`

EXPLORING GENDER SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES OF ADOLESCENTS'

PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR EXPERIENCES THROUGHOUT THE PHASES OF PARENTAL

MILITARY DEPLOYMENT

by

LESLIE ARLEE GLADNEY

(Under the Direction of Jay A. Mancini)

ABSTRACT

The current study explored and expanded current literature on adolescents' experiences with parental military deployment. Adolescents provided pivotal perspectives of their experiences with their families and peers during each phase (pre, during, post/reintegration) of parental deployment. A sample of 75 youth aged 11-18 years participated in focus groups around the country at Operation Military Kids summer camps in 2008. Data were examined using content latent analysis to reveal possible variation in adolescents' expressions of their experiences according to each deployment phase. Additionally, data were examined to explore possible similarities and differences between boys and girls. Symbolic interaction theory and family stress theory framed the study's approach. Results indicate that adolescents expressed having difficulty in adjusting to their parents' military deployment. Both boys and girls shared similar family experiences during their parents' deployment. Adolescents were also concerned for their family members' ability to cope.

INDEX WORDS: adolescents, youth, military deployment, gender, symbolic interaction theory, family stress theory

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DEDICATION

To all the young people around the world who need their voices heard.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The military lifestyle is unique and complex, wherein families may face challenges in their capabilities to adjust to situations such as multiple relocations or deployments to war zones. Since the start of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, an increasing number of researchers have taken interest in studying the lives of military members and their families. However, despite this surge in interest, much of the literature concerning military families is neither empirical nor theoretically based. Many assumptions abound concerning military members and their families, yet supporting evidence is lacking. A number of investigators have conducted research that has advanced the knowledge base, particularly in attempting to learn more about adolescents' experiences with parental deployment (e.g., Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2011; Kelley, 2003; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009; Segal & Segal, 2004; Weber & Weber, 2005; Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, & Oglesby, 2011). Although researchers recognize the importance of studying adolescents in the context of parental military deployment, some researchers who actually gathered data from adolescents themselves include the work of Bradshaw, Sudinaraset, Mmari, and Blum (2010), Mmari et al. (2009), Huebner and Mancini (2005, 2010).

Listening to the voices of adolescents in military families can refine the focal points of researchers', educators', and policy makers', as well as prevention and intervention program professionals' efforts to understand and strengthen the lives of military families. The following

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chapter begins with an overview of information on military life today, typical aspects of what goes on during the social developmental stage of adolescence, and how gender development and the socialization of emotion come into play in terms of how and why adolescents may express themselves when they discuss their experiences. Continuing on, a review of recent literature on military adolescents' relationships with their parents, siblings, and friends/peers, as well as findings on how military adolescents make adjustments in school follows. Finally, the use of a theoretical framework encapsulates all of the components of the literature review, providing a strong basis for the current study.

The purpose of the current study was to explore ways in which adolescents vocalized their experiences while their families endured parental military deployment. Specifically, this study compared variances between ways that adolescent girls expressed themselves versus how adolescent boys expressed themselves in how they discussed their feelings and experiences they had while their parents' deployed. The goal is to uncover how adolescents voiced their perspectives of their experiences they had during their parents' military deployment.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Military Life Today

Since the War on Terror began in the Middle East, many researchers are now focusing their attention on military personnel and their families. With varying types of media available to report events that are occurring within the U.S. military, more people are concerned with military families' well-being (Huebner & Mancini, 2005). Now that the war in Iraq ended and the war in Afghanistan is ending, knowledge of how well military personnel and their families adjust to life post-war will be of interest for years to come.

Description of the deployment cycle gives contextual meaning to what military families endure. There are three main phases of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration/post-deployment (Huebner & Mancini, 2010). The pre-deployment phase starts when a service member receives deployment orders and ends once the service member leaves home. This phase can range from a few weeks to more than a year. The phase of deployment is the period in which the service member is away from home on an assigned mission. Reintegration/post-deployment takes place when the service member returns home, and reunites with the family. The time that service members are at home is also variable, and is dependent upon the needs of the military (Huebner & Mancini, 2010).

Much of the literature on military personnel and their families are not supported by data-based empirical evidence, thereby adding to misunderstandings of the military population. It is challenging to describe the life of a typical military family, not only because of the empirical

information that is currently available, but also because there is such wide variation within the military (e.g., branch,-Active Duty Component vs. Reserve Component, rank, location, race/ethnicity, and age of children) (Department of Defense, 2010). Moreover, there is an even greater deficiency in the literature in the area of understanding the lives of military families with adolescent children. Therefore, for the current study, examining adolescents' perceptions of what went on within their families during parental military deployment is a starting point to gain insight of how researchers might make connections in understanding the uniqueness of what military families endure.

The Social Developmental Stage of Adolescence

Adolescence is a critical period of development in which individuals experience many changes in their lives that are complicated by increasingly interwoven relationships with their parents, peers, siblings, and romantic partners (Collins, Gleason, & Sesma, 1997; Collins & Laursen, 2004; Laursen, 2012). In order to appropriately discuss literature on military families with adolescent children, it is important to provide background information on adolescents. Because this study is not primarily centered on adolescents' development, a brief explanation of adolescents' continued social development and the adjustments they make within their relationships and environments presents a contextual level of understanding the complexities of their lives as they experience military parental deployment. Without some explanation of normative adolescent social development, it is difficult to begin to understand how military life may have an effect on them.

Hafen, Laursen, and DeLay (2012) provide a conceptual overview of the types of influences (e.g., peer and parental) adolescents experience. The changes adolescents experience with their peers are a result of changes in their relationships with their parents. Furthermore, a

give-and-take relationship exists between parent-adolescent and peer-peer relationships during this time. Investigators posit that the influences adolescents experience with their parents is a shared process between peers and parents (Hafen et al., 2012). Parents and peers "start off as unique sources of influences" (Hafen et al., 2012, p. 71), and, overtime, their influences become more integrated (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Adolescents' relationships with their parents assist in providing guidance for how adolescents make friends as well as maintain friendships (Parke & Buriel, 1998).

Relationships are an integral part of adolescents' developmental transition during this stage. Sroufe, Egeland, and Carlson (2009) contend that successful peer relationships take place based on parent-child caregiving foundations. Also, adolescents' "prior peer experiences, the history of relationships within the family, and current support" they receive are all factors that are associated with their peer relationship success (Sroufe et al., 2009, p. 239). Throughout the course of development, as children move to each new stage of schooling (i.e., primary, middle, and secondary), they spend an increasing amount of time away from home and away from their parents. Hafen and colleagues (2012) and Laursen (2012) explain that as adolescents spend less time with their parents, they also have less individual interaction with teachers, but more interaction with students in their schools. An increase in peer-peer interaction allows adolescents to form their own unique culture (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Peer culture development gives rise to adolescents' increased desire to fit in with their new peer group; placing new social and emotional demands on their relationship needs (Hafen et al., 2012). If adolescents are able to balance their family relationships as well as their peer relationships, they tend to have more positive relationships and success in school (Sroufe et al., 2009).

Balancing various types of relationships may depend on the ways in which adolescents share their experiences as they make adjustments in their relationships with others. Adolescents typically rely on peer relationships during this time of their social development, so the possibility of figuring out how to balance their relationships with peers coupled with complexities of being part of a military family may be difficult. The discussion of key aspects of the social developmental stage of adolescence illustrates the importance of acknowledging typical things that adolescents may experience during this transitional period; thus, setting the stage for what adolescents may be going through in their lives outside of military life experiences.

<center>**Gender Development and Socialization of Emotion**</center>

Military youths' experiences with parental deployment and the ways in which they discuss their perspectives of what occurred in their lives during each phase of deployment is the central focus of the current study. Over time, researchers found variation in how individuals verbally share their experiences based on gender norms (Epstein & Ward, 2011). Therefore, background information on gender development and the socialization of emotion sets the stage for possible gender differences found in the sample of the present study.

Gender Development

Gender development is the process of demonstrating how children should act based on gender norms (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Stryker, 1964). Multiple factors comprise gender development, and some aspects include parents, siblings, religion, media, friends, and grandparents (Epstein, & Ward, 2011). Leaper, Anderson, and Sanders (1998) offer that a main issue with literature focused on gender development is those researchers' results tend to have wide variation. In some cases, when researchers do find differences between boys' and girls' gender development they are often not significantly different (Leaper et al., 1998). Although

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many factors are associated with gender development, researchers have found parents/caretakers to be the most influential, especially since they are often the earliest stable individuals in a child's life (Ruble, Martin, & Berenbaum, 2006).

Socialization is a lifetime process starting from birth and ending with death; however, researchers often solely focus on the socialization of young children (Epstein, & Ward, 2011; Stryker, 1964). Since parents are typically the most influential individuals in a young person's development, parents are often the focus of studies concerning children's socialization. Researchers (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Klimes-Dougan, 1997) suggest four ways that parents have an effect on their children's socialization. The first way consists of parents/caretakers giving their children gendered-type toys, chores and activities (Blakemore, Berenbaum, & Liben, 2008; Witt, 1997). Second, parents/caretakers engage in gendered behaviors with their children (Leaper et al., 1998; McHale, Crouter, & Whiteman, 2003). Third, parents/caretakers act as role models by demonstrating female and male interactions within their family (e.g., gendered divisions of household labor) (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002; Mischel, 1966). Finally, verbal messages and communication help parents/caretakers pass on their gender expectations and ideals (e.g., telling daughters to play with dolls but not with trucks) (Epstein & Ward, 2011; McHale et. al, 2003).

Even though verbal communication is a key area of gender socialization, few researchers have focused their work on how parents/caretakers influence their children in this manner, but instead only focus on activities (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Kennedy Root & Denham, 2010). Epstein and Ward's study is one of the first of its kind that examined the amount and content of parents' verbal communication with their adolescents and young adults. Although the focus of the current study was not on parents' experiences with military deployment, the amount of

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information adolescents share about their communication with their parents is relevant for the purposes of this study to explore if there was any indication of gender differences in verbal communication between adolescents and parents.

Epstein and Wards' (2011) approach to verbal communication research focused on both traditional and egalitarian messages, and they found that gender socialization might possibly be more egalitarian than investigators once thought. Parents with adolescents and young adults may express their gender beliefs more similarly for both males and females. The innovativeness of Epstein and Ward's work adds to the literature on the importance of exploring the bigger picture of ways in which parents/caretakers may influence their children's gender development. Their study also highlights the need for more research in the area of how and on what level parents/caregivers influence their children at older ages.

Emotion Socialization

Throughout children's development, they constantly view and model the behavior of others around them, especially their parents, as they create and develop their own expressive behavior (Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007). Emotion socialization of adolescents is the idea that with increased age and development, parental expectations of appropriate emotional behavior of their adolescents also increases (Klimes-Dougan, 1997). With the increase in age and development, older children are able to internalize parental expectations of how they should behave with less input from their parents.

Since there is little extant research on emotional socialization of adolescents, reasonable connections are made to research on adults. For adults, research on emotional socialization highlights how and in what ways males and females communicate various emotions (Guerrero, Jones, & Boburka, 2006). Guerrero and colleagues believe that the main gender difference in

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emotional expression is that women tend to focus more on maintaining interpersonal relationships through emotional expression than men. Men and women communicate differently on how they express positive affect, anger and aggression, sadness and depression, and jealousy. Despite the research on emotional expression of adults, research on emotion socialization of adolescents is in its infancy; therefore, much work is necessary to advance this area of research (Klimes-Dougan, 1997).

