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Toward a Model of Military Family Resiliency: A Narrative Review

Over the years, the construct of resilience has been increasing in complexity, indicated by the lack of consensus in its definition, operationalization, and measurement. Resiliency in military families is of particular interest given the nature of military life. A narrative review explored and synthesized how resilience and resiliency are understood in the military family literature. Twenty references were identified and underwent a detailed data extraction process focused on descriptions of resilience. Five themes were identified: the difference between resilience and resiliency, intrafamilial factors, processes that enhance military family resiliency, the role of context, and family–context interactions. These themes have informed the development of a synthesis of models of family resiliency that can reveal areas of vital significance for military families and serve as an important starting point to inform ongoing research and theory development for this population.

INTRODUCTION

At face value, resilience appears to be a simple construct. What looks like "ordinary magic" (Masten, 2001), or an innate capacity for successful adaptation despite challenging or threatening circumstances (Baptist, Barros, Cafferky, & Johannes, 2015; Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013), is actually much more. The lack of consensus on the definition, operationalization, and measurement of resilience evident in the broader literature (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Munoz, Brady, & Brown, 2016) underscores this point. For example, Luthar et al. (2000) articulate the need to critically evaluate the concept of resilience: "Work on resilience possesses substantial potential for augmenting the understanding of processes affecting at-risk individuals." Moreover, issues with operationalizing and measuring resilience persist, with conceptual challenges "particular to resilience" (Pangallo, Zibarras, Lewis, & Flaxman, 2015, p. 1) and "inconsistencies in definition, operationalization, and measurement indicat[ing] the need for further theoretical 'delineation'" (p. 2). The need for "concept clarification" (Windle, 2011, p. 153) is a common refrain in recent resilience research. Part of the challenge in conceptualizing resilience is confusion about the unit of analysis (Patterson, 2002a). It is important to distinguish between resilience as an individual and a family construct.

Individual Resilience

Resilience science (Masten, 2014) originated in the field of developmental psychology and focused on the hardiness of individuals who

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cope well with extreme stress (Garmezy, 1985; Rutter, 1987; Werner & Smith, 1982; Windle, 2011) despite threats to system function, viability, or development (Masten, 2014). Studies of invulnerable children living with parental mental illness, alcoholism, or adverse conditions such as poverty, community violence, and chronic illness substantiated the view of a resilient individual who, despite difficult circumstances, not only survives but also thrives (Hoge, Austin, & Pollack, 2007; Masten, 2001; Walsh, 1996, 2002). From this literature, personal traits and qualities identified as attributes contributing to resilience include self-esteem, self-efficacy, positive emotion, and positive affect (Bonanno, 2004; Connor & Davidson, 2003; Rutter, 1987). Some of the research also provided evidence of "steeling effects," suggesting that successfully addressing adversity builds capacity for managing future experiences with adversity (Rutter, 1987). Cultural predispositions favoring rugged individualism and self-sufficiency reinforce these assumptions (Masten, 2001).

The early work of developmental psychologists studying stress-resistant children substantiated conceptualizations of resilience emphasizing innate, self-righting traits (Windle, 2011) and coping strategies (Kimhi & Eshel, 2015). Analysis of this research prompted questions about the role and function of external protective factors in the lives of such children (Windle, 2011). Studies revealing the significance of relationships between resilient children and caring adults suggested an interactive effect involving dynamic interplay of individual psychological traits and social and environmental factors (Moeller-Saxone, Davis, Stewart, Diaz-Granados, & Herrman, 2014). Resilience science was maturing, encompassing the focus on adaptation and sustained competence as well as an awareness of protective factors (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten, 2001) emerging through multilevel dynamics (Kimhi & Eshel, 2015; Masten, 2014; Pangallo, Zibarras, Lewis, & Flaxman, 2015) ongoing in networks of personal, environmental, and biological systems (Hermann et al., 2011).

Family Resilience

Family resilience, which emerged from the dialogue on individual resilience, has evolved through two "waves" of development, with a third wave in progress (Henry, Morris, & Harrist, 2015). The evolution of this construct through these waves mirrors the development of the construct of individual resilience from the focus on intrapsychic outcomes to an increasing emphasis on context, meaning, and process (Henry et al., 2015). Wave 1 family resilience models are grounded in family stress and coping theory (Hill, 1949; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988; McCubbin & Patterson, 1983; Patterson, 2002a), emphasizing family characteristics, specifically strengths, mobilized in reaction to stress (Henry et al., 2015). These models, such as Hill's (1958) ABC-X model of family stress, emphasize that predisposing factors, specifically risk factors, intersect with social-psychological resources or protective factors, along with definitions of the situation, or meanings, to produce stress responses or family crises (Meadows et al., 2015; Patterson, 2002b). If family risk and family resources are in balance as they interact with family meanings, families are better able to adapt to the stressor (Patterson, 2002b). Family resilience within Wave 1 is depicted as an outcome, a reactive response to normative and nonnormative stress exercised by competent families capable of withstanding adversity.

Wave 2 models of family resilience encompass ideas taken from conceptualizations of individual resilience, family stress theory, and general family systems theory (Henry et al., 2015). Increasing emphasis on resilience as a process (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996) rather than outcome, along with protective factors, ecological contexts, and specific risks, are distinguishing features of Wave 2 family resilience models (Henry et al., 2015).

The idea of family resilience as process is informed by ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986; Folke, 2006), conceptualizing families as interdependent and open systems that function through ecological contexts. Boundary shifts and role redefinitions emerge in response to disequilibrium, or lack of balance, in the family system, activating protective factors, or strengths, that buffer normative and nonnormative stress as the families strive to reestablish balance. The strengths may be internal to the family, such as family meanings, or shared perceptions held by families that emerge over time and serve as the basis for understanding and responding to risk (Patterson, 2002b). Correspondingly, strengths may emerge through transactions with external networks that provide support (Walsh, 2012).

As internally or externally sourced strengths are mobilized, definitions of the situation are altered and old, counterproductive family beliefs, goals, and values are challenged (Henry et al., 2015), resulting in impacts that resonate in the family over the long term. Individual families follow unique pathways or trajectories (Rutter, 1987) through this process in accordance with the meanings and contexts at hand.

