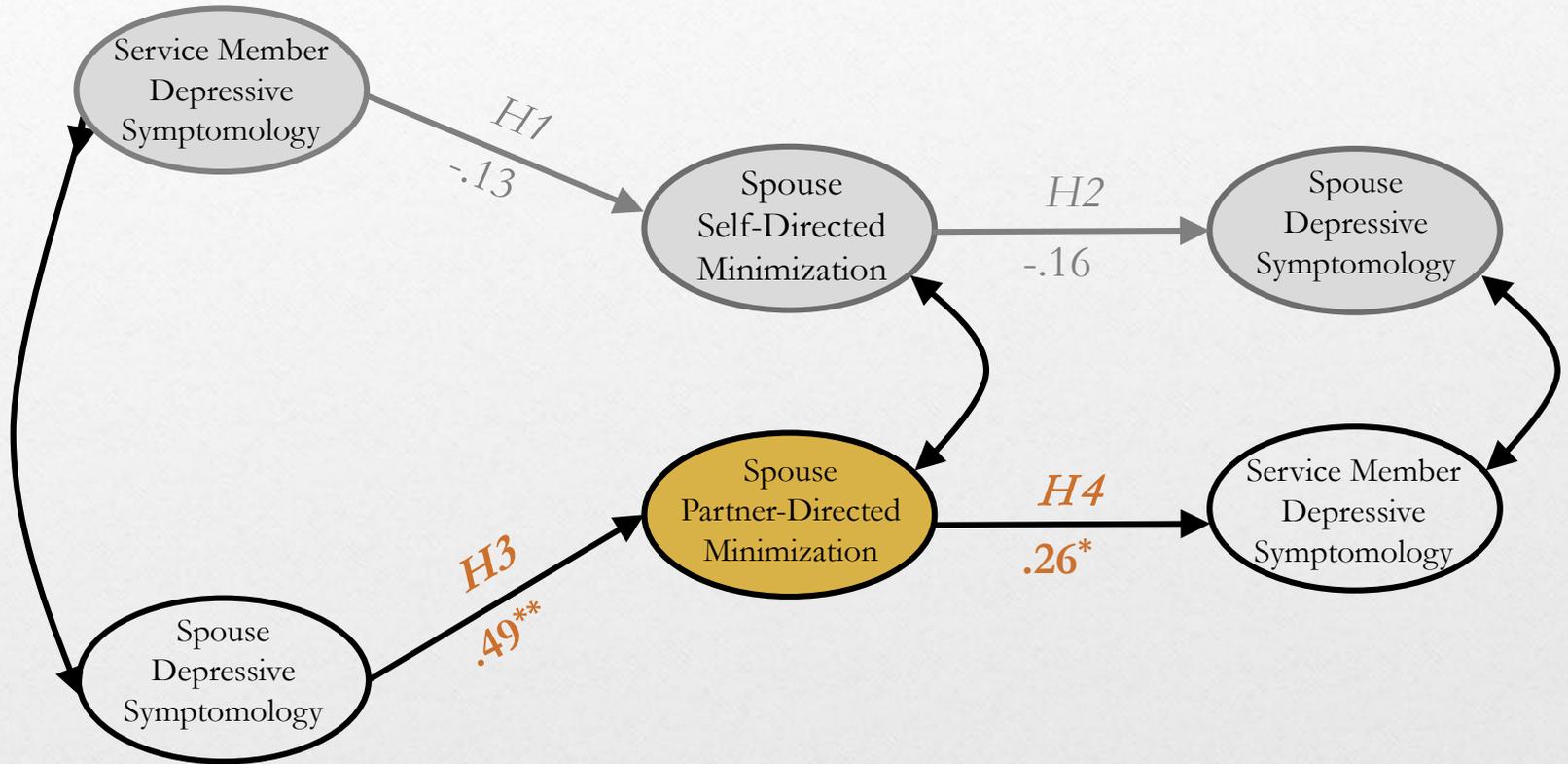
Measurement Model



Structural Model



Structural Model



$\chi^2(162) = 190.04, p = .065; CFI = .93; RMSEA = .03, 95\% CI .00 - .05$

Discussion

- Findings shed light on links between spouses' self- and partner-directed minimization and their own and service members' psychological adjustment over the course of deployment.
 - **Self-Directed Minimization:**
 - Unrelated to service members' depressive symptomology at predeployment; instead predicted by covariates (spouses' own distress at predeployment and service members' combat exposure)
 - Unrelated to spouses' subsequent psychological functioning
 - Social support from other family/friends may be more protective for their psychological well-being (Skomorovsky, 2014).