In 1997, Klimes-Dougan stated that research in the area of emotion socialization of adolescents was in its infancy, and a decade later, the research still has not moved forward as was expected. Zeman, Klimes-Dougan, Cassano, and Adrian (2007) suggest that in order to capture the level of detail needed to understand adolescents' emotion socialization, multi-method measurements are necessary. The use of multi-method measurements will advance research on emotion socialization of adolescents, which could in turn help researchers gain better understandings of ways parents/caretakers connect the sociocultural norms within the given society in which they live with how they assist their adolescents' emotion socialization (Klines-Dougan, 1997; Saarni, 1998). Perhaps responses from adolescents in the present study will provide some insight into how researchers can begin to understand possible ways in which parents' emotion socialization may influence how adolescents express their experiences during parental deployment. For example, adolescents' responses may reveal that their parents tell them to 'be the man of the house' while they are away on deployment.

The increased need to manage and devote time to a variety of relationships may be especially difficult for adolescents in military families. Within military culture, a large proportion of families face frequent relocations and deployments which has the possibility of making it difficult for adolescents to balance peer and family life if they have not been allotted

the time needed to create their own peer culture (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Adolescents in Huebner and Mancini's 2005 and 2010 studies recounted holding their feelings inside and suppressing their emotions as a strategy of adjusting to parental deployment, which may be indicative of their gender development as well as their emotion socialization. The next section explores adolescents' relationships and adjustments in the context of military families who have experienced parental deployment.

Military Adolescents' Family and Friend/Peer Relationships

Parent-Adolescent Relationships

At-Home Parent. Most of the deployments during the War on Terror last at least 12 months per service member (Huebner & Mancini, 2008). The extended period that military members are away from home due to war may influence individual family members as well as the family as a whole. Researchers who study military family dynamics have found that when at-home parents adjust well to the change in family structure due to deployment, adolescents also have fewer difficulties in their adjustments with their families, peers, and in school (Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner et al., 2007; Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2011; Kelley, 2003). In related studies with civilian samples, researchers have found a significant relationship between parents' positive emotional expression and their children's positive emotional expression, and found connections to children's positive relationships with peers and even caregiving behaviors with siblings (Garner, Jones, Gaddy, & Rennie, 1997; Isley, O'Neil, Clatfelter, & Parke, 1999). The similarities between military versus civilian samples shows that although military families are a subgroup of the larger U. S. population, military families experience comparable experiences within their families that civilian families also experience.

Interestingly, most of the studies that obtained information regarding military parent-adolescent relationships collect information from mothers (e.g., Chandra et al., 2010), or the authors do not make a distinction of who the at-home caregiver was during deployment (e.g., Lara-Cinisomo et al. 2010). The Department of Defense (2010) reported that 14.4% of the Active Duty force is female and 17.9% of the Selected Reserve (Guard and Reserve) are female; however, no available studies were located that focused on female deployed parent-adolescent relationships. Since the number of women in the military is considerable, there is a definite need for researchers to include them in their studies whenever possible.

To assess adolescents' well-being throughout the deployment cycle, Chandra and colleagues (2010) used computer-assisted telephone interviews to gather information from at-home caregivers (95% were women) and their adolescent children. The sample of the study came from 11-17 year old 2008 Operation Purple camp attendees, which is a national camp established by the National Military Family Association. Operation Purple camp offers a free summer camp for military children between seven to 17 years of age who have parents who have in the past, present, or near future experienced deployment (National Military Family Association, 2012). This camp helps military children by teaching them coping mechanisms they can use to deal with their parents' deployment.

Chandra et al. (2010) found that some adolescents who did not cope well with parental deployment also had at-home caregivers who had trouble coping emotionally, some participants reported adolescents problems with academic engagement, and problem behaviors. In addition, girls found it more challenging to deal with their parents' deployment, yet that finding was not statistically significant. Despite the coping issues the authors found in the results of the study, it is difficult to ascertain the severity of adolescents' coping issues because Chandra and colleagues

provide little explanation of specific types of difficulties that adolescents faced regarding

parental deployment. Therefore, it is difficult to apply their findings to the larger military

adolescent population due to the lack of explanation provided in the results.

In contrast to the methodology previously described, results from Huebner and Mancini's

(2005) focus group study offer more detailed information on adolescents' experiences during

parental deployment. The researchers asked adolescents if they saw changes in their mothers'

well-being, behaviors, and attitudes while their fathers deployed. Themes found within their

responses included issues of depression, their parent being quick to anger, their parent being

stressed-out, and changes in their relationship with their mothers. Huebner and Mancini (2005)

found that many adolescents observed increases in their mothers' absent-mindedness, the amount

of time their mothers slept, their mothers being "snappy" (or short-tempered), and being

concerned with their mothers having more responsibilities than before their parent left home

(e.g., household tasks and work). Some adolescents even expressed concerns of wanting to

protect their mothers from extra stress and negative emotions. Additionally, adolescents

discussed feeling additional stress due to an increase in their responsibilities at home.

Adolescents as co-parents and companions. While parents deploy, changes in roles and

responsibilities within the family unit are commonalities in adolescents' family relationships

(Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner et al.,

2007). During the time that their parent was away, many adolescents expressed that their at-

home parent looked to them for assistance in taking care of their younger siblings, especially if

their at-home parent worked outside of the home full-time, or were attending school (Huebner &

Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner et al., 2007). Huebner and colleagues

(2005; 2010) also report that adolescents felt that their at-home parents looked to them as

companions because their parent confided in them more than ever and on issues that the adolescents usually witnessed their parents discussing with each other, and not with them. Adolescents described the heightened level of responsibilities of caring for themselves, their siblings, and their at-home parents as being very stressful. The types of role changes that adolescents experienced with at-home parents reflect their relationships with their deployed parent.

Deployed Parent. Most military personnel experience not only prolonged deployments but also multiple deployments. The extensive work time that is required from military personnel is said to be what makes the military "greedy" (Segal & Segal, 2004), and military parents miss a large portion of their families' live. A consequence of the shortened period that military personnel are at home between deployments (dwell time) is that researchers have had diminished opportunities to obtain their point of view on their relationships with their adolescents (Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, & Oglesby, 2011). With advancements in technology, families are more often able to communicate during the deployment phase. Email and telephone calls were the most prevalent form of communication in Huebner and Mancini's study (2005).

Recently, Willerton and colleagues (2011) explored military fathers' perspectives of how they deal with being away from their children for long periods. Their study was the only study found of its kind in which military fathers provided accounts of their perceptions of their parenting skills in light of experiencing extended periods away from home due to deployment. The researchers asked military fathers to discuss their involvement with their adolescents, and their feelings about relationships with their adolescents. Focus groups took place around the world at several U.S. military installations; fathers had various experiences in the military and had children of differing ages. Fathers with adolescent children conveyed having the most

distress when handling behavioral issues and providing guidance to their children while deployed. Some battled the decision of whether to stay in the military as a result of feeling guilty about their wives parenting alone.

Additionally, some fathers were surprised at the unanticipated challenges they endured during the reintegration phase of deployment (Wilerton et al., 2011). Fathers had to come up with strategies to readjust to their home environment while also figuring out how their roles as both husband and father could alleviate some of the stressors related to transitioning back home. Wilerton et al.'s study gives a new perspective of the kinds of issues military fathers may grapple with because they decided join and remain in the military even though they often miss out on being available for their families, especially for their children.

Though not a research study conducted with military youth, Denham and colleagues' (2007) research on emotion regulation showed an association between mothers who display great amounts of negative emotional expression and their children in turn holding back their emotions out of fear of ridicule. Therefore, adolescents who suppress their emotions within their family relationships during their parents' deployment may do so because of a history of receiving negative comments from their parents when they expressed their emotions in the past. Chandra and colleagues (2010) obtained perspectives from school staff, and found that 50% of the staff were very concerned for their students' well-being and academic performance due to the amount of responsibilities they took on to co-parent.

In both Huebner and Mancini's (2005; 2010) focus group studies and Chandra and colleagues (2010) study, adolescents felt that during reintegration their families were challenged to readjust their family-life once their deployed parent came home. Despite being excited to have their parent return home, adolescents expressed frustration with having to adjust to any

physical, emotional, and mental changes their military parent was going through (Chandra et al., 2010). The adjustments reported to be unexpected and challenging for the adolescent as well as the rest of their family. Furthermore, some adolescents mentioned maturing during their parent's deployment, but once their parent returned, the changes in their maturity level were not recognized the way that they wanted (Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner et al., 2007). Adolescents wanted their reintegrating parent to respect them based on the growth and development that took place while their parent was away. Changes and challenges throughout the deployment cycle of a military parent also have an effect on adolescents' relationships with their siblings.

Sibling Relationships

East (2009) explains that compared to other stages of development, there has been an insufficient amount of research conducted on sibling relationships during adolescence. Conflict seen within sibling relationships tends to decrease during adolescence (Kim, McHale, & Crouter, 2006), which may occur because of increases in emotional-self control and youth spending more time away from their family (e.g., peer relationships, romantic relationships, extracurricular activities). Parent-child relationships influence sibling relationships as well, especially when mothers and fathers aid in the development of socialization by spending more time with their children (Brody, Stoneman, & Gauger, 1996). Brody and associates suggest that over time, as children grow older, the more time parents spend helping to socialize their children, the more capable their children will become in navigating social interactions, including those with siblings. However, when positive, healthy functioning is not available within a family system, all members of the family, including siblings, are vulnerable to internalizing (e.g., depressions) and externalizing (e.g., physical fights) problems, which can harm relationships between

individual family members as well as the family system (Minuchin, 1988). These typical sibling relationship dynamics help provide a platform to approach what researchers have previously reported regarding sibling relationships during adolescence in military families.

Although family separation due to parental deployment differs from family separation due to parental separation and divorce, both experiences share commonalities in siblings' relationships with each other. Researchers have found that during times when stressful life events occur, such as parental separation and divorce, siblings are more likely to turn to each other for support (e.g., Bush & Ehrenberg, 2003; Gass, Jenkins, & Dunn, 2007; Jenkins & Smith, 1990). It is important to highlight that it is not typical at this developmental stage for adolescents to provide help and nurturance to their younger siblings on the level of co-parenting (East, 2009), which may be contrary for adolescents in military families experiencing parental deployment. For some adolescents, co-parenting responsibilities and change in role may challenge them both physically and emotionally.

Few researchers have studied sibling relationships of military adolescents (Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner et al., 2007). Moreover, providing emotional support and companionship to one's parent is also atypical for adolescents to undertake. In Huebner and colleagues (2007) study, one adolescent wished he/she could have had their old life back (pre-deployment), but they held back their emotions, and did not discuss them with their families. Therefore, even though adolescents take on the new role of co-parenting their younger siblings during the deployment phase, it is possible that their relationships with their siblings change. It is possible that the responsibilities and time that is required to co-parent will lead to negative consequences for adolescents' development and maintenance of their peer relationships.

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Friend/Peer Relationships

During adolescence, a crucial component of identity-formation is that adolescents are able to formulate their own peer culture (Hafen et al., 2012). Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, and Blum (2010) found that losing peer connections due to frequent relocations was the largest source of stress that adolescents reported. Having to leave friends behind and start over at a new school, possibly a new city, state, or even country, has the potential to grossly impact adolescents' capacity for being able to connect with peers. On the other hand, some adolescents' reported that making new friends with other military adolescents was easy (Mmari et al., 2010). However, making new friends may not be as easy for individuals who mainly interact with civilian adolescents, especially individuals from Guard and Reserve families, because they typically do not live near military installations or attend schools that have large numbers of military students.

In Mmari and colleagues' (2010) study, both parents and school personnel agreed that when schools have resources concerning how to best address the unique challenges military families endure, adolescents would have more success in school and within their peer relationships. School personnel wanted to build better connections between the school system and the military in hopes of strengthening military adolescents' peer, student-teacher, and family relationships. In cases where there is not much support in schools regarding military culture, some adolescents felt that their peers were insincere when they talked about their parents' deployment (Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini, 2010). When adolescents feel like they cannot turn to their peers for support, it may negatively influence their school engagement, especially if they feel like they are unable to express their feelings (Huebner et al., 2007).