Ongoing progress in research and theorizing on family resilience progresses through the third wave will impart greater conceptual clarity in modeling and support the development of prevention and intervention strategies. In the third wave of family resilience models, theories build on the progress of Wave 2 models to emphasize increasing clarity around definitions and terms associated with resilience or resiliency and tease apart the processes in family systems that are both promotive and protective, considering how risk and vulnerability as well as protection and adaptation might develop over time (Henry et al., 2015).

Military Family Resilience

The issues from the broader resilience literature are perpetuated in the military family resilience literature. For example, MacDermid Wadsworth (2010), in "Family Risk and Resilience in the Context of War and Terrorism," described multiple types of resilience and definitions, and noted that the studies on military families tend to focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with "few studies of resilience" (p. 545). Building on her previous works, Mac-Dermid Wadsworth described the various types of resilience found both elsewhere and within military family scholarship, which emphasizes the need to better unpack interactions and transactions within and across those various types of resilience.

The ongoing contextual factors that shape life for military families—specifically high mobility, protracted periods of separation, and risks of injury and death associated with combat—are a unique, compounding set of stressors that typical families are unlikely to experience concurrently (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; National Defense & Canadian Armed Forces Ombudsman, 2013; Wadsworth, 2010). The effects of these stressors are exacerbated by the impacts of recent shifts in military operations as active

combat in war-torn areas of the globe continues to intensify.

Psychological injuries, or operational stress injuries (OSIs), described as "invisible wounds" incurred through exposure to combat-related trauma, affect approximately one-third of returning service members in the United States (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). The effects spill over to the family unit. A recent review of 256 internationally sourced published articles focusing on the impact of operational stress injuries resulting from current and historical conflicts suggests a correlation between service members' OSIs and higher rates of mental health problems in spouses and children as compared to those in military families with no OSI present and civilian families (Norris, Cramm, Eichler, Tam-Seto & Smith-Evans, 2015). Research reviewed suggests that the operational tempo, intensity, and risk associated with service in contemporary militaries have the potential to heighten the impact of stress for military families (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, 2013), lending further weight to the contention that the military is a "greedy institution" (Segal, 1986).

Little is known about the military families who do well through adversity. Overall, few studies have focused on the mechanisms that foster and sustain resilience in military families, despite the knowledge that some military families address the challenges successfully (Martin & Sherman, 2009). It is important to develop a better understanding of the risks, resources, and meanings accessed by military families, as well as their transactions across ecological contexts that facilitate resilience.

We argue that a synthesis of military family resilience models exposing areas of key emphasis is necessary given the heightened vulnerability to significant risks associated with combat in current military operations. Support for this argument can be derived from Bowen et al.'s (2013) reference to the cultural context of military life, which places particular constraints on families and may affect their capacity to cope, thus contributing to cumulative family stress (Patterson, 2002b) flowing through trajectories or pathways of adaptation that move through multiple system levels (Henry et al., 2015). Military family lifestyle stressors are nonnormative and require additional attention from researchers. The tensions within the military family field often hinge on polarized messages

of military families being at increased risk and military families as strong and resilient, which demands careful consideration of the mechanisms, processes, and resources that might need to converge for a family to experience the positive outcome of resilience. Moreover, family meaning systems may vary in military families as compared to their civilian counterparts because the organizing principles in the military institution also vary. Family worldviews, identities, and definitions of situations are shaped by the "linked lives" or "social convoys" that military families experience across the life course (Bowen et al., 2013), offering them opportunities to access social support through the close, interpersonal connections built and maintained through shared experiences, such as combat. Military families also share ideology and purpose, often perceiving the family as part of a larger collective (Henry et al., 2015), a "definition of the situation" enabling them to ascribe meaning to adverse experiences (Bowen et al., 2013). It is also important to note that military family experience is enhanced through system-specific capacities or resources and mechanisms that counter the risks, a fact that offers further support for the development of a synthesis of models of family resilience amenable to application to the military family context.

Models and theories should drive research in military family health and well-being. Theory can help us to better develop and evaluate policy and programs that support families at all levels of resilience. The purpose of this narrative review was to synthesize the scholarly discourse on military family resilience and resiliency, revealing key areas of emphasis significant to their experience.

Method

Given the objective of this article, a narrative review was appropriate (Green, Johnson, & Adams, 2006). Narrative reviews are particularly useful when there is lack of consensus about a phenomenon (Ferrari, 2015), because they offer a transparent method of systematically summarizing key themes from relevant literature addressing a specific question(s) (Green et al., 2006). Moreover, narrative reviews facilitate the development or refinement of theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Rumrill & Fitzgerald, 2001).

Identify the Research Questions

The research questions guiding this review were the following: How is resilience or resiliency explored and understood in the military family literature? What are the implications for the development of knowledge, theory, and practice for military families?

Identify and Select Relevant Studies

The procedures to identify and select relevant studies must be transparent, replicable, and systematic (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Green et al., 2006; Rumrill & Fitzgerald, 2001). In consultation with a health sciences librarian, the keywords identified were the following: *military famil**, *military personnel**, *military veteran**, *resilienc**, *hardiness*, and *soldier*. The Medical Subject Heading *military family* was also used. Relevant psychology and social science databases were selected: CINAHL, EMBASE, ERIC, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Social Sciences Citation Index, and Sociological Abstracts.

The screening process involved scrutiny of titles, keywords, abstracts, and chapter summaries for reference to *military*, *family*, *resilience* or *resiliency*, and *models*, *frameworks*, or *theory*. An iterative process was used to identify and refine inclusion criteria across reviewers. All sources had to be written in English, peer-reviewed, and published between 1990 and January 2017, a period that reflects the shift toward modern conflict beginning with the Bosnia–Croatia conflict. Sources that did not explicitly use the key terms were excluded during screening. All 1,195 English titles and abstracts were screened. All abstracts were reviewed independently by at least two team investigators to ensure interrater rigor. Twenty of these sources (those with asterisks in the reference list) included material on models, theories, or conceptual frameworks related to resilience or resiliency in military families and proceeded to final data extraction.

