**Adolescents' Perceptions of the Relationships with their Parents in the
Context of Parental Military Deployment: A Systems Theory Perspective**

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Abstract

This study sought to explore how adolescents' relationships with both of their parents changed

over the course of parental military deployment. Participants were 9 adolescents, 12-13 years

old, that participated in a focus group. Family systems theory was the guiding lens for

qualitative data analysis, which included constant comparative and open and axial coding. Two

dominant patterns emerged: 1) process that promoted relationship closeness and 2) process that

promoted relationship distance. Processes that promoted relationship closeness included clear

communication, connectedness with the at-home parent, togetherness, and flexibility of roles.

Processes that promoted relationship distance included restricted communication, at-home parent

disengagement, deployed parent disconnectedness and lack of role shifting. Findings suggest

processes evident in adolescent relationships with their parents during deployment indicative of

adjustment outcomes. Clinical implications and future research are discussed.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem and its Setting

Since the deadly terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, the United States has been

involved in the ongoing Global War on Terrorism (GWOT), heavily relying upon our own U. S.

military troops to fulfill two main operations: Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in

Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) in Iraq. Approximately 2.2 million men and

women comprise the United States armed forces, which include those in active duty as well as

the National Guard and Reserves (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2005).

Despite this admittedly large number, this is a 32 percent reduction in forces from just under 20

years ago (U.S. Department of Defense, 2010).

A smaller, all voluntary U. S. military force in conjunction with GWOT, the longest-

lasting war conflict since the Vietnam Era, has led to many troop deployments. Throughout the

course of the current 9-year conflict, more than 1.6 million service members have been deployed

to Afghanistan or Iraq (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2008). These deployments are often

lengthy, usually lasting between 12 and 15 months (Congressional Research Services, 2008), and

one-third of these service members have deployed more than once (Defense Manpower Data

Center, 2008). In fact, of those that have experienced multiple deployments, 70,000 have

experienced three deployments, and 20,000 have been deployed 5 times or more (Johnson, et al.,

2007). Long, multiple combat deployments not only tax the many service members involved, but

also the children and families left back at home.

There are overwhelmingly more spouses and children of military service members, than

service members themselves (Office of the Deputy Under the Secretary of Defense, 2005).

Three out of five service members have "family responsibilities" that include a spouse and/or

children (Johnson, et al., 2007, p. 10). In fact, approximately 43 percent of service members have children, totaling about 1.8 million children (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2005). In addition to the military service members, families and children of the personnel are also affected by the demands the military culture places on their families. Some of these include: risk of service member injury or death, long and unpredictable work hours, frequent moves, residence in foreign countries, deployments and reunions, certain behavioral expectations of family members, the hierarchical military culture seeping into family life, the masculine structure of the military not conducive for valuing family, and isolated locations of many military installations (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Frances & Gale, 1973; Segal, 1986; 2006). Deployments, aforementioned, are especially difficult on families, as they have to adjust to home life without their spouse, father, or mother around for long periods of time, which can be very stressful. Not only do families have to deal with the physical stressors that come with having a service member absent for a great deal of time (e.g., change in routine, additional responsibilities), but also the plethora of emotional stressors that present as well.

Children are especially susceptible to experiencing more negative outcomes due to parental military deployment. These include changes in behavior, such as attention difficulties and aggression (Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008; Hiew, 1992; Yeatman, 1981), changes in academic performance (Yeatman, 1981), changes in emotional health, such as symptoms of anxiety or depression (Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989; Jensen, Martin, & Watanabe, 1996; Kelly, Hock, Smith, Jarvis, Bonney, & Gaffney, 2001), feelings of loss and uncertainty (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007), and even physiological changes, such as increases in heart rate and blood pressure (Barnes, Davis, & Treiber, 2007). Additionally, the incidences of child maltreatment have been shown to increase during times of parental combat

deployment (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, & Johnson, 2007). With that being stated, much of the research has shown that better adjustment in at-home parents (usually mothers) during deployment, as measured in levels of stress and perceived support (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Hiew, 1992; Medway, Davis, Cafferty, Chappell, & O'Hearn, 1995) seems to serve as a protective factor for the adjustment of children to military deployment. In other words, at-home parents that reported having lower stress and having more support during deployment was associated with better adjustment in their children. Furthermore, higher levels of stress and less support seem to be linked with poorer adjustment and negative outcomes in children.

While much research has studied the effects of deployment on military children and families, little attention has been given to how deployment affects the relationships between children and either of their parents, deployed or non-deployed. Unlike other forms of parental absence, such as divorce (Popenoe & Whitehead, 2005) or parents' employment (Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian, 2005), combat deployment has the risk of service member injury or death and inconsistent communication. Additionally, with longer and multiple deployments, separation and reintegration may also be more challenging for families and the quality of their familial relationships.

Adolescents in military families are of particular importance to study because they are not only in a normally transient stage of development, similar to civilian adolescents, but they also are susceptible to adjustment difficulties during parental deployment. Normatively, they are moving from childhood to adulthood, experiencing a vast number of typical stressors, including physical, cognitive, and social changes. Adolescents often strive for independence from their parents during this time, yet still desire a supportive relationship with them to facilitate their

growth and success. Parents still serve a critical role in the development and growth of their

adolescents (Allen, 2008). Because of this, it is important to understand how the relationships

between adolescents and their parents change over the course of deployment, including the

parent that stays at-home as well as the deployed parent.