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Military Adolescents' Adjustments in School Environments

Recently, in June 2010 and February 2011, the Department of Defense identified quality education for service members' children as one of the top concerns military families have when it comes to remaining in the military and maintaining morale. As a result, DOD made it a priority to improve the lives of military adolescents and their families, especially in terms of education (The White House, 2011). An example of DOD's effort to ensure military children are receiving quality education, is the establishment of School Liaison Programs (SLPs) across the U.S. Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force (Department of Defense, June, 2010). The intended purposes of SLPs are to assist military families make smooth school transitions as they relocate or experience deployment using formal and informal community-based programs (Aronson, Caldwell, Perkins, & Pasch, 2011). However, as Aronson and colleagues describe, because the SLPs are new programs, and each branch has the flexibility to structure their programs as they deem necessary, it has yet to be determined the adequacy and effectiveness of SLPs.

Many investigators are concerned with military adolescents' adjustment in school, yet few have focused on school adjustment. Huebner and Mancini (2005; 2010) and Houston and colleagues (2009) conducted studies with adolescents and found that a common theme in the discussion was school performance. Some adolescents expressed declines in grades and lower levels of concentration, while others improved their grades to reassure their deployed parent that home-life was going well. Additionally, other students had a hard time adjusting in school because students bullied them because they had an issue with their parents being military members. While conducting a literature search on the topic of school adjustment, only two

recent studies were found in which researchers analyzed military students' school tests scores to measure academic achievement (Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010; Lyle, 2006).

In 2006, Lyle analyzed youths' test scores to study parental absences (i.e. deployments), household relocations, and youths' academic success. Although he found that parental absences had gross negative effects on youths' test scores, the data analyzed were from 1997-1998. Therefore, the results of this study are difficult to apply to military adolescents today for two main reasons: 1) data collection occurred in only one state, Texas, and 2) test taking occurred during 1996-1997. The results of this study lack generalizability because the sample was not representative of the larger military youth population since youth in U.S. military families are geographically dispersed. Additionally, today's military culture differs from that of the mid to late 1990s when the U.S. was in a state of peace. Lyle's study illustrates the importance of how a lack of rigorous conceptualization of a research study can grossly impact the usefulness of data. Moreover, Lyle's study displays the need for continued research efforts concerning military youths' academic success in times of war.

Similarly, Engel and associates (2010) conducted a study that used test scores to measure school adjustment when parents deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. They analyzed test scores from children enrolled in Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools as well as data from the records of their parents' deployment. The researchers found "disruption" effects in children's test performance, which they defined as dramatic decreases in tests scores that occurred during the months that their parent was either deploying or returning home. Therefore, it is possible that children have difficulty in their adjustments because of their parents' departure to war zones, as well as their arrival upon returning home.

Results from Engel and colleagues' (2006) study also have generalizability issues due to the type of information collected. The DoDEA school system is set in place specifically for military children and these schools are located on or near military installations. The results would be more useful if the Engel et al. analyzed students' and their parents' deployment information using various types of school systems (e.g., public, private, mostly civilian vs. few civilian) in their sample because many military youth do not attend DoDEA schools. In contrast to using test scores, Mmari and colleagues (2009) explored deployment issues experienced by adolescents and their families, and found that adolescents had a difficult time adjusting in school during the reintegration phase of deployment. Mmari and colleagues' findings suggest that students in military families, their parents, and school personnel need better preparation, training, and resources on how to deal with the phases of deployment more effectively to help not only military families, but school personnel as well. Findings from Engel et al. (2006) and Mmari et al. (2009) suggests a need for more research to determine what goes on during the reintegration phase of deployment that could be harming youths' school success.

Bradshaw and colleagues' (2010) qualitative study with military students, their parents, and school staff, presents a more dynamic way of understanding military adolescents adjustments to new school environments. The most prevalent stressors participants expressed were: "tension at home, strains on their relationships with peers, adapting to a new school environment, academic challenges, student/teacher relationships, and becoming involved in extracurricular activities" (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p. 90). Students expressed feeling stress in their families due to the unpredictability of moving; some students expressed anger or even protested moving out of their parents' homes. Parents were concerned that the new school their children would be attending would not provide quality education, or that variations in school

policies across school districts/states/countries would hinder their children's academic progress and success. School staff reported that they had a difficult time knowing what was appropriate to say or what measures to take when dealing with topics related to parents' deployment or military service. If school staff members do not have appropriate guidance on how to comfort military students, an additional hurdle for adolescents can arise if they are also not receiving emotional support and comfort at home.

According to Chandra and colleagues' 2010 study in which school staff participated in focus groups, resiliency in military families is diminishing, especially when children experience multiple parental deployments. School staff in this study described the school being a "safe haven" for children who were experiencing increased stress and anxiety at home due to their parents' deployment. Even though staff described many students as coping well with their parents' deployment, some students were clingy and would stay after school for longer periods, which were signs that they were in need of more social and emotional support. Additionally, school staff agreed that parental/guardian characteristics such as values placed on education, parental/guardian mental health status, and levels of supervision in the home and community were key contributing factors to adolescents' functioning. Despite the concerns the school staff expressed regarding military adolescents, it is difficult to ascertain the accuracy of their perceptions since they only "know" the children within the school environment. Even though school staff are key informants in discussions of how adolescents are coping, researchers need to incorporate the use of multiple types of informants in their studies (e.g., adolescents, school staff, parents).

In sum, based on the literature discussed, there is a need for families, friends/peers, schools, and other community organizations to assist their children to adjust and adapt to new

situations and surroundings (Kelley, 2003). The need is especially crucial for adolescents who experience continual change such as those that being a part of the military community demands. During adolescence, they are already going through individual changes, and the unique challenge and complexities of being in a military family may exacerbate other stressors (e.g., puberty) or vice versa during this stage.

Aforementioned literature focused on adolescents in military families who have endured parental military deployment demonstrates that even though researchers are becoming more interested in this area of research a definite gap remains. In spite of the gap, the literature confirms that within all families, adolescents' successful growth and development is dependent upon the relationships they have with other people, especially their families, and their environments. For military families, adolescents' lives are consumed with continuous change. Therefore, their ability to adapt to new situations and environments, as well as their relationships with their families are crucial contributing components to their overall well-being. Applying a theoretical framework to this area of research is a useful way to gain clearer understandings of the intricacies of military adolescents' perceptions of their experiences while dealing with parental deployment.

Theoretical Framework

The current study examines the positive and negative aspects that adolescents in military families describe pertaining to parental deployment, while also highlighting differences in how they may describe their experiences depending on their gender. Since the study is oriented around a pivotal event called the deployment experience, and because of particular interest in the range of adolescent responses, several theoretical perspectives are applicable. A general theory that is relevant is symbolic interaction, and two theories centered on stress and resilience, the

ABC-X Model and the FAAR Model, provide more nuanced guidance for understanding the research data.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

The underlying message of symbolic interaction theory (SI) is that everything an individual says and does are results of their history of words, ideas, feelings, and movements (Cooley, 1964). A basic tenet of SI theory is that individuals attach *meanings* (See Table 1 on p. 32 for Theoretical Terms and Definitions) of the interactions they have with others, objects, events, and their environment (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009; Smith, Hamon, Ingoldsby, & Miller, 2009; Stryker, 1959). *Symbols* form when individuals have shared meanings with others about those specific objects, events, and environments (Aksan, Kisac, Aydin, & Demirbuken, 2009; Cooley, 1964; Smith et al., 2009; Stryker, 1959; Stryker, 1964). For instance, children in military families may have discussions with their families and friends about what their parents' deployment entails. As actors as well as reactors, individuals subjectively create their worlds based on their definitions of their experiences (Plunkett et al., 2007; Stryker, 1959; Stryker, 1964). Overtime, children attach meaning to what deployment means as they grow to understand what typically goes on during this time, and make meaning of deployment. However, since symbols develop through an individual's unique experiences and personal relationships, symbolic meanings of objects can differ from person to person.

The meanings individuals attach to their interactions influence how they interact in social situations, in turn influencing how others react in response (Smith et al., 2009; Stryker, 1959; Stryker, 1964. In order to develop as sense of "*self*" and *identity,* this social process occurs by attaching meaning to interactions, and then individuals internalize their responses to their experiences (Mead, 1934; Stryker, 1968; White & Klein, 2008). An individual's "self" only

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occurs when they are able to view their behaviors and activities in an objective manner by viewing their actions from the point of view of others (Mead, 1934). A related term, *the looking glass self*, or how an individual thinks others perceive them based on social cues they receive from others, occurs once an individual responds to situations and interactions with others and their environment (Cooley, 1964; Smith et al., 2008).

Some adolescents in Huebner and Mancini's focus groups (2005; 2010) discussed having poor interactions with children at school who spoke negatively about the war and about the military. Because of the negative interactions they experienced with other students, some adolescents either reacted by fighting with other students, or they internalized those interactions by shying away from being a part of the military culture and explaining that they did not want their classmates to know their parents were in the military. Therefore, attaching meaning to interactions is a complex and interrelated process individuals develop according to their perceptions of their social interactions (Aksan et al., 2009).

Individuals are influenced on a personal, family, cultural, and societal level (Mead, 1934; Smith et al., 2009; Stryker 1934), so without having an understanding of the subjective meanings individuals apply to their interactions human behavior cannot be understood (Smith et al., 2009; White & Klein, 2008). Therefore, using symbolic interaction theory in the context of the family is an appropriate approach to begin providing explanations of social interactions. As individuals interact with each other and apply meaning to symbols, they learn how they should act in specific situations, which are *social norms* (Smith et al., 2009). For example, adolescents in military families may express their perceptions of the War on Terror based on their interactions in situations with peers, family members, school, or even media portrayals of the war.

The way in which individuals enact social norms depends on their *position* (i.e., father, mother, child, sibling, employee, and student) (Stryker, 1959; Stryker, 1964). Individuals organize positions into a classification system, and for each category, cues help individuals identify expectations for each position. Categories for each position determine appropriate ways to behave, which are *roles*. Roles are patterns of behaviors that are associated with any social situation an individual experiences (Smith et al., 2009; Stryker, 1964; White & Klein, 2008). Stryker contends that roles are the "part" an actor plays because expectations for roles differ depending on both the situation and the individual or group of individuals in which interactions take place. Interpersonal relations occur when family members interact with each other based on social norms using the various roles they possess. *Rituals* develop, assisting them to figure out not only how their individual lives coalesce as a family, but also the salience of their specific roles (Smith et al., 2009).

In typical situations, adolescents already have the position of child, student, and sibling; however, as discussed in the literature review, when military parents have to deploy, they often expect their adolescent incorporate the position of co-parent. When adolescents take on the position of co-parent they not only have to learn their new roles, but also develop rituals within their families to figure out how to navigate each position. It is possible that by the time parents return home post-deployment, adolescents, as well as the family have adjusted and adapted to changes in positions, roles, and rituals, making it challenging to re-adjust to their previous positions, roles, and rituals (Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner & Mancini 2010). Therefore, SI helps frame and contextualize the changes family members experience within their families throughout periods of adjustment.

In sum, symbolic interaction theory sets the stage for how individuals create meaning in their lives from their perspectives to help them understand how they fit in, interact, and adjust to the world around them. Applying symbolic interaction theory to the sample in the current study emphasizes the significance of how researchers can understand what adolescents in military families are going through during parental deployment. Doing so serves as a platform that will allow researchers to have a better, informed sense of ways to approach studying adolescents in military families.