Chart the Data and Collate, Summarize, and Report Results

All articles were reviewed using an analytic data guide that included authors, author disciplines, keywords, year of publication, research location, objectives and key focus of the article, population described, and findings related to the

conceptualization of resilience of military families in the research literature. Data extraction focused on the descriptions of resilience in military families in the context of theories, models, or frameworks to provide a comprehensive conceptualization of resilience in military families; this was facilitated by the use of the qualitative software MAXQDA. Extracted themes were clustered through the application of thematic analysis procedures (Bryman, 2012). Patterned and recurring themes were discerned across the collated categories that emerged through data extraction and, upon satisfactory assessment of relevance to the objectives of the narrative review, were reclassified as key themes. The results of this analysis process are presented in Table 1 and summarized in the following section.

Results

The military family literature describes a range of models and frameworks that contribute to the conceptualization of resilience and resiliency. Two-thirds of the articles were published in the previous 5 years, all originating in the United States. The articles included research studies ($n = 7$), perspective commentaries ($n = 5$), and literature reviews ($n = 8$). The research studies included a mix of qualitative and quantitative studies. Interviews were conducted in three of the studies to further develop knowledge of the experiences of military family life on the development of resilience in adolescents (Baptist et al., 2015), coping strategies employed by military spouses or partners during deployment (Rossetto, 2015), and exploration of how resilience is enacted through communication by military spouses or partners throughout the deployment cycle (Villagran, Canzona, & Ledford, 2013). A program evaluation was described (Kees & Rosenblum, 2015) using a combination of nine checklists, surveys, scales, and questionnaires. Similarly, two other articles described the use of various measures; however, modifications or abbreviations were made to the tools used. One article described the use of structural equation modeling to better understand the impact of parent stress across military family systems (Saltzman, Lester, Milburn, Woodward, & Stein, 2016).

Across all models and frameworks that emerged from this review, military families are described as experiencing a state of resiliency,

even when faced with significant challenges (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Bowen & Martin, 2011; Chapin, 2011; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2011; Saltzman, Pynoos, Lester, Layne, & Beardslee, 2013; Wiens & Boss, 2006). The models and frameworks reviewed focus on teasing apart the factors that can enhance and disrupt the experience of resiliency in military families.

Of the 20 articles reviewed in the final data extraction, five overarching themes emerged that reveal areas of key significance for contemporary military families: (a) resilience versus resiliency, (b) intrafamilial factors, (c) processes that enhance military family resiliency, (d) context matters, and (e) family–context interactions.

Resilience Versus Resiliency

Articles included in this narrative review represent a variety of ways that family resilience and resiliency are conceptualized in the military family literature, drawing heavily on the broader resilience literature. Many definitions describe a system capacity as well as a state of being or functioning. For example, according to Masten (2013), the concept of resilience "refers to the capacity of a system to withstand or recover from significant disturbances and continue to function effectively" (p. 280). In the military family literature, this conceptualization is embedded in definitions focusing on overcoming adversity and addressing challenges (Baptist et al., 2015; Bowen & Martin, 2011; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Oshri et al., 2015; Saltzman et al., 2011; Saltzman et al., 2013; Wiens & Boss, 2006; Wilson, Chernichky, Wilkum, & Owlett, 2014).

Differential conceptualizations of resilience and resiliency have emerged from ongoing refinement of the resilience construct (Bowen & Martin, 2011; Oshri et al., 2015). There is no consistency, however, in the conceptual and operational definitions of each construct within the literature. Although modeling has begun to carefully discriminate resilience from resiliency, there is no consensus as to which captures the process aspect and which the outcome. For instance, Oshri et al. (2015) drew on developmental psychopathology literature to distinguish resiliency as processes and resilience as outcomes. Bowen and Martin (2011) and Patterson (2002a), alternatively, advance

Table 1. *Narrative Review of Resilience and Resiliency*

Author	Source	Type of Publication	Focus on Individual vs. Family	Resilience vs. Resiliency	Definition	Specific Model
1 Baptist, Barros, Cafferky, & Johannes (2015)	*Journal of Adolescent Research*	Research	Individual	Resilience	Process of, capacity for, or outcome of successful adaptation despite difficult circumstances	Lerner & Catellino's development contextual model
2 Boberiene & Hornback (2014)	*American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*	Perspective	Individual	Resilience	Not an individual child trait but a product of interactions and relationships between child and changing contexts	N/A
3 Chapin (2011)	*Social Work in Health Care*	Perspective	Family	Resilience	Family's ability to adapt to stressors influenced by resources and coping abilities	McCubbin's family resilience model
4 Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner (2013)	*The Future of Children*	Perspective	Individual	Resilience	Sustained competence or positive adjustment in the face of adversity	The 5 C's of positive youth development model
5 Kees & Rosenblum (2015)	*Psychological Services*	Research	Individual	Resilience and resiliency	N/A	McCubbin & McCubbin's resiliency model of family stress, adjustment and adaptation
6 Masten (2001)	*American Psychologist*	Review	Individual	Resilience	Characterized by good outcomes despite serious threats to adaptation or development	Various interaction models of resilience
7 Oshri et al. (2015)	*Family Relations*	Research	Family	Resilience	Ability to withstand and rebound from adversity	General systems theory; Olson's circumplex model of marital and family systems

Table 1. *Continued*

Author	Source	Type of Publication	Sample	Focus on Individual vs. Family	Resilience vs. Resiliency	Definition	Specific Model
8 Palmer (2008)	*Military Psychology*	Review	U.S. military families	Family	Resilience	Affected by several factors that contribute to reducing parental stress and psychopathology	N/A
9 Riggs & Riggs (2011)	*Journal of Family Psychology*	Perspective	U.S. military families	Family	Resilience	Involves interplay of multiple risk and protective processes over time, including individual, family, and larger sociocultural influences	Family attachment network model
10 Rossetto (2014)	*Journal of Family Communication*	Research	U.S. military partners	Family	Resilience	N/A	Afifi et al.'s theoretical model of coping; Boss's resilience-centered framework
11 Russo & Fallon (2015)	*Early Childhood Education Journal*	Review	U.S. military families and children	Family and individual	Resiliency and resilience	Resilience is commonly defined as positive or protective processes that reduce maladaptive outcomes under conditions of risk; a dynamic process that strengthens coping skills and balances stress and adversity	ABC-X model; double ABC-X model; McCubbin & McCubbin's resiliency model of family stress, adjustment and adaptation
12 Saltzman (2016)	*Family Process*	Review	U.S. families	Family	Resilience	Family resilient processes contribute to the adaptation of family members; these interactive characteristics are amenable to change	Walsh's family resilience framework