Discussion

- **Partner-Directed Minimization:**

- Spouses who were more distressed at predeployment were more likely to minimize service members' concerns during deployment
 - Depressed individuals are generally more withdrawn (Conger, Ge, & Lorenz, 1994) and more likely to engage in negative support behaviors than their non-depressed counterparts (Bodenmann, Charvoz, Widmer, & Bradbury, 2004).
- Spouses' partner-directed minimization during deployment predicted higher levels of service members' depressive symptomology at reintegration
 - When wives utilize more restrictive communication behaviors, husbands report that their wives are less emotionally responsive, which in turn elevates husbands' distress (Fekete, Stephens, Mickelson, & Druley, 2007).

Applied Implications

- Promote the deployment readiness of spouses
- Encourage military couples to discuss/plan for how they will manage emotional boundaries before deployment

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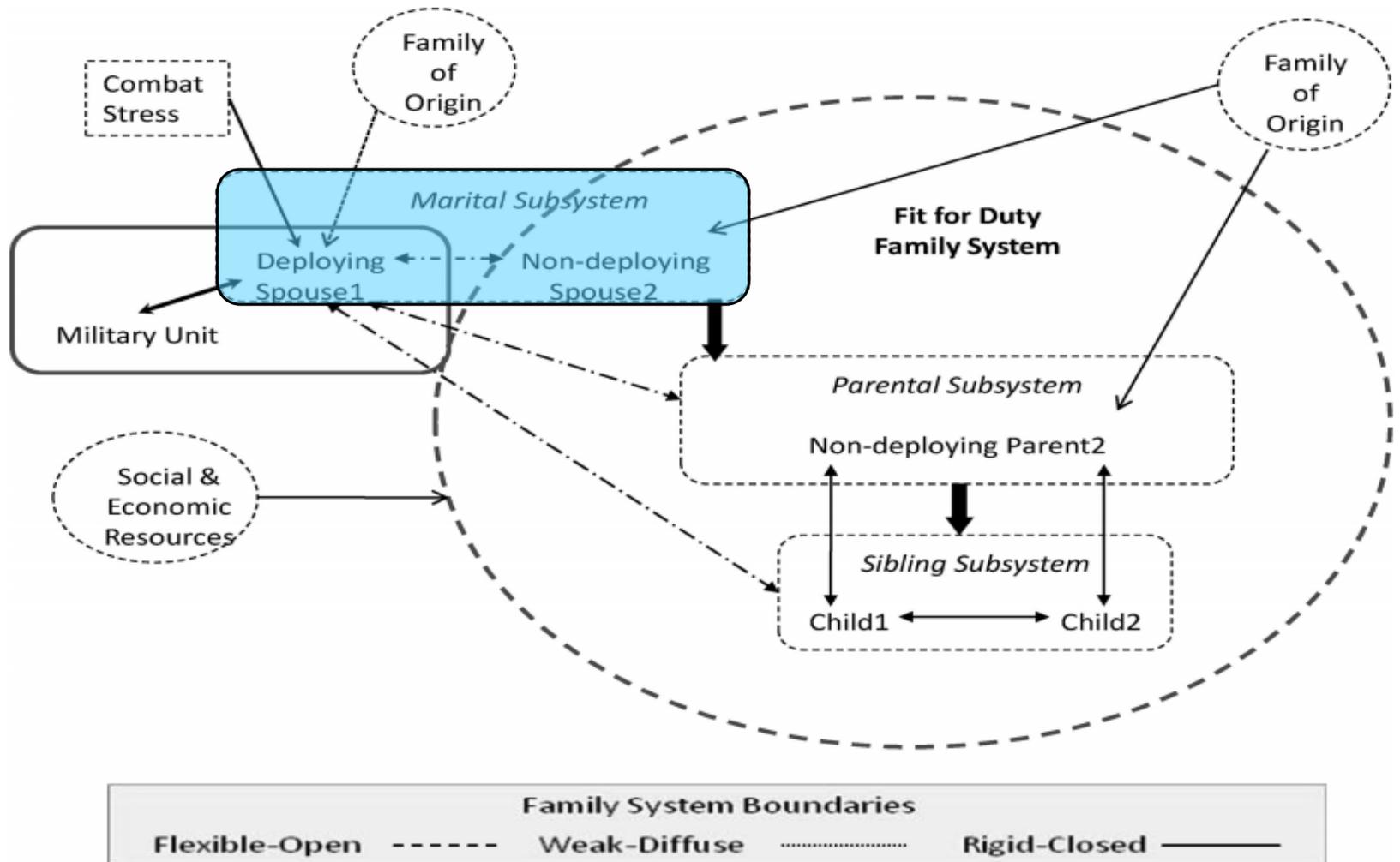


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Limitations and Future Research

- Limited generalizability
- Motivations for minimization
- Service members' own minimization and interpretation of spouses' minimization
 - Need a more fully dyadic approach
 - Re-examine relationships during reintegration only (across 3 waves)
- Re-examine at a micro-timescale (disclosure-responsiveness links at the daily level)

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Thanks for listening!

Questions?