Family Stress Theory

Families endure multiple challenges in their daily lives. Family stress theory primarily incorporates symbolic interaction theory and life course theory, but also includes systems theory, ecological theory, and family developmental theory (Bowen, Martin, & Mancini, in press). By bridging SI and family stress theory, combining key components of the more general theory, SI, and incorporating a more specific theory, family stress theory, addresses research that focuses on participants' perceptions of how they apply meaning to important events in their lives –the deployment experience. Scientists across many disciplines (i.e., family studies, sociology, and psychology) apply stress theories to their research by making predictions of how families respond to stressors by forming linkages within the family system in order to describe their relationships to their environments (Patterson, 1989). Common conceptual themes across disciplines include that illustrate the encompassing nature of how stress theories apply in the context of the family include: "(1) sources of stress, (2) mediators of stress, and (3) outcomes of stress" (Patterson, 1989, p. 203)

Family stress theorists attempt to explain family weaknesses, strengths, and coping processes families use when responding to stressors (Lavee, McCubbin, & Patterson, 1985;

McCubbin & McCubbin, 1989; Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 1989; Patterson, 2002; Weber, 2011).

Using family stress theory can help guide researchers in determining how military families

appraise the added challenges they face (e.g., deployment and relocation) as well as explain the

processes by which they respond to stressors (Huebner et al., 2007; Huebner & Mancini, 2005;

Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Faber et al., 2008; Saltzman et al., 2011).

ABC-X Model. Reuben Hill developed the ABC-X Family Crisis model with his

colleagues during the late 1940s and through the 1950s (Weber, 2011). His model continues to

be the basis for most family stress models (Weber, 2011). Major components of the ABC-X

model include: "A" the stressor event, "B" the resources the family has available to cope with

the stressor, "C" the meaning the family attaches to the crisis event, and "X," the crisis, or

outcome. For the current study, "A" are adolescents' parental military deployment, "B" are the

resources adolescents have to help them cope throughout each phase, "C" are adolescents'

perceptions of how their families make meaning of the situation, and "X" are the outcomes of the

deployment experience based on the adolescents' point of views of the entire experience. During

the 1980s, McCubbin and Patterson developed the Double ABC-X Model of Family Behavior by

exploring longitudinal data of Vietnam Prisoners of War (Patterson, 1988; Weber 2011). Within

this model, post-crisis variables of adaptation were added to predict and provide explanations of

ways and the levels (good to bad) in which families are able to recover from crises (Weber,

2011).

Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response (FAAR) Model. The Double ABC-X

model expanded to "describe the processes by which families achieve precrisis adjustment and

postcrisis adaptation" (Patterson, p. 208). This expansion, the Family Adjustment and

Adaptation and Response (FAAR) model, biopsychosocial in nature, emphasizes interactions

between the individual, the family, and the community systems as families change over time (Patterson, 1989). There are two phases of the FAAR model: 1) the family adjustment phase, and 2) the family adaption phase, wherein family crisis separates each phase. The FAAR model is a theoretical approach that researchers use to uncover family processes when they encounter difficult situations. Therefore, the FAAR model is used as a way to explain family adjustment and adaptation processes for crises such as military parental deployment; whereas, the ABC-X model is unable to show process. There are six elements in the FAAR approach to understanding resilience and stress, beginning with family demands.

  Pileup of family demands. A *family demand* is a condition wherein there is a threat or challenge to the family system, and families need to make changes in their lives (Patterson, 1988; Patterson 1989). When there is an imbalance between a family's perceived demand-capabilities, stress occurs. Demands may give rise to *stressors,* which occur when a life event takes place at a specific time that has the potential to produce change in the family system (Patterson, 1988). Stressors can be normative (e.g., adolescents going through puberty) or non-normative events (e.g., a parent being injured while deployed in a war zone); however, it is important to note that families perceive stressors at different levels of intensity (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 2002). Patterson (1988) describes the element *strain* as tension felt when a family has a need or desire to change something and this component has had a presence within the family system for some time. Strains usually arise from three sources: unresolved tension from prior stressors, ongoing tension due to a lack of meeting role expectations of other family members, or previous family adjustment and family adaptation results that were unfavorable. The sources of strains are a result of a family's history of how they make individual adaptations so that they can

deal with issues within their family (Burgess, 1948), which is a result of their interacting personalities (Burgess, 1926).

       Capabilities. Patterson (1988; 1989; 2002) describes *capabilities* as the potential ways in which a family can meet their demands based on what is available to them (resources), characteristics, traits, or competencies. Personal resources include innate intelligence, knowledge and skills, personality traits, physical and emotional health, a sense of mastery, and self-esteem. Time is an additional important resource because how family members and the family unit manage their demands depends on how they allocate time to address those demands. Family resources consist of cohesion, family bonds and unity, and adaptability/resilience, which is the family's capacity to meet their demands and make adjustments when necessary. Community resources are additional major resources and the social support networks that a family calls upon to assist them to meet demands.

       Because families are constantly dealing with the interactions of stressors and strains, when new stressors arise, existing strains are often exacerbated. This in turn may make it more challenging for the family to use their capabilities to deal with their demands. Military families may use capabilities such as money, intelligence, knowledge and skills, education, personality traits, time, physical health, self-esteem, medical care, schools, religion/spirituality, and social support networks. These resources can thus reduce the number and/or intensity of demands they face, as well as maintain and/or increase the number of resources a family possesses (Patterson, 1989).

       Meanings. Families assess the strains and stressors they encounter and apply *meaning* to their situations through primary and secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal involves the assessment of the strains and stressors placed on the family (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and

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secondary appraisal occurs when the family uses its capabilities to cope with stressors and strains (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 2002). *Situational meanings* are subjective to a family's definitions of their demands, capabilities, and the relationships between the two (Patterson, 1988). Patterson's idea of situational meanings, is a key concept of symbolic interaction theory, illustrating the integration of the two theories. The second level is *global meanings* or family schema, which is how a family views their relationship to each other, their family unit, to the community at-large, and to larger macro systems (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 1989). Therefore, in the case of military families, how they apply meaning to the situation of deploying to a war zone may depend on whether they can accept the transition of the upcoming change in their family with little difficulty or struggle.

       Family adjustment/pre-crisis phase. The *pre-crisis phase* is a phase of homeostasis in the family unit where normal family functioning takes place, including the daily hassles and strains that occur (e.g., marital conflict, poor communication, monthly military trainings) (Patterson, 1988). How well the family is able to adjust to the demands is dependent upon the family's ability to adjust to minor changes that are predictable, while at the same time avoiding major changes that will affect their family system (Patterson, 1988). Family adjustment, also known as family resilience, is a family's ability to "return to a previous way of functioning" (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996, p. 2; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988) when they may be temporarily off course due to encountering stressful situations. Resiliency occurs when a family can rise above traumatic and stressful events by not letting those events immobilize them (Boss, 2006).

       Many researchers write about the concept of resilience, including some researchers who study military family dynamics (e.g., Huebner et al., 2007; MacDermid et al., 2008; Saltzman et al., 2011). For instance, a military family may be accustomed to daily changes and strains of

things such as rivalry between siblings or even parents' daily conflict (minor), yet they may find it difficult to adjust to an event such as relocation or parental deployment (major). Where the family falls on the continuum of bonadaptation (positive adjustment to changes) to maladaptation (poor adjustment to changes) speaks to whether they will define a major family change as a family crisis (Patterson, 1989).

Family crisis. If a family is unable to balance their demands and capabilities, disorganization and disruption occurs, possibly leading to a *family crisis* (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 1989; Patterson 2002). Family crisis take place on a continuum –on one end of the continuum, minor disruptions within a family occur, and on the other end, it can break up the family. As a family crisis takes place, change is necessary because current family patterns are no longer working within the family system.

Although a crisis takes place, it is critical to emphasize that the crisis can be either normative or non-normative in nature (Patterson, 1988). An example of a normative crisis occurs when a family has another child. The structure of the family changes, roles of family members change to take on new responsibilities, and interactions between family members alter to ensure that the family spends enough time taking care of the baby. Families dealing with a non-normative crisis are uncomfortable and vulnerable, and they may need to reach out for help in order to get past the crisis (Patterson, 1988). For instance, in terms of a non-normative crisis, if a military family is not adequately prepared for a scheduled deployment, they may view it as a family crisis if they do not have the resources available to them to meet the demands of the situation. How the family decides on how they will change the structure, interactions, and patterns of their family system is crucial for the family adaptation phase.

Family adaptation phase. During *family adaptation*, the family goes through a process of restoring balance between demands and capabilities, among family members, and the family system and the community (Patterson, 1989). The family places effort into reducing the pile-up of demands, developing new resources and coping mechanisms, and altering or expanding their family schema to take into account their new circumstances (Patterson, 1988; Patterson, 1989). Bonadaptation or family resilience takes place when a family is successful at this process, and they are able to bounce back to their normal life, while maladaptation occurs when there are some levels of disruption in the process (e.g., family members' lack of effort, not enough available resources, continued pile-up of demands) (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; Patterson, 2002).

Families who are highly flexible and unified are resilient, and are often able to overcome demanding situations (Hawley & DeHaan, 1996; McCubbin & McCubbin, 1988). For instance, during the reintegration phase of deployment, military families who are successful at this process (bonadaptation) may participate in things such as reintegration programs that the military offers, other support groups, or reach out to family and friends in efforts to achieve family adaptation. Taken together, keeping in mind the importance of understanding that an individual's perception is their reality (Smith et al., 2009; Stryker, 1964; White & Klein, 2008), symbolic interaction theory and family stress theory align for the purposes of this study.

Summary

Military culture consists of continual change and transition (e.g., Temporary Duty assignments and Permanent Change of Stations); therefore, using SI and family stress theory guide researchers to comprehend the complexities of military family life in more meaningful and knowledgeable ways. The literature review and explanation of SI and family stress theory suggest a need for more research that closely examines adolescents' perceptions of what goes on

in their families during parental deployment. The current study does so by exploring 1) how adolescents make meaning of their family situation throughout the deployment cycle (i.e., pre, during, and post) of adjustment and adaptation, and 2) examines possible variation in how they discuss their experiences based on gender (i.e., boys vs. girls) differences.

Table 1

Theoretical Definitions and Terms

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Meanings	When individuals make sense of interactions with others, objects, events, and their environment
Symbols	Shared meanings about specific objects, events, and environments
"Self"	Occurs when an individual is able to view their behaviors and activities in an objective manner
Looking Glass Self	How an individual thinks others perceive them based on social cues they receive from others
Social Norms	When individuals learn how they should act in specific situations
Position	Categories to classify people
Roles	Patterns of behaviors associated with any social situation based on positions
Rituals	Assist individuals to figure out fits in with the larger group (e.g., family or work environment) and how important each ole is to them

Family Stress Theory: ABC-X Family Crisis Model

A	The stressor event
B	The resources the family has available to cope with the stressor
C	The meaning the family attaches to the crisis event
X	The crisis, or outcome

Family Stress Theory: Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response Model (FAAR)

Family Demands	A condition wherein there is a threat or challenge to the family system, and families need to make changes in their lives
Stressors	Occur when a life event takes place at a specific time that has the potential to produce change in the family system
Strains	Tension felt when a family has a need or desire to change something, and is present within the family system for an extended period
Capabilities	Potential ways in which a family can meet their demands based on what is available to them (resources), characteristics, traits, or competencies
Personal Resources	Innate intelligence, knowledge and skills, personality traits, physical and emotional health, a sense of mastery, and self-esteem
Family Resources	Cohesion, family bonds and unity, and adaptability/resilience, which is the family's capacity to meet their demands and make adjustments when necessary
Community Resources	Additional major resources and the social support networks that a family calls upon to assist them to meet demands.
Meanings	When families assess their stressors and strains
Situational Meanings	Are subjective to a family's definitions of their demands, capabilities, and the relationships between the two
Global Meanings/ Family Schema	How a family views their relationship to each other, their family unit, to the community at-large, and to larger macro systems
Pre-crisis Phase	A phase of homeostasis in the family unit where normal family functioning takes place, including the daily hassles and strains that occur
Family Crisis	If a family is unable to balance their demands and capabilities, disorganization and disruption occurs
Family Adaptation Phase	When a family goes through a process of restoring balance between demands and capabilities, among family members, and the family system and the community

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

The current study uses qualitative focus group data collected in 2008 (Huebner, Mancini, et al., 2010). Focus groups consisted of adolescents in military families who experienced parental military deployment. Adolescents recounted their experiences with parental deployment for each phase of deployment, pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration/post-deployment. The purpose of this study was to explore adolescents' experiences during each phase of deployment. Latent content analysis was used to examine the data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayan, 2009) using Atlas.ti version 6 (Scientific Software, 2011). Atlas.ti is a computer software program that is primarily used by researchers to analyze qualitative data. This software allows researchers upload various types of files such as text, images, audio, and video files, and includes tools that help to uncover complex findings.