Table 1. *Continued*

Author	Source	Type of Publication	Sample	Focus on Individual vs. Family	Resilience vs. Resiliency	Definition	Specific Model
13 Saltzman et al. (2011)	*Clinical Child and Family Psychological Review*	Review	Military families in the U.S. and Japan	Family	Resilience	A dynamic process that includes positive adaptation in the context of significant adversity	Stress continuum model
14 Saltzman et al. (2016)	*Family Process*	Research	U.S. military families	Family	Resilience	Ability to reduce stress and vulnerability, foster healing and growth out of crisis, and empower families to contend with ongoing challenges	Various systemic models of family functioning
15 Saltzman et al. (2013)	*Clinical Child and Family Psychological Review*	Review	U.S. military families	Family	Resilience	Power to achieve positive adaption following a crisis	Family adjustment and adaptation response model
16 Villagran, Canzona, & Ledford (2013)	*Health Community*	Research	U.S. military spouses	Family	Resilience	Resilience is constructed as chaos, and uncertainty is reduced through proactively developing relationships and shared experiences	Five processes of milspouse resilience communication
17 Westphal & Woodward (2010)	*Military Medicine*	Review	U.S. military families	Family	Resilience	Capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful	The stress continuum model; defense centers of excellence resilience model
18 Wiens & Boss (2006)	*Military life: The psychology of service in peace and combat*	Review	U.S. Army National Guard	Family	Resilience	Ability to bounce back to a level of functioning equal to or greater than before	Emotional cycle of peacetime deployment model; contextual family stress model

Table 1. *Continued*

Author	Source	Type of Publication	Sample	Focus on Individual vs. Family	Resilience vs. Resiliency	Definition	Specific Model
19 Wilson et al. (2014)	*Journal of Family Communication*	Research	U.S. National Guard families	Family	Resilience and resiliency	The ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges; refers to "springing forward" to create a new sense of normal by adjusting interactions to fit new conditions	Model of family resiliency; family communication patterns theory
20 Wright et al. (2013)	*Building Psychological Resilience in Military Personnel: Theory and Practice*	Review	U.S. military families	Families	Resilience	Built by factors leading to adaptation and competent functioning and the ability to bounce back after experiencing stressful events	Systems theory framework; framework of belief systems, organizational patterns, and communication

resilience as the process and resiliency as the outcome.

Intrafamilial Factors

Military family resilience and resiliency may be negatively affected by the accommodation of multiple stress management styles and varying tolerance levels for stress (Chapin, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2013) within the family. The literature reviewed recognizes the capacity of adult family members to respond to and tolerate different kinds of stressors. Examples of stressors discussed in the broader resilience literature include environmental presses (chronic stressors) and pulses (acute stressors) (Lawton, 1977, 1986; Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). Presses and pulses influence the dynamic interactions ongoing in a family system. Environmental presses may elicit a steady response, whereas a series of environmental pulses may disrupt equilibrium in the family system.

Whether chronic or acute, some stressors enhance resiliency while others hinder it. Those that enhance resiliency are referred to as challenge stressors. These stressors have a quality that facilitates the development of personal capacities such as coping strategies and perceptions of coping efficacy (Crane & Searle, 2016); they also create developmental opportunities for growth, enhance resources, and support effective problem solving in the family. In contrast, hindrance stressors diminish or deplete family resources such that resiliency cannot be developed and/or sustained. Hindrance stressors are perceived as barriers to achieving goals, and they inhibit personal growth.

Individual military family members may experience variance in stress management and stress tolerance across time and domains of experience. For example, a child may experience resiliency at home but not school, or during one parental deployment but not another (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Russo & Fallon, 2015). This affirms that the resiliency of the family is affected by each family member's vulnerabilities and strengths (Chapin, 2011; Masten, 2013; Oshri et al., 2015), with the potential for both positive or negative "cascade effects" to unfold (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Masten, 2013; Saltzman et al., 2011).

Resilience and resiliency may be complicated in military families because of differential developmental imperatives (Easterbrooks et al.,

2013). The timing of protracted separations as well as reunifications has an impact on individual family members differently according to variation in developmental needs at any given stage (Masten, 2013). Heterogeneous outcomes (Rutter, 1999) evolve in relation to different capacities for managing stress and implementing strategies at different ages (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Family systems also experience developmental changes as families grow through the process of establishing the partner relationship, transitioning to parenthood for some, raising children, and supporting aging parents (Wiens & Boss, 2006).

Processes That Enhance Military Family Resiliency

Frequently cited across the literature modeling resilience in the military family are "critical resilience-enhancing processes" (Saltzman et al., 2013), which include family belief systems, communication processes, and organizational patterns (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

Family belief systems. Military family members ascribe meaning and purpose to the normative stressors characterizing the military mission. This attribution supports the development of a military family identity that functions to enhance resiliency. The resilience processes supporting this include situational appraisal of stressors aligned with familial capacity, positive interpretations of difficult circumstances (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Villagran et al., 2013), a shared family narrative that includes an expectation of sacrifice, feelings of pride in the ability to master adversity, patriotism, and a sense of hope for the future (Chapin, 2011; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Saltzman, 2016; Saltzman et al., 2011; Saltzman et al., 2013; Villagran et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2014). Embracing the military family identity sustains a sense of belonging and connection to a broader community with shared values and goals (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Saltzman et al., 2011).