<div align="center">Significance</div>

Military deployment of a parent is one of the more stressful life events a child can

experience (Johnson, et al., 2007). Children usually rely on the comfort and security of their

parents during stressful experiences, but during deployment, a parent is actually physically

removed from access. It is particularly important to study adolescents that experience this

because they are already in a transient stage developmentally. With transience in adolescence,

comes physical, social, and cognitive changes, not including an increased risk of engaging in

high-risk behaviors (e.g., substance use, sexual activity). All of these normative changes may

become negatively exacerbated if the families the adolescents are a part of are also under

additional stress, due to parental deployment.

It is well-researched the value and importance of the parental relationship in adolescence

(Allen, 2008). In fact, positive parental relationships through the perception of parental support

often serve as a protective factor for many of the changes that occur in adolescence (Weiss &

Schwarz, 1996). The role of the parent as an "encourager" with school-aged children now shifts

to a "counselor" for adolescent children (Hamner & Turner, 2001). Emotional closeness

between parents and children often decrease during this developmental stage (Steinberg, 1988).

It is important to understand what happens with the relationships between the adolescents and

their deployed parents and at-home parents over the course of deployment to better understand

how to support adolescents through deployment. Understanding possible shifts in parent-

adolescent relationships occurring throughout the course of deployment can also provide mental

health providers working with this population a better understanding of when and how to

intervene to best support these relationships.

Rationale

Relatively few studies have included adolescents in their study of deployment effects on

youth (Barnes et al., 2007; Chandra, et al., 2010; Houston et al., 2009; Huebner & Mancini,

2005; Huebner et al., 2007; Jensen, et al., 1995, 1996; Levai, Kaplan, Daly, & McIntosh, 1994)

and even fewer from the descriptive perspective of adolescents (Houston et al., 2009; Huebner &

Mancini, 2005). Additionally, the author was not able to find any empirical study that has

examined the potential changes in the parent-adolescent relationship over the course of the

deployment cycle. This study, therefore, sought to add to the current field of research by

exploring adolescents' perspectives on the relationships with their parents (both deployed parent

and nondeployed parent) over the course of the deployment cycle. This study used secondary

data analysis of focus groups comprised of adolescents from military families as they reflected

on their past experience of deployment. The qualitative approach allowed for rich, description of

the adolescents' experience of deployment and their relationships with their parents over the

course of deployment that could not have been simply captured by quantitative methods.

Theoretical Framework

Systems Theory

With its origins in the fields of biology, communication, and cybernetics, systems theory

was first applied to families by leaders, Gregory Bateson and Don Jackson (White & Klein,

2002). There are five primary assumptions and concepts that systems theory provides that relate

to the present study: holism and interdependence, system levels, boundaries, feedback, and self-reflexivity.

A system is a set of objects and the relations between the objects and their attributes (Hall & Fagan, 1956). Additionally, it "is a unit that can be distinguished and affect its environment (White & Klein, 2002, p. 124);" therefore, a family is a system (Broderick & Smith, 1979). A fundamental assumption of systems theory is holism. According to Whitchurch and Constantine (1993, p. 328), "a system must be understood as a whole and cannot be comprehended by examining its individual parts in isolation from each other." Because of this, components of the system are interconnected and have mutual influence on one another. What happens to one part of the system affects the other parts of the system as well. In applying systems theory to this current study, deployment physically removes one parent from the family system, thus according to systems theory, causes change in other parts of the system. The present study sought not only to understand how the relationship changes between the adolescent and the deployed parent during the deployment but also the non-deployed parent.

Systems are nested within other systems, and these are hierarchically organized (Broderick & Smith, 1979). Systems smaller than the family system, subsystems, make up relationships that include the parent-child and marital relationships. Systems larger than the family system, suprasystems, could include a variety of systems, such as the community, racial or ethnic subcultures, or a geographic region. At each level, the encompassing system is made up of the systems it includes as well as the interaction among those systems (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). In the present study, the parent-adolescent relationship was a subsystem of the larger family context. Understanding how the subsystem reacts to a stressor, such as deployment, provided further insight into how the larger family structure changes. Additionally,

this concept of systems theory provided insight into how hierarchy is organized within a system. This was especially pertinent when studying parent-child relationships, and for this study as well.

Boundaries define what is included and excluded in a system (Broderick & Smith, 1979). These boundaries set apart the system from their environment, as well as from other subsystems and suprasystems. Boundaries are also characterized by their "permeability; that is by the degree to which they permit or impede the flow of matter, energy, or information into and out of the system" (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993, p. 333). These can range from open to closed and can be explicit or implicit within the system. In this study, it was important to consider boundaries when looking at the parent-adolescent relationship because they could have influenced communication patterns, the roles and rules of the system, and emotional closeness or distance.

Feedback is how the system maintains and regulates behavior (Broderick & Smith, 1979). Negative feedback strives to maintain equilibrium, or homeostasis, within the system. When a change occurs, negative feedback tries to bring the system back to its previous homeostatic state to create stability. Positive feedback, on the other hand, serves to promote change in the system. When a change occurs, positive feedback creates variability, diverging from the previous homeostatic state (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). In the present study, deployment shifted the family from their homeostatic level, and of interest, is what feedback occurred in the parent-adolescent relationships and facilitated continued growth and movement in the system.

The last concept or assumption of systems theory relevant to this study is that of self-reflexivity. Human systems are able to reflect on their interactions and behavior and thereby change as the needs of the system change (Jurich & Myers-Bowman, 1998).

Thus, the adolescents that participated in this study were able to describe their relationships with their parents and how they potentially changed over the course of deployment.

Purpose of the Present Study