Denzin and Lincoln define qualitative research as "a complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions" (2005, p. 2) that is used across a variety of disciplines and areas. Qualitative research transforms how researchers see the world because this type of research often occurs in individuals' natural environments, or in environments that are familiar to participants in given study. Like symbolic interaction theory and family stress theory, qualitative research describes how individuals apply meaning to their daily lives without participants having to focus on a set of given answer choices. Both theories and qualitative research complement each other because they allow for more flexibility in how we as researchers interpret participant responses. Comprehension of what takes place in individuals' lives is strengthened with the use

of qualitative methodology because it adds complexity and richness to their experiences from the point of view of the participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Focus groups are an ideal method to gather information from multiple participants at one time (Morgan, 1997). Strengths of using focus groups includes researchers' ability to collect information from participants that covers a wide range of topics, and researchers having the freedom to explore areas of research in which there is little empirical information available (Morgan, 1997). Focus groups also allow participants to respond to questions without the constraints of having pre-determined response choices (Mmari et al., 2009). Additionally, researchers have the ability to control the questions asked, which helps them maintain the focus on their goals for their studies (Creswell, 2009; Morgan, 1997). Possible limitations of using focus groups are biased responses from participants due to researchers' presence, and some individuals do not feel comfortable discussing sensitive information in a group setting (Creswell, 2009). However, since focus groups require group interaction (Morgan, 1997), timid individuals may open up more when they see their peers discussing their experiences with researchers (Huebner et al., 2007). Therefore, even though using focus groups present some limitations, they are an appropriate qualitative method to use to gain a clearer understanding of an under-studied area of research.

Role of the Researcher

Researcher biases are inherent within all types of social science research – no research is completely objective, neutral, or value free (Creswell, 2009; Mayan, 2009). It is important that researchers acknowledge any potential biases that they may bring to their research. My personal background of being a member of a military family, and living in a region of the U.S. that has a very high military population for the majority of my life influences how I approach this study.

However, while my father was an Active Duty service member, he did not experience war deployments. Therefore, although my upbringing occurred within a military family, my experiences with parental deployment differ compared to the participating adolescents in this study. In addition to my military family background, I have had close relationships with individuals who are war Veterans. Because of my personal connections to service members, I have become both sympathetic and empathetic to the challenges service members and their families experience because of their efforts fighting the War on Terror.

Study Participants

Identification of adolescents who participated in the study occurred via their attendance in Operation Military Kids (OMK) camps in Florida, Maine, North Carolina, and Ohio. OMK is a national program partnership between USDA Cooperative Extension and the U.S. Military, established in 2002 (Harriet, 2009). OMK brings together youth who have experienced parental deployment at low or no cost to attendees, with the goal of involving surrounding civilian communities in embracing and understanding the complexities that go along with being military families with youth (Harriett, 2009).

The researchers obtained approval from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Institutional Review Board (human subjects) to conduct research with youth. The researchers received informed consent from parents, and gained assent from the adolescent participants at the time of data collection. To ensure I followed ethical procedures, I obtained approval from the University of Georgia's Institutional Review Board to perform secondary data analyses.

Seventy-five adolescents (40 males and 35 females) participated in focus groups at the OMK camps. The ages of the participants ranged from 11-18 years of age. Gender

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representation was approximately equal (50.6% female, 49.4% male). Participants' reported their ethnicities as 73% White, 11% African-American, 2% Hispanic/Latino, 4% as Asian, 1% as Native American, and 8% as biracial. Participants with parents serving in the Active duty force included: 26% Army, 4% Navy, 8% Air Force, 2% Coast Guard, and 8% Marines. Forty-four percent of participants had parents who were members of the National Guard (all services), only 2% were Reservists (all services), 7.1% parents were in more than one service, 2% were unsure of their parents' affiliation, and 1% did not report any military affiliation.

There were 6-10 adolescents for each of the nine focus groups. The duration of each session was approximately 70 minutes, and were recorded and transcribed later. Adolescents were not separated amongst focus groups based on the number of times (e.g., one time vs. three times) they experienced parental military deployment.

Design and Procedures

Semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted using an interview guide (See Appendix A for complete interview guide). Questions focused on adolescents' perspectives of their relationships and experiences while going through a parental deployment. First, the researchers asked participating adolescents general questions about themselves as well as their parents' military service, such as: whom they live with, if there parent is currently deployed (and how long), which parent has deployed, the number of deployments they have gone through, and their age when they experienced their first parental deployment. Second, researchers asked adolescents open-ended questions about each phase of the deployment. During pre-deployment, researchers asked adolescents how their family prepared for the deployment. For the duration of their parents' deployment, the researchers asked participants to reflect on how things were different in their families while their parent was away. Finally, during the reintegration/post-

deployment phase, participants discussed what was going on within their family once their parent

returned home. These questions allowed youth to discuss other issues such as role changes,

adaption to each phase of deployment, and communication that occurred within the family unit.

Analysis Strategies

To examine the focus group data, I used qualitative content analysis. Since the current

study is exploratory in nature, it is fitting to use content analysis (Mayan, 2009). Content

analysis is a widely used technique and the number of researchers who use content analysis has

increased dramatically within the past few years (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). According to Hsieh

and Shannon (2005), the goal of content analysis is to provide an understanding of the

phenomenon studied. Specifically, I used latent content analysis to analyze the focus group data.

Mayan (2009) defines latent content analysis as "the process of identifying, coding, and

categorizing the primary patterns in the data" (p. 94). The key element of conducting a latent

content analysis is that examination of data occurs in the context of what participants intended

(Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayan, 2009).

The process of conducting a latent content analysis begins with thorough readings of each

transcript. Since I was not a part of the focus group interview process, reading each transcript

several times enabled me to obtain a clearer understanding of what questions were asked, learn

the flow of the discussions between the adolescent participants and the interviewers, and gain a

general idea of frequent topic areas. Next, open-coding was used by highlighting key sections of

the text, making notes and comments in the margins of the transcripts of any salient interesting

points, while paying attention to key phrases and terminology adolescents verbalized as they

described their experiences throughout each phase of deployment. Finally, after establishing

intercoder reliability by crosschecking with a colleague, I created a code list based on the open-codes, and then condensed the list into broader categories.

The condensed list was used to further code data using Atlas.ti (Scientific Software, 2011). Codes were organized into categories that were more specific to ensure consistency was achieved with the interview process. Doing so helped uncover adolescents' perceptions of what went on in their lives during each phase of deployment. Additionally, I made distinctions between notable similarities and differences based on participants' gender. In the final step, themes formed by integrating categories by keeping in mind the "big picture" of identifying possible explanations of adolescents' overall experiences with parental military deployment.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

In order to guard against the researcher's biases, Creswell (2009) offers multiple strategies that were used to address the credibility and trustworthiness of the current study. For instance, researchers should clarify the biases they may hold in their research (Creswell, 2009). To counter any biases I may hold, I clearly enumerated my perspectives in a previous section (see Role of the Researcher). Another strategy for increasing credibility and trustworthiness was used by Huebner and Mancini (2010), and in this case the researchers developed and followed a focus-group guide throughout data collection to ensure data collections were consistent across focus group sessions. Additionally, when they transcribed the data, the research team held meetings to ensure consistency. Creswell (2009) also makes the suggestion of having someone crosscheck codes to establish intercoder agreement. A peer coded focus group transcripts independently, and we later compared our results to check for consistency. Each of the credibility and trustworthiness strategies as described by Creswell (2009) strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the current study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overall, both boys and girls recounted many similar experiences with their parents'

military deployments. Both genders shared their perspectives of their close relationships

especially while their parents deployed. The following results are divided according to

each phase of deployment (pre, during, and post), by their close relationship type (at-home

parent, deployed parent, sibling, and peer/friend), and potential school related difficulties.

The following sections provide specific examples of participants' perspectives of what

occurred during their parents' deployment. The use of pseudonyms protects participants'

identities.

Pre-Deployment Phase

Discussion of the pre-deployment phase was minimal for the participants.

Adolescents discussed what information their parents shared with them and the types of

activities they experienced with their families leading up to their parents' departure.

Neither boys nor girls shared anything regarding their sibling or peer/friend relationships,

nor did any participants reflect on school issues before their parents deployed.

At-Home Parent Relationships

Girls. One girl mentioned finding out about her father's upcoming deployment

from both of her parents while her family attended a family readiness briefing. However,

she did not discuss her feelings concerning finding out about her father's upcoming

deployment to a war zone from strangers at a briefing instead of from her father himself.

Generally, girls did not discuss specific examples of information shared from their at-home parent during the pre-deployment phase

Boys. Even before their fathers deployed, boys expressed having closer relationships with their mothers than their fathers. When the interviewer asked with whom the participants went to for support, one boy responded,

"Tim: Uhm, my mom I guess and then if mom wouldn't be there I go to my

grandma's.

Male Interviewer: Okay. And how are they helpful to you? How are they helpful to

you when you need that support?

Tim: Well, since my dad usually makes fun of me and that's retarded and that's why

I don't go to him because I know he's going to make fun of me for something. . .

Yup, suck it up wussy. I get that a lot.

Male Interviewer: Do you get that from your dad?

Tim: Yeah.

Male Interviewer: Okay. So you don't feel like there's a lot of that support there?

Tim: No"

The example provided above highlights how Tim's at-home parent (mother) showed more support to him than his father (military member). Tim's account of his father making fun of him was not typical for the boys who participated in group discussion, yet it is still worth showcasing that teens did express having negative interactions with their family members.

Deployed Parent Relationships

The main topic adolescents discussed was in relationship to the activities they said occurred with their deploying parent. Also, participants provided some details of what their deploying parent instructed them to do while they would be gone. This appeared especially important to the boys in the sample as they expressed more accounts of their deploying parent instructing them on their upcoming role more than girls recounted.

Girls. In juxtaposition to the boys receiving instructions, girls talked instead about the special time they spent with their parent before they left for deployment. From their perspectives, they did not have atypical experiences with their parent who was about to deploy. Moreover, some girls received special transitional objects from their deploying parent as a keepsake. One girl explained that her father spent special time with her and her siblings by purchasing a keepsake,

> *"Megan: And we, before my dad left we went to Build a Bear, and we got this teddy bear, and we all got a bear and we did there was like ten second things and he said how much he loved us and stuff like that."*

Boys. Similarly to what girls experienced, boys also discussed spending special time together (e.g., bonding, traveling, and playing video games) with their parent in the time leading up to their departure. Additionally, when asked whom they would go to for support, boys oftentimes answered that while their father was at home they would go to them. Others boys said that no matter if their father was at home or deployed, they would always go to their fathers first, a typical behavior for adolescent males.