Communication processes. Open and ongoing communication strategies ensure that strong attachments are maintained within the family over time (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). These communication strategies demonstrate a collaborative approach to problem solving and shared decision making and enable emotional expression and regulation within the family and external systems (Saltzman, 2016; Saltzman et al., 2011; Saltzman et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2014; Wright, Riviere, Merrill, & Cabrera, 2013). Realistic recognition of the nature of the stressor is important in maintaining open communication. Downplaying or denying difficult situations may deplete resilience stores in other family members (Saltzman, 2016; Saltzman et al., 2011). Age-appropriate information is shared with the children, with developmentally appropriate messaging (Saltzman et al., 2013)

Organizational patterns. While intrafamilial tensions can have "potentially corrosive effects" (Saltzman et al., 2013, p. 301) for family resiliency, a clear hierarchical organization and set of boundaries can be protective for military families, creating an internal family system that may be more predictable and may offset the less predictable normative stressors associated with the military family lifestyle (Oshri et al., 2015; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Wiens & Boss, 2006). Organizational patterns ensure that the family base to which all members are attached is secure enough to withstand the flexibility and adjustments required as roles shift (Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2011).

Military families who craft a sense of normalcy on a daily basis and reframe current stressors are more likely to experience resiliency (Chapin, 2011; Wright et al., 2013). As family member availability and capacity fluctuate in response to normative and nonnormative stressors, the military family system accommodates role transitions across flexible role trajectories (Bowen & Martin, 2011). Some of these accommodations include adjusting work outside the home and commitments to extracurricular activities (Villagran et al., 2013; Wiens & Boss, 2006). Adults in military families will socialize younger members through role modeling (Baptist et al., 2015; Easterbrooks et al., 2013) and co-constructing meaning (Saltzman et al., 2013).

Military families model a "battle rhythm" to turn "chaos into consistency" when faced with new challenges and stressors (Villagran et al., 2013, p. 778). Spouses in military families must structure their reality in a way that is distinct

from their civilian peers and that allows for a mental map of separation, risk, and mobility (Villagran et al., 2013). Should the military family have an incomplete understanding of potential impacts of deployment and operational stress on different members of the family, resiliency can be compromised (Saltzman et al., 2011).

Context Matters

The resilience literature informing the synthesis of military family resiliency modeling brings into view the shift toward a contextually grounded understanding of resilience and resiliency, underscoring need for a model that recognizes the contextual factors at play for military families. For example, the literature reviewed acknowledges unequivocally that deployment and relocation are "normative" stressors and challenges for military families that affect the entire family system, not just the serving member (Chapin, 2011; Oshri et al., 2015; Palmer, 2008; Saltzman, 2016; Wilson et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013). Role fluidity and family transitions through separation, reintegration, and spousal employment changes support the development of accommodations to normative and nonnormative stressors (Bowen & Martin, 2011; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Palmer, 2008; Villagran et al., 2013; Wiens & Boss, 2006; Wright et al., 2013). Access to resources available through the military community context (Wright et al., 2013) promotes resilience (Masten, 2013). These resources include "consistent employment, free medical care, legal assistance, a social network of persons with similar interests and experiences, and screenings for severe illness/dysfunction and criminal history" (Palmer, 2008, p. 211). This observation affirms that military families experience a positive and supportive culture with rich traditions, shared experiences, and resources that address perceived family needs (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014).

The nature of stressors matters (Russo & Fallon, 2015) when considering a family's ability to experience and sustain resilience. Should the type, frequency, length, and accumulation of stressors, and limited opportunity for reprieve from stressors, be compressed, family resiliency can be undermined as each of these factors, along with individual family members' tolerance to withstand them, interacts

with the family system's resilience processes (Russo & Fallon, 2015; Saltzman, 2016). A stressor "pile up" results (Chapin, 2011, p. 529).

Social support is a critical resource that can influence military family resiliency. However, in addition to the availability of the social support, factors such as accessibility, reciprocity, and formality affect its capacity to enhance resiliency (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Bowen & Martin, 2011; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Russo & Fallon, 2015). Moreover, formal supports may exacerbate vulnerability for families (Bowen & Martin, 2011). Requests for social support and connection may be interpreted negatively in the military community, rendering requests and the need(s) that motivate them as socially unacceptable (Villagran et al., 2013). When seeking social support from nonmilitary spousal peers, there may be concern that there will be a lack of understanding, stigmatization, or lack of connection (Villagran et al., 2013).

Community institutions such as schools have a part to play in whether a military family has access to resources that will create opportunities for collaboration and interaction and will enhance or hinder family resiliency and (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Masten, 2013). It is also possible that external systems like schools draw on, rather than enhance, resilience stores of individual members or the family system as a whole (Baptist et al., 2015).

Family–Context Interaction

Overall, military family resiliency may be understood as a state that, given the right blend of personal capacity and contextual circumstances, can be strengthened through experience and sustained over time, but it is also vulnerable to changes. It is, ultimately, highly relational (Villagran et al., 2013). Resiliency is most likely to be experienced when there is congruence or balance between the intrafamilial factors in the family system and broader contextual demands and resources (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Russo & Fallon, 2015). Bowen and Martin (2011) articulate the complex interaction of family systems and context:

> At any point in time, service members and their family members are somewhere on the road of life facing a unique combination of

mission-related events, personal life events, career events, resources and opportunities, and hopes and dreams, aspirations, and disappointments in the context of historical circumstances (economy, war, social and environmental challenges) and individual (personal and military life events—including duty and operational experiences) and family time (marriage and children, parents, and extended family). (p. 166)

Exposure to stressors need not create harm; rather, emphasizing the family system's capacity can catalyze resource and skill mobilization to potentially yield positive effects (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Russo & Fallon, 2015). Repeated exposure to the normative stressors of military life may create enhanced resiliency (Baptist et al., 2015; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Palmer, 2008; Wiens & Boss, 2006). Positive experiences in overcoming challenges create enhanced self-efficacy that feeds forward to the next challenge, creating a chain reaction (Rutter, 1999) and suggesting growth and maturation (Baptist et al., 2015; Chapin, 2011). Cumulative effects may also be experienced; for example, a family may fare well during the first deployment, with issues emerging during the second or third (Baptist et al., 2015; Masten, 2013). Villagran et al. (2013) referred to previous research that has identified groups who may be more vulnerable to low levels of efficacy under these conditions, including military families who have younger spouses and small children at home, as well as single-parent families (Wright et al., 2013). Families struggling with a persistent condition such as PTSD or a child's disability may also experience lower levels of resiliency (Palmer, 2008; Russo & Fallon, 2015; Saltzman et al., 2011).

Discussion

Military Family Resilience and Resiliency: The Evidence

The quality of the literature examined in this narrative review was mixed. The body of research consisted of both qualitative and quantitative studies. In the qualitative studies, interviews were used; however, analysis tended to remain at the level of theme identification, thus lacking a deeper exploration of the topics at hand. Surveys and questionnaires were commonly used in the quantitative studies and often modified to meet the study objectives, thereby potentially compromising the utility of the measures. A commonly used measure of program efficacy was evaluation of satisfaction, which does not provide the necessary evidence to measure change.

Articles that were perspective and review in nature advocated for a strength-based approach and advocated for the importance of this when informing policy and practice. Several theoretical articles were included to give context to the experiences of military life on spousal relationships, child development, overall family functioning, and intervention approaches (Palmer, 2008; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Saltzman et al., 2011).

The Families OverComing Under Stress (FOCU.S.) program was the subject of four of the reviewed papers, including one quantitative research article, a program description, and two theoretical overviews. This body of work has contributed to developing a thorough understanding of the scientific rigor as well as the utilization of the program with military families.

Military Family Resilience and Resiliency: A Synthesis of Models

We present a synthesis (Figure 1) of military family resilience and resiliency factors that represent the key themes emerging from this narrative review, specifically intrafamilial factors, processes that enhance military family resilience, and family–context interactions. The synthesis reinforces contemporary conceptions of resilience and resiliency focusing on the dynamic interplay of individual, psychological traits and family and community factors (Oshri et al., 2015; Saltzman, 2016). Bowen and Martin's (2011) and Patterson's (2002a) characterizations of resilience as process and resiliency as outcome provide a useful framework for understanding contemporary military family experience. This distinction is evident in our synthesis.

An understanding of the dynamic character of interactions ongoing between and among ecological levels is significant to this synthesis of military family resilience and resiliency models. The levels—micro to macro—are not discrete. As Figure 1 depicts, levels coalesce to create a nested arrangement of interacting, concentric circles, with those closer to the center, or microsystem, enveloped by those that

FIGURE 1. SYNTHESIS OF MILITARY FAMILY RESILIENCY FACTORS.
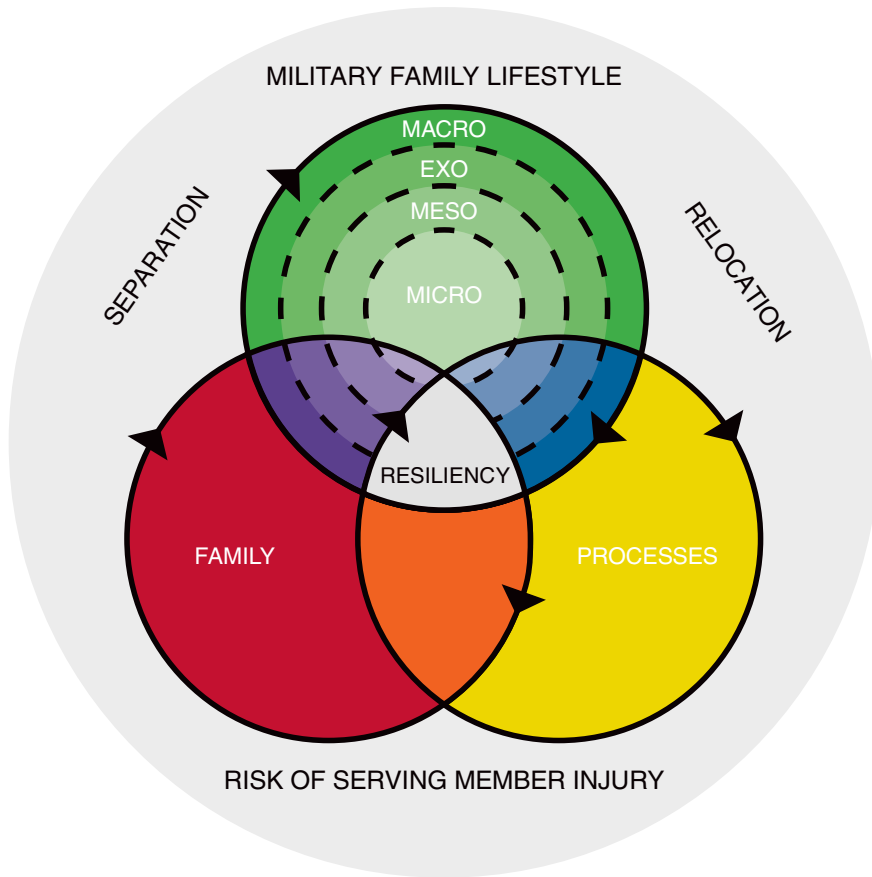
are farther away (Rosa & Tudge, 2013). Risk, relocation, and separation, described previously as facets of experience distinguishing military families from their civilian counterparts, and highlighted in Figure 1 as integral to the military family lifestyle, are nonnormative stressors that necessitate ecological transitions (Rosa & Tudge, 2013) for military families across these levels. "Primary mechanisms" (Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, & Karnik, 2009) enable military families to make sense of their lifestyle contexts and accommodate the ecological transitions required.

Figure 1 offers further understanding of the dynamic exchanges through its emphasis on the intersection of ecological levels, family processes, and intrafamilial factors. The arrows reflect the fluidity of exchanges ongoing between these three facets of the model.

CONTEXT MATTERS: MILITARY FAMILY RESILIENCY FROM AN ECOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The context component of the synthesis is conceptualized ecologically. The integration of an ecological perspective into the model contributes to the development of a nuanced and multifactor conceptualization of the risk and protective factors that coalesce in a cumulative or additive manner to either enhance or diminish resiliency. As noted by Shaw, McLean, Taylor, Swartout, and Querna (2016), the ecological model provides a mechanism for translating the multifaceted and multilevel conceptualization of resilience into research questions examining the facets and levels and dynamic interactions between and among them. Therefore, integration of this framework into the synthesis is warranted.