On the other hand, as aforementioned boys received instructions, male participants expressed that their fathers talked to them about wanting their sons to 'be the man of the

house', which would in turn involve adolescents' anticipating an increase their responsibilities at home while their fathers were gone. Based on what adolescents said their fathers told them, the exchange of verbal communication that occurred between fathers and sons was a reflection of typical gender socialization. The following is a typical example of one boy's reflection of what his father told him before he deployed:

> *"Theo: My dad, my brother was too young. He was just about like five, no, not five, Holy Geez. Uhm, he was just about one, around that age, and so my dad really all he said was I'm leaving it up to you, you need to take care of them, take care of your mother and your brother."*

Interestingly, according to male participants' recall, although their fathers told them that they would be expected to increase their responsibilities at home, male participants did not offer their opinion of how that made them feel even when interviewers probed for more discussion. It is unclear if males accepted the expectation of increased responsibilities, or if they did not feel comfortable offering that information to the group.

Summary

Discussion within focus groups surrounding the time before their parents departed was limited. Both boys and girls said they spent special time together before their parent left. Moreover, girls' special time spent with their fathers involved receiving transitional objects (e.g., toys or jewelry). Boys said their fathers expected them to increase their responsibilities at home while their fathers were away.

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Deployment Phase

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Participants offered the most information about their experiences when discussing the deployment phase. During the timeframe that adolescents experienced having a parent

gone on deployment, adolescents articulated having the most changes in their relationships

with their parents, siblings, and peers/friends. Adolescents also shared having school

difficulties during the deployment phase.

At-Home Parent Relationships

Male and female participants recounted very similar experiences with their at-home

parents while their parent was away on deployment. Adolescents were the most vocal

about their observations of their at-home parents' level of functioning during the

deployment phase. Some adolescents said that they did not have difficulties or strains in

their relationships with their at-home parents, and sought support from them when they

needed it. The following example highlights the positive experience a male participant

said he had with his mother during the time his father was away on deployment,

"Male interviewer: You go to your mom? How does she help you?

Cameron: She makes me feel better.

Male interviewer: Okay, she makes you feel better, how?

Cameron: She tells me not to worry.

Male interviewer: Okay. Tells you not to worry.

Cameron: And does stuff with me."

However, others said they experienced very *difficult situations* with their at-home

parents, and during the focus group sessions, they struggled to vocalize their experiences

and became emotional and cried as they shared with the groups. Participants who had a

hard time with their at-home parent felt that the difficulties were due to issues such as:

- An increase in their parents' work hours

- An increase in the time their parents spent focusing on furthering their education

- Their parents being in denial about their spouses' deployment

- Their parents becoming distant with them and their siblings

- Their parents having a difficult time handling an increase in their parental responsibilities

- Their parents becoming paranoid or overprotective of them

- Their parents often being depressed or sad

One male teen said he found it difficult to see his mother distressed about his father's absence,

> *"Joshua: My mom gets sad more often.*
>
> *Female interviewer: Okay. Joshua, okay.*
>
> *Male participant: It's just really hard to see her cry like that because I really don't want to see her like that again."*

In spite of it being difficult for him to witness his mother's hardships, their relationship strengthened,

> *"Female interviewer: Okay. Do you find that your relationship with her changes?*
>
> *Joshua: Uh-huh, we had started talking a little bit more than when my dad was around, and I thought that was really nice."*

In situations where adolescents felt that their relationship with their at-home parent improved, they often worked on their relationships with their deployed parent.

Deployed Parent Relationships

Participants struggled with maintaining their relationships with their deployed parent, often due to limitations in the *content* of their communication with each other. In some cases, adolescents said they did not have many opportunities to talk to their deployed parent, or in other cases, the number of topics they talked about was limited even though they were able to speak with their parent regularly or often. Adolescents felt there were limited topics of discussion because they did not want to relay any negative information to their deployed parent. Participants said they withheld or limited negative information to protect their parent –to make sure they would not get angry, sad, or upset. In addition, other adolescents said they had limited communication due to technological difficulties such as their parent not having an internet connection, cell phones or computers breaking, and even having email conversations censored by the military.

Girls. The focus groups revealed that girls did not feel very close to their deployed parent (usually fathers) whether they were at home or away from home on deployment. Other girls who said they had very close relationships with their fathers expressed battling with more difficulty in dealing with their deployment. The following example demonstrates how a girl had a very close relationship with their father prior to his deployment had a difficult time adjusting,

> *"Sidney: Uhm, yeah. I was probably the one that did the most crying because I used to go everywhere with my dad when he would go places except for work because he wakes up at five in the morning. So, I would go with him everywhere, and when he left I wanted to go with him, but like I couldn't, and I knew I couldn't*

and like everyone else stopped crying about like a week later, and I was still crying

everyday."

Boys. Boys, more so than girls, said that they still felt close to their fathers despite

the separation. In many cases, boys said they were able to talk to their fathers very often,

which helped to sustain the quality of their relationships. For instance, one adolescent told

the group that

"Caleb: I still feel close to my dad because I talk to him like every day on the phone

and he sends me letters and I do like the video chat on the computer thing."

Siblings

It was common that adolescents became *closer to their siblings* by spending more

time with them during the time that their parents were away on deployment. Some

adolescents became closer by choice, while others became closer to their siblings because

they had to take on the role of caretaker of their younger siblings, which included *new or*

an increase in their responsibilities. Below is an example of how one female participant

received support from her older sister,

"Dina: I'll talk to my sister, the oldest one.

Male interviewer: Okay.

Dina: She gives good advice."

Boys who said they got closer with their siblings expressed similar experiences as girls.

Boys. Even though both boys and girls had caretaking responsibilities, boys

expressed having more of a difficult time handling this role. The following example

highlights how difficult he felt it was for him to handle this responsibility,

"Tim: Uhm, well, it's sort of a little bit harder because since he's gone I have to step up and do some of the stuff he does when he's gone, and I have to take care of my little brothers and sisters, which is a lot more responsibility than I'm used to having.

Female interviewer: Okay.

Tim: Which is good and all, but it's just hard.

Female interviewer: It's just hard, okay. Tell me the hard part.

Tim: Well, sometimes they don't want to listen to you and then it's just a mess.

Additionally, more boys than girls experienced a lot of conflict with their siblings, specifically with their brothers. Boys who typically did not spend much time with their brothers before their parent deployed reported having more conflict-filled interactions with their brothers, such as

"Anthony: Uhm, when my mom is just home, my brothers kind of act up and they push me, try to push and shove at me, and I say stop. After a while I just go upstairs and do something while my mom yells at them and then two weeks later on spring break she'll take us somewhere and that stuff because like my brothers, they are bored to death when dad isn't there because they have nothing to do, they don't have any friends because my dad usually drives them places and stuff."

Friend/Peer Relationships

Adolescent participants generally relied on their friends/peers for support during the time that their parents deployed. This finding aligns with research on the developmental stage of adolescence wherein adolescents develop their peer cultures (Hafen et al., 2012).

Girls and boys found *solace* in having peers/friends they could go to while their parents were away on deployment.

Girls. Despite both genders recounting their friend/peer relationships, girls generally went into greater detail about how their friends/peers supported them than boys. A typical example of how female participants reported their friend/peer relationships follows,

> *"Abby: I usually go to my mom or Rachel, but because my mom, she's been there before, but I go to a peer, a fellow peer, or Rachel because they kind of like share I guess share everything and like I guess if I'm embarrassed to talk to my mom about something I, you know, talk to Rachel and she either gets hyped up or concerned or she's [indiscernible] I guess."*

Alternatively, other girls did not receive the support they needed or expected from their friend/peer relationships. Girls who shared commonalities in unsupportive friendships discussed having issues such as having friends who could not relate to having a parent gone on deployment, which is what the following example shows:

> *"Dasia: Yeah. It's just that, it's like they do the whole, 'Oh, I know what you're going through' thing[s], but really they don't because I've got a friend her dad's a police officer.*
> *Interviewer: Okay.*
> *Dasia: But he works like nights or whatever so she says there's sometimes. I'm like, 'Okay, you get to see your dad when you wakeup. I don't get to see my dad at all until he comes back on leave.' And then when he's on leave it's like you get tears and you're trying so hard to do everything together that you don't have time to just*

spend time hanging out. Because you're trying to make sure, that. . . Because we

went to like non-stop movie theaters, we went out to dinner and like we didn't

actually just stay home and chill out and do nothing."

Boys. It was common for boys to spend more time describing the *activities* they participated in with their friends/peers, and did not place as much emphasis on the quality of their relationships with them. Below is an example of this type of experience where friendship activities were described,

"Aaron: I usually just turned to friends.

Female interviewer: To friends, and what was helpful about that?

Aaron: We'd talk about it after a while and just grab a guitar or something like that

and go play.

Female interviewer: Okay.

Aaron: Do some Tae Kwon Do and go beat the crap out of each other."

School Adjustments

Although the majority of the participants did not say they experienced challenges adjusting in school while their parents were away, there were those who did experience major difficulties. In general, boys shared that their grades dropped dramatically while their parent was gone, while girls shared that they had a hard time concentrating on their school work. Adolescents did not want to share information about their parents' deployment status with their teachers and peers. Their reasoning was that they did not want sympathy because people did not really understand what it meant for their parent to be away for an extended period.

Girls. Girls felt that they experienced being hassled in school because their peers were not educated about the war; however, some girls preferred to keep their parents' deployment a secret to avoid the possibility of people bothering them at school. Below is an instance of how keeping a parent's deployment was difficult to handle,

"Brittany: People didn't like me at school, and no one knows at school about it. . . I broke down one time at school and everybody was looking at me like 'What is wrong with you". They were, like, 'Did you get a summer school? [laughter] Summer school? Saturday school?' I'm like, 'No, I didn't.' They were like, 'You're lying.' I'm like, 'No, never mind.'"

Girls typically discussed issues that were distressing to them, which may indicate that Brittany's behavior is atypical of gender socialization for adolescent females.

Boys. Even though both boys and girls expressed similar experiences, some boys had *behavioral problems* when they faced difficult situations at school. The following examples demonstrate how one teen dealt with being hassled on a daily basis because his peers were not educated about the war.

"Theo: Everyday at school someone would always say, oh, your dad's not doing anything over there. He's just sitting around killing innocent people, and almost everyday I'd get in a fistfight, and it just kind of hit me hard because I took it to military camp and just took it out on all of them."

He chose to engage in physical aggression to handle bad situations at school. Another example showcases how one male teen had noticeable behavioral problems in school,

"Chris: When he was deployed the first time, it was even worse. My teachers even know that my behavior went from good to horrible just because of the difference."

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Summary

Discussion about at-home parent relationships was the most detailed for both genders, and according to participants, they saw the most changes in their at-home parents' behavior during the deployment phase. When it came to their experiences with their deployed parent, adolescents had limited communication in terms of topics discussed and amount of communication that occurred. Despite communication limitations, boys reported feeling closer to their deployed parent, yet girls said they felt distant. Overall, participants reported becoming closer to their siblings, which was often due spending more time together. However, adolescents, especially boys, who said they did not have a good relationship with their siblings before their parents' deployment reported struggling with their sibling relationships. According to girls, they had more of a difficult time confiding in their friends than boys did about their parents' deployment status. Although boys and girls reported having some trouble in school, dialogue on this subject was minimal. Boys' reported physical behavioral problems (i.e., getting into physical fights. Both genders felt that their schoolmates as well as school personnel misunderstood their deployment experiences.

<div align="center">

Reintegration/Post-Deployment Phase

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At-home Parent Relationships

Adolescents' reported that their relationships with their at-home parent during the reintegration phase typically improved than what it was during the deployment phase. For both boys and girls, they recounted seeing a *change for the better* in their at-home parent's moods and behaviors. They felt that since their parent returned home, their at-home parent

experienced less stress, which created a better atmosphere for their families' level of healthy functioning. Below is a typical example that illustrates such change,

> "*Tim: Uhm, yeah, well, when he's gone, my mom is, like, sad and all of that, but when he comes back she's always so happy and she talks to her friends, oh, he comes home tomorrow or whatever, and she'll be all excited about it.*
>
> *Female interviewer: How does your relationship with her change? Do you notice any differences in how she is when your dad is gone versus when he's back with you?*
>
> *Tim: Yeah. Well, when he's here, it's, uhm, kind of, sort of altogether and everything and when he's gone, me and my mom are a lot closer than when he is here because he's not here to be with her and all of that so.*
>
> *Female interviewer: So the two of you are closer and when he gets back, it's back to kind of [interposing]*
>
> *Tim: All three of us together.*"

From what Tim explained, he would rather have his family together than separated because of a parental deployment. He saw a positive change in his at-home parent (mother), which in turn brought his family closer. Tim's experience of positive change was also common for female teens in the sample.

Deployed Parent Relationships

It was apparent that participants had more to say about their relationships and observations with their parent who returned home post-deployment. Both boys and girls experienced positive reintegration periods with their deployed parents, and discussed how happy their families felt to have their parent back home, and things went 'back to normal'

right away. On the other hand, a few participants had some difficulty adjusting to their

parents' return. As participants discussed their relationships with their deployed parent,

there was variation in what girls' reports versus boys' reports.

Girls. In general, girls expressed more of the *process* of their parents' reintegration

back into the family setting. They expressed more challenges in *adjusting* to their parents

coming back home than boys. An example of a challenge follows,

> *"Abby: Uhm, when my father returned home, it felt like we were all rejoicing. We*
>
> *were so happy. And then after a couple of days it had sunk in that he was home to*
>
> *stay and it seems so different because we had all, you know, like a year children*
>
> *mature so much or become different and it wasn't the same and then it took a while*
>
> *to get used to it until we got back to our current relationship."*

Abby's expressions of what occurred in her family highlight how the time spent apart due

to her father's deployment may have led her to feel differently about her father, and she

needed the time to re-adjust to her relationship with him. A small number (n=5) of female

teens in the study experienced their mothers' military deployment, and the experiences

they expressed were similar to girls who had fathers deploy. The following is an example

of how regardless of which parent (mother vs. father) deployed, girls had comparable

experiences.

> *"Elizabeth: Oh, when my mom came back, it was really different because I wasn't*
>
> *used to her being around so when she, like, first started to try to talk to me I was*
>
> *like really uptight and I wouldn't want to talk to her because I wasn't used to her*
>
> *being here. She would try to find some stuff and I would tell her that's not how we*
>
> *do it or that's not how dad does it, and she would get upset, but I wouldn't know it*

and me and my brother just treated her really differently because we weren't used

to her being around. So, our relationship changed really a lot for the first couple of

months that she first came back from Iraq."

Boys. In comparison, adolescent boys' discussed *events* they experienced with their fathers once they returned home. A typical example of what boys said happened is as follows,

"Scotty: I just want to add something, like, when my dad got back from being

deployed, me and him would spend more time together like, we would build stuff in

the garage. He started to let me cut wood with the circular saw and like he would,

uhm, he would, if I asked him to play, like, Madden '08 with me, he would play with

me. We went to a hockey game once."

Contrary to discussing events, like the girls in the study, boys experienced difficulties adjusting to their fathers' return home. The following example illustrates that transitioning back into family life at home is not always a smooth one.

"Rob: It was hard, I mean the first feeling I had was he's home, you know, and

everything's going to be great. And then it just sort of got awkward and I mean he

doesn't talk about it. He, to this day the only thing he mentions how frustrated he is

with the world."

Taken together, some adolescents experienced smoother family adjustments than others did during the reintegration phase. The majority of adolescents said that overtime, their families got "back to normal" in due time.

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Summary

Girls and boys saw positive changes in their at-home parents' well-being. Although adolescents said their deployed parents' transition back into family life was effortless, others reported having more difficulty in re-adjusting to having their deployed parent back home. Girls reported their parents' reintegration being a gradual process of becoming reacquainted, whereas boys reported the events (e.g., playing video games) that took place once their parent returned home.

Summary of Results

Overall, there was variation in what girls reported versus what boys reported in their experiences throughout each phase of their parents' military deployment. However, it appears that the experiences that both boys and girls recounted shared many commonalities. Both experienced positive and negative situations within their relationships with their families and friends, and even found themselves in challenging situations in school settings and with peers. Nevertheless, adolescents in this study displayed resiliency in their ability to adjust to their families' circumstances. The next chapter covers more details of possible explanations of adolescents' relationship experiences throughout their parents' deployment.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Throughout the course of analyzing the focus group data, it became apparent that

adolescents' reports of their family and friend relationships, as well as their reported issues in

school might be associated with each other. Although many adolescents in the current study

experienced difficult situations throughout their parents' military deployment, many eventually

adjusted to their situations. Their resilience shows that despite military deployment being tough

on families, most have the capacity to adapt and readjust their lives as necessary. The population

of children growing up in military families who experienced deployments to war zones will

continue to increase. Efficient and effective assistance to military families can only occur if

researchers continue their efforts in the direction of thoroughly planning their approach to

studying military members, veterans, and their families. Additionally, this chapter discusses

results of the study, strengths and limitations, and offers implications for future research.

Discussion of Results

Previous Literature

Consistent with previous literature (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Huebner & Mancini, 2005;

Huebner & Mancini, 2010; Huebner et al., 2007), adolescents in this study expressed having

trouble within their families' adjustments to parental military deployments. Navigating one's

role and position within their family as a whole, and also with individual family members was a

challenge for many adolescents who participated in this study. Furthermore, based on the

information they offered to the groups, their parents as well as their siblings also had difficulty, some more than others, in adjusting to shifts in their roles and positions.

Some deployed parents told their sons prior to their parents' departure that they were expected to increase their responsibilities by taking care of their siblings and at-home parents, which were usually their mothers. When male adolescents discussed this role change they explained that they did not expect the increase in responsibilities to be as difficult what they actually experienced. It is possible that they were not well-prepared for what taking care both their siblings and at-home parent would entail since males said that they were not given an explanation of what they should expect in their new role. Males serving the role as caregiver are still atypical of cultural norms in American culture. However, even though adolescents in this study said that their parents did not provide them with much (if any) details on what their increased responsibilities would involve, it is still difficult to support researchers' notion that adolescent males and females receive different gender socialization due to the fact that there is so little research available on this topic.

In other cases, adolescents had unexpected experiences of their at-home parent either being in denial about their spouse's deployment, distancing themselves from their children, or even suffering from depression. This finding was also consistent with previous studies that found that there is a negative association between parents' displays of high amounts of negative emotion in front of their children and their children then having difficulty coping with their parents' behavior (Bradshaw et al., 2010; Chandra et al., 2010; Denzin et al., 2007). As a result, this may have led adolescents to feel added pressure to take on not only the role of caretaker of their siblings, but also act as a companion to their at-home parent, which was consistent with Huebner and Mancini's (2005; 2010) studies.

Adolescents viewed their relationships with their friends as important sources of support throughout the deployment cycle. Like previous research on adolescent development shows, formulating and maintaining close relationships with peers is important for continued growth (Collins & Laursen, 2004; Hafen et al., 2012; Sroufe et al., 2009). Some adolescents felt they did not have peers they could rely on for support, which may have resulted in having difficult school experiences. Hafen and colleagues (2012) contend that during this stage, adolescents focus more on developing their own peer cultures, but adolescents in this study who were also serving as caretakers probably did not have the time to dedicate to develop this source of additional support.

Theoretical Framework

Reflecting on family stress theory, adolescents who were in families that endured multiple hassles and strains pre-deployment may have had *pre-crisis phase* situations in which they did not experience states of homeostasis (Patterson, 1988). Some adolescents expressed that their family lives pre-deployment were fraught with poor relationships with one or both parents, and for some, even with siblings. In difficult pre-deployment situations, many of those same adolescents expressed continued difficulties throughout the deployment and reintegration phases in their family lives. Therefore, results imply that adolescents need more preparation of what to expect when it comes to parental deployment. Moreover, based on the hardships that adolescents observed with their parents and siblings suggest that entire families need more professional assistance as they prepare for military deployments.

Participants who did not receive adequate details of what to expect when it came to their parents' deployment may have endured more stress and harm than those who received support throughout the deployment cycle. During the reintegration phase, which is also the termed the

family adaptation phase, according to the FAAR model (Patterson, 1989), some adolescents

expressed that it took some time for their families to "get back to normal". This finding was

consistent with Huebner and Mancini (2005; 2010) and Chandra and colleagues' 2010 studies on

adolescents. Although adolescents said that readjusting took a while, there was not enough

discussion surrounding this topic to grasp how their interactions with their family members

occurred.

There were a number of participants who experienced difficulties in their schools while

their parents were deployed. Some adolescents hid their parents' deployment status from their

teachers and classmates, while other adolescents said their peers bullied them. It is likely that

adolescents who had school difficulties were in schools that did not have large numbers of

students from military families, or their schools did not have a supportive network in place for

students'. According to symbolic interaction theory and family stress theory, it is probable that

adolescents struggled with making sense of their interactions with others (*meanings*) who were

not having similar experiences such as their own (Stryker, 1959; Patterson, 1988).

 Some participants expressed that they did not want sympathy from people at school

because people at school did not understand what is was like to have a parent deployed, and felt

that their sympathy was not sincere. Others may have been harmed because students bullied

them about their parents' military service. In regards to bullying, males engaged in more

aggressive and physical behavior, while girls engaged tended to cry. A reasonable explanation

stems from research findings on gender socialization (in that boys react in more physical

manners than girls do when faced with difficult situations. However, as Leaper et al. (1998)

explain, there has been such wide variation in results of studies on gender socialization it is hard

to tell if this is the case. There are so many factors associated with an individual's gender development throughout their lifetime that the current study is unable to identify.

Strengths and Limitations

The current study has strengths and limitations. A major strength is that adolescents were given the opportunity to describe what went on in their lives when their parent was deployed – from their point of view. Although more researchers are conducting studies on military children, many either do not focus on adolescents specifically, or only obtain information from parents about their adolescents. Because data collection was planned and conducted by two family science researchers, Dr. Huebner and Dr. Mancini, who possess many years of expertise in researching adolescents in military families, adds to the merit of the current study.

Furthermore, the level of detail Huebner and Mancini used when framing the focus group protocols was a necessary and additional strength. Oftentimes, researchers who focus on military families do not conceptualize their work with a theoretical approach, which leaves their work lacking. Therefore, Huebner and Mancini's study as well as the current thesis benefit due to the researchers' theoretical considerations in their approaches to their research studies. Results of studies such as those may devalue the meaning of researchers' work if they fail to make thoughtful connections and observations using a theoretical framework. Therefore, Huebner and Mancini's decision to write the questions asked in this study with the consideration of a theoretical framework, family stress theory, also gave this study an advantage.

One limiting factor is due to the use of a single informant. Obtaining information from only one informant limited the level of details presented regarding adolescents' family and friend relationships as well as adjustments within school settings. The goal of this study was to explore adolescents' experiences during their parents' deployment; however, participants uncovered

many observations of their at-home parents' behaviors. Regardless of this shortcoming, a study focused on youths' perspectives is a needed addition to the body of literature on adolescents in military families. Also, this study was limited because it was cross-sectional, and participants provided retrospective information of their experiences.

An additional limitation is that the focus groups took place in summer camps targeted to helping military youth adjust and learn positive coping strategies to handle their parents' deployment. Therefore, this sampling bias could have influenced the results of the study if parents of adolescents who participated in the summer camps were already well aware of their adolescents' difficulties with coping. However, since the goal of the current study was to explore what is going on adolescents' lives during parental deployment, the information that adolescent participants offered is just one step in figuring out more efficient ways researchers can be more effective in their approach to learning more about adolescents' well-being in military families.