The ecological framework depicts individuals and families as embodied in a system that comprises interdependent levels of the environment, referred to as macrosystem, exosystem, mesosystem, and microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). The levels function interdependently such that interactions between and among the levels are dynamic and bidirectional.

The macrosystem level of the environment comprises sociohistorical ideologies and cultural values embedded in everyday life (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, 1986). For military families, military ideologies such as unit solidarity and primary loyalty to the regimental system characterize the military as a unique culture (Winslow, 1999). These ideologies fulfill important organizational imperatives for the military and are rendered visible in the daily practices of members, veterans, and their families (Norris, 2001). Cultural identification through adherence to ideology has the potential to enhance a sense of belonging, an outcome fostered through resilience (Dekel, 2016; Masten, 2001), and to mediate perceptions of normative stressors, as noted in the results of this narrative review.

Community resilience may also be enhanced through cultural identification and belonging, as all members of the culture work together communally to cope with stress and adversity (Rossetto, 2015). Exosystems provide a regulatory structure for the organization and governance of community supports that operate at the local level. For military families, military family policies that potentially or actually affect capacity for resiliency are examples of exosystem structures. The mesosystem refers to the relations between individuals, often involving the intersection of microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). It is at this level where social supports, as noted in this review, are highlighted. Social supports include community resources and interpersonal relationships in the everyday context. Military family support programs offered through military family resource centers are examples of mesosystem resources for military families. Microsystems are the settings in which individuals participate directly (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These can include family, friends, and formal and nonformal caregivers. At this level, military families manage adversity through taking responsibility and seeking support (Rossetto, 2015), as well as finding shared meaning in adverse events (Dekel, 2016).

Intrafamilial Factors

The second intersecting component of the synthesis of military family resilience literature brings intrafamilial factors into view, specifically environmental pressures (chronic stressors) and pulses (acute stressors) (Lawton, 1977, 1986; Lawton & Nahemow, 1973). There is growing evidence that responding positively to stressors helps reinforce and consolidate resilience skills (Ungar, 2012), building the "steeling effects" (Rutter, 1999) noted in earlier studies. This focus is analogous with conceptualizations of resiliency prominent in this narrative review that emphasize both intrafamilial strengths mobilized during times of stress and predisposing factors, including prior strains and meanings, or definitions of the situation, that will variously challenge or enhance or hinder growth (Crane & Searle, 2016). The challenge–hindrance stressor framework (Cavanaugh, Boswell, Roehling, & Boudreau, 2000; LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005) and the environmental press construct are useful facets of the synthesis of military family resilience models presented here.

Family Processes

The third significant element in our synthesis of military family resilience and resiliency models emphasizes process. Processes significant to military families as evidenced through this review are family belief systems, organizational patterns, and open communication.

Maintaining underlying belief systems is a significant family process influencing how families perceive crises and make meaning out of adversity (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Villagran et al., 2013). Walsh (2003) noted that contextualizing adversity helps families navigate stressful circumstances together, a process wherein they gain a "sense of coherence" as they come to view the problem as something they can handle as they learn about the resources available to address it. Contextualizing adversity also reinforces a shared identity as a "military family," ascribing a set of beliefs attached to broader military culture shaping family members' understanding of their experience (Bowen et al., 2013).

Clear hierarchical organization and boundary management are instrumental organizational

processes (Oshri et al., 2015; Riggs & Riggs, 2011; Wiens & Boss, 2006) for resilient military families intent on adhering to a "battle rhythm" that supports turning "chaos into consistency" (Villagran et al., 2013, p. 778) when faced with "presses" and "pulses" (Lawton, 1977, 1986; Lawton & Nahemow, 1973) and "challenge" and "hindrance" stressors (Crane & Searle, 2016).

Open communication emerges from the narrative review as a third process fostering attachment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011) and supports collaboration and shared decision making (Saltzman, 2016; Saltzman et al., 2011; Saltzman et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2014; Wright et al., 2013). These processes support a flexible and cohesive family structure and prime families for resiliency.

Points of Tension

The translation of research knowledge into practice is complex and slow (Graham et al., 2006), and there appears to be a knowledge-to-practice gap between the research-informed modeling of military family resilience and policy and programming on the front lines. For instance, in the RAND Corporation's list of the U.S. Department of Defense and Institute of Medicine definitions of *resilience*, the emphasis remains on marshaling individual resources and overcoming adversity rather than on the dynamic family–context system interaction shift that the narrative review reveals (Meadows et al., 2015). Although a military family may, at any given time, have the potential to draw on its intrafamilial resources, that ability is necessary but not sufficient for that family to experience resiliency; rather, a supportive context and effective processes with which to interact with that context are also required.

Many military families are, in fact, enjoying a state of resiliency; however, we advance that there are risks to the statement "military families are resilient"—risks that transfer blame and shame to them if they are not able to achieve a state of resiliency. Military families are resilient—until they are not. Like all families, if enough environmental presses and pulses cluster, a state of resiliency can deteriorate under the right intensity, duration, and frequency of normative and nonnormative stressors, or environmental pulses. If, for example, a military family that has had many opportunities to

develop and refine its resilience repertoire and has weathered several deployments and many relocations faces, within a few short months, a child requiring specialized medical and education support, an injured military member transitioning back home, and a grandparent with declining health in a distant location, a resilient family may falter. Such an experience may be both realistic and foreseeable, as any given family system has limits on its adaptability and flexibility.

We run the risk that the current emphasis on building resilience at the levels of individual and family system may be stigmatizing for some families. The need for supports superseding cultural expectations of self-reliance may incite stigmatized reactions (Bowen & Martin, 2011). Resiliency-enhancing programs have become part of the culture for serving personnel but have not yet extended in a systematic fashion to other family members (Villagran et al., 2013). Recent advances in interdisciplinary resilience research suggest that the emphasis on community is most neglected when looking to enhance the experience of resiliency (Shaw et al., 2016). Shaw et al. (2016) highlight the "dark side" of an excessive focus on the individual, which can "put too much blame on specific individuals for broad, systemic injustices and disadvantages and too much responsibility on these individuals to overcome them" (Hamby, Banyard, & Grych, 2016, p. 4).