Implications

The United States' fight against terrorism is a battle that will not end in the near future. Despite the War in Iraq ending and the War in Afghanistan now coming to end, the nature of war will persist globally. Although the current U.S. military population comprises a very small percentage of the U.S. population, many people in our society are connected to someone who is currently serving, has served in the past, or is a family member or friend of a servicemember. Therefore, it is important that American society continue to support service members, veterans, and their families.

Future Directions

One way that U.S. military families can receive support is if researchers continue their efforts in learning more about their family dynamics. Doing so in systematic and well-planned ways can help individuals in the educational systems, legal, financial, and health systems. Professionals can then gain a better grasp of how they might alter their current approaches to families who protect the United States.

Research. Specifically, to understand an in-depth level of what goes on in military families who have experienced parental deployments, researchers should develop and implement more studies that include multiple informants (e.g., parents, children, school personnel, extended family members). The use of multiple informants will provide more details; thus, researchers, educators, interventionists, practitioners, clinicians, and other professionals interested in military adolescents' well-being can take more of a holistic approach when supporting military families. Although studies such as Mmari and colleagues' (2009), as well as Chandra and colleagues' (2010) used multiple informants, using that type of research design has been few and far between, and there is definitely much more to be learned.

Additionally, in the future, implementing longitudinal studies would allow researchers to capture adolescents' experiences in relationship to their parents' military deployments as they occur. Longitudinal studies with military youth can and should be implemented in large scales through the use of involving entire families (i.e., parents, children, extended family members) within a given study. Even though a study of that kind would require enormous amounts of resources, support, and skill, the strength of its power could capture elements of this field that are still unknown. The idea of designing and implementing longitudinal studies is a common goal

within the field of family research, yet researchers who study military family dynamics (e.g., Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner & Mancini, 2008), especially, share this view.

Theory. Even though theories are incapable of providing complete answers to research questions, they do offer solidified ways of thinking about particular issues, situations, phenomena, and groups of people. Therefore, with the continued use of theoretical approaches to research studies, especially those focused on human behaviors and experiences, the social sciences field will continue to gain more influence in the larger research arena. The study of aspects of the lives of military families can be approached in variety of theoretical frameworks. Because the available research on this population thus far is considerably lacking in researchers' use of theoretical guidance, researchers should strongly consider taking on a more rigorous approach to researching this population by applying a theoretical framework as they plan their studies.

As more studies are conducted using theoretical approaches, it will only be at that time that we will be able to more accurately assess whether any one particular theory is relevant to both the population and the issue studied. Until that occurs, it is in the best interest of researchers to thoughtfully consider how theories might help them make better since of the results of their research studies. Moreover, this might especially be useful in understudied research areas, such as adolescents' experiences with their parents' military deployment during today's war climate.

Practice

Professionals around the country have made great strides in increasing the amount and types of support that is available to military members and their families both in times of war and peace. In the case of the most recent war conflicts, the surge in support offered has been

widespread especially due to the federal governments' concern and interest in maintaining retention rates and morale within U.S. military. However, even though the number of deployments to war zones are decreasing, it is my hope that military members, their children, and significant others, as well as veterans, will continue to be provided with the care and concern that they may need for many years to come due to the gross effects of war. Since conflict in the Middle East is winding down, and there continues to be a global financial crisis –budget cuts are inevitable in the amount of funding that the government will provide to service members, veterans, and their families.

It is of great concern how professionals can reach out to this community in larger numbers, as well as provide them with information that can be easily understood. In addition, professionals are also concerned that the methods of how information and resources are presented to military members, veterans, and their families is not done so in a way that is feasible for their current lifestyles or situations. Not every military adolescent has the opportunity nor wants to participate in camps such as Operation Military Kids or other similar camps that offer coping support while their parents' are deployed. Furthermore, in terms of parental or family levels of support, not all adults or families experiencing military deployment seek those types of opportunities to learn about ways that they can view the deployment situation in a more positive light, use resources already available to them, or seek additional resources, that would all in turn help ease their overall deployment experiences.

One of the greatest needs for researchers, practitioners, clinicians, and other community leaders is to figure out more innovative ways to provide outreach services so that information can be dispersed. Because adolescents spend a large portion of their time at school, it would be extremely helpful if more schools are provided with appropriate and useful information and

training on how to support youth in military families, especially those schools that have smaller numbers of students in military families. If school staff receives proper education, they can then disperse that information to the student body, which would in turn create a more welcoming and accepting atmosphere for all adolescents who may be impacted by their parents' military deployment. Once welcoming environments are created adolescents should also be encouraged to reach out to their fellow classmates who come from both civilian and military families for support. Within the current study, it was found that some adolescents hid their feelings. It is important for youth to know that their feelings are normal and that although their situation is unique, it should not be kept a secret if they are experiencing difficulties coping with the changes in their families.

As mentioned previously, adolescents who participated in the current study expressed having concerns about their parents' level of coping during the deployment cycle for various reasons. Contrary to the high possibility of adolescents being able to receive support and education from their schools (if their schools are educated), parents will only receive support *if* they seek it. Parents who may be struggling with deployment may not even know how to use the resources they already possess, let alone seek additional resources from others. During the pre-deployment phase, while service members prepare for their upcoming departures, their units should offer words of encouragement and provide details on how both the deploying and at-home parent can receive support if they need it. If parents know that they are not alone, and that they are not expected to endure the entire deployment without help, they might be influenced to change their behaviors and seek support.

Today, there are many programs and services available, which focus on supporting military members, veterans, and their families. However, to date, the effectiveness and

efficiencies of those programs and services have not been evaluated. Consequently, it is difficult

to say whether available resources are reaching audiences in the manner in which they were

originally intended. It is crucial that the practitioners, researchers, interventionists, clinicians,

and other professionals who have been dedicated in supporting this population continue to do so

in ways that are valuable, efficient, and timely.

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APPENDIX A

Examining the Effect of Multiple Deployments on Adjustment among Youth in Military

Families

Focus Group Interview Protocol

REVISED 7.4.08

INTRODUCTION

As introduction, My name is _____and _____we're from Virginia Tech. We are so

excited to talk with you today about your experience with having parent deployed. We recognize

that this is a very different time in your life—that deployment can potentially create many

changes for you and your family. We want to understand what this is like. We think it's

important for those in the military and outside of the military to have a better understanding of

what this experience is like from a teen's perspective.

To do this, we plan to ask questions and then let you talk and help us to understand. Our role was

to keep the conversation on track and to make sure that everyone has the chance to contribute

their ideas. We're going to do a graffiti wall (which we'll explain in a minute), ask some

questions, and end with you giving us some written feedback.

Optional (see note following): To make this official, we need to go over the agreement for your

participation [pass out the minor assent and review it-emphasizing process confidentiality,

anonymity, right to not answer questions; after signatures, turn on the recorder.] NOTE: if assent

forms have been completed prior to the focus groups, there is no need to review the form in the

group session.

BACKGROUND ON DEPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

To begin, we just want to get a sense of who you are and where your parent is in the deployment

process. So let's just go around the circle and have each of you introduce yourself (first name

only) and tell us about your current situation with respect to deployment:

1. Who do you live with?

2. Is your parent deployed now? (how long has the parent been away)

3. Which of your parents is/has been deployed

4. How many deployments have you experienced?

5. How old were you when your parent was deployed the first time?

Graffiti Wall Exercise: "When I Think About Deployment"

[After the initial introduction, introduce the graffiti wall activity]

You'll notice that we've placed three sheets of paper on the (floor/wall). Each one has the same

"starter" phrase on it [read it out loud]: When I think about deployment………..

Please write/draw your response to the phrase. You can use a single word, a brief sentence, or a

simple picture. No need to put your name on it—just give us your thoughts. We'll give you a few

minutes to do that.

6. When you think about deployment, what words, phrases, or pictures come to mind?

[Allow about 5-7 minutes—depending on interest and group size—for them to complete. Then hold up each sheet and review some of the responses. The intent is to get the group more comfortable in talking and in sharing emotions. Limit this activity to 10 minutes.]

THE DEPLOYMENT CYCLE

Youth and their families go through different phases of deployment: before the parent goes, while the parent is away, and when your parent returns. We'd like to ask you some questions about your experience with this process.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT: We'll start with what happens BEFORE your parent is deployed.

7. Tell me about how your family prepared for the deployment.

    a. Were there special conversations or discussion about changing responsibilities?

    b. Who did the talking (e.g. both parents together/separate conversations)?

    c. Were there discussions about what the parent would be doing?

8. What else do we need to know about what happens before your parent is deployed?

DEPLOYMENT: Now let's talk about what happens DURING the deployment (when your parent is away)

9. How are things in your family (including relationships with brother & sisters, mom) different when your parent is deployed? For example, do you find that you spend more or less time with each other than you did before? Do you notice any changes in how you get along?

   [NOTE: what are they noticing in terms of change or stability—in all familial relationships]

10. Tell me about the relationship you have with your at home parent during deployment

    [NOTE: trying to get a sense of the attachment relationship and its stability/change during separation].

    a. What kinds of things do you talk about?

    b. What things do you keep from him/her?

    c. What kinds of things do you do together?

    d. How close do you feel to this parent?

11. Tell me about the relationship you have with your deployed parent while they are deployed.

    [NOTE: trying to get a sense of the attachment relationship and its stability/change during separation].

    a. What kinds of things do you talk about?

b. What things do you keep from him/her?

c. What kinds of things do you do together?\

d. How close do you feel to this parent?

12. What else do we need to know about what happens during the deployment?

REINTEGRATION/POST-DEPLOYMENT: Now let's focus on what happens when the deployed parent RETURNS home.

13. Was there anything different about your deployed parent when he/she returned home? [NOTE: intent is to reveal description and stability/change in emotions, routines, expectations— also be listening for signs of PTSD, wounded warriors etc—probe a bit more if you get these to see the interpretation by the teen]

14. What did you notice about how your returning parent "fit' back into the family?

15. After the deployment, what did you notice about your relationship with your deployed parent?

16. After the deployment, what did you notice about your relationship with your at-home parent?

17. What else do we need to know about what happens or what it's like when your deployed parent returns home?

MULTIPLE DEPLOYMENTS: Now we'd like to talk about your experiences with MULTIPLE deployments.

18. Now please remind me which of you have experienced a deployment more than once.

[NOTE: Focus on these youth, so that we get reports of experience, rather than what other youth have heard from their friends about multiple deployments, or what they guess about multiple deployments]

19. For you, what was different about the second (or third) deployment? Did you and your family prepare for it differently than the first? During the second (third) deployment what was different for you? When your parent returned from the second (or third) deployment what was different for you, compared to the first deployment?

SUPPORT: Now we want to talk to you about who you go to for SUPPORT.

20. Who is the first person you usually turn to for support when you are really sad/scared/ or lonely?

[NOTE: going for if they have an attachment figure or if they are isolated—the scared sad lonely part is what tips us off to the attachment figure--keep them focused on the scared/sad/etc rather than on problem solving issues—again, trying to get at attachment activation—not problem solving per se]

   a.   How are they helpful?

b. Is this the same person you turn to when your parent is deployed?

c. Does the support you receive from them change over the course deployment?

d. Do you find that you become the support system for others? If so, who?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADVICE

We will end our discussion with a very important question.

21. If you could give advice to a teen that just found out her/his parent was deploying soon, what would you tell her/him?

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Now to end our focus group we have a very brief set of survey questions for you to complete.

It will take just a few minutes to complete. There are no right or wrong answers to any of these questions. We are interested in your honest opinions. If you do not understand some of these questions, please ask us to explain.