The military family resilience and resiliency literature synthesized in a thorough narrative review of the interdisciplinary literature in this article creates opportunities for future researchers to frame the dimensions of resiliency they wish to explore, as well as to refine and validate the synthesis. It may also create the opportunity for anticipatory resource enhancement designed to promote sustainment of the resiliency state for military families. Rather than a reactive, downstream resource response, consideration of the synthesized areas of emphasis for military families revealed in this review could facilitate preventative responses through the early identification of patterns of risk that diminish the capacity for resiliency. Evaluations of family-centered prevention initiatives reinforce the relevance of resiliency enhancement (Hamby et al., 2016, p. 4). One pilot study focusing on the effectiveness of a psychological resilience program for military spouses was associated with decreased anxiety and greater

life engagement (Lester et al., 2012; Lester et al., 2013).

Currently, as conceptual ambiguity about resilience and resiliency persists, it remains challenging to develop and test effective assessments and interventions designed to promote resiliency for military families. Developing more comprehensive tools that allow for understanding of the resiliency experience of the family system will require expansion beyond the individual unit of analysis that has historically predominated (Hamby et al., 2016). The current constellation of resiliency-enhancing programs "represents an investment that is based in models that are fundamentally atheoretical and often lack an understanding and corresponding investment in the social—the broadly defined formal and informal relationships that are requisite for successful human existence" (Bowen & Martin, 2011, p. 163). Programs have emerged from good intentions, but they lack systematic monitoring and evaluation (Kees & Rosenblum, 2015). Accurate and reliable conceptualizations of resilience processes and resiliency outcomes, along with the complex and dynamic interaction of family systems with their current contexts, are critical to inform and shape effective military family programming. Validated theoretical grounding will enable dyadic intrafamilial dynamics to be explored, along with how those dyads affect and are affected by the broader family network. Further research will reveal which areas of significance revealed through this review are most amenable to change and yield the greatest return on investment.

Methods such as community-based participatory research could extend research capacity to the system level. Social network analysis exploring network density and reciprocity and the intersections and transactions across multiple levels within the resiliency model would accomplish the same objective (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Ohye & Bui, 2016). The broader resiliency research has recently highlighted the need to qualitatively understand the nature of the social support that is available. Binary analyses of social support that merely note its presence or absence need to be augmented with research examining the nature, accessibility, reciprocity, and formality of the relations ongoing in social support networks (Saltzman et al., 2013). Finally, the determination of resiliency, and who is the best

judge of whether it is present, remains elusive. Self-reports have recognized limitations, but there are alternatives, such as the Situational Judgment Test, which uses scenarios to determine knowledge, values, skills, and attitudes (Shaw et al., 2016). This type of approach could proactively reveal aspects of family functioning that diminish capacity for resiliency.

The developmental nature of resiliency has not been well explored. The field would be enriched by longitudinal research that follows how military families develop, achieve, and sustain a state of resiliency throughout a military life course that would include deployments, protracted separations, relocations, and potential health, education, and employment factors for serving members, spouses, and dependents.

REVIEW LIMITATIONS

Narrative reviews are not used to evaluate the quality of included studies. It is possible that the addition of other databases would have returned different results. It is possible that some sources were excluded that would have supplemented the current review because they did not specifically use the inclusion terms, and that a different team may have organized the synthesis differently (Rumrill & Fitzgerald, 2001). The literature continues to emphasize a heteronormative nuclear family with a single serving member; this may not be reflective of today's family diversity and transforming family roles that have as yet unidentified impacts on military family resiliency. Moreover, the variance and disparity of the military family resilience field concerning definition and measurement demands that researchers move beyond historic notions of resilience to critically examine and develop evidence that captures the complexity of the construct and creates opportunities to develop and test programs. At present, the ability to identify the mechanisms, processes, resources, and contextual elements that contribute to or detract from military family resilience is limited. The field requires further quantitative investigation of the prevalence and incidence of military family resiliency, longitudinal studies, refinement of measurement tools, and qualitative exploration of contexts, processes, and meanings pertinent to this population. Now that the diverse elements of the theoretical modeling of resilience and resiliency among military families have been synthesized, consideration of the strengths and

limitations of available empirical data addressing military family resilience and resiliency is warranted.

Conclusion

The synthesis of military family resilience and resiliency literature presented in this article was developed through a systematic and comprehensive narrative review of 20 articles examining models, theories, and frameworks focusing on military family resilience and resiliency. Five themes emerged from the review: There is a distinction between resilience and resiliency; intrafamilial factors constitute one element of resilience and resiliency for military families; military families engage in processes that enhance military family resiliency; context matters; and military family resiliency is the outcome of dynamic, interactive processes ongoing between military families and their contexts. Using these themes as a guide, a synthesis was developed in an effort to introduce conceptual coherence to the research on military family resilience. Issues of definitional ambiguity, inconsistent operationalization of variables, and challenges in measurement have the potential to be addressed through this synthesis and subsequent iterations resulting from validation of key components. The synthesis emphasizes interactive processes ongoing between individual and/or familial traits and social and/or environmental factors on multiple levels across the macro-, exo-, meso-, and microsystems, and as such, it counters reductive and monolithic conceptualizations emphasizing resiliency as an outcome of innate capacities.

While formative, the synthesis has the potential to impart clarity and consistency to the use of definitions of resiliency in research focusing on military families. The emphasis on process in the synthesis could inspire further interest in understanding capacities and resources that support situational experience with stressors aligned with the normative and nonnormative imperatives of the military institution. Nuances and complexities of military family resiliency that have, to this point, remained invisible, may emerge through further analysis of this synthesis, potentially countering stigmatized responses to military families who are judged to have less resiliency and informing the development of proactive resiliency-enhancing programs and services for military families. Moreover,

recognition of the multidimensionality of the resiliency construct inherent in the synthesis could prompt integrative, multidisciplinary research enhancing scientific rigor and ongoing theory development.

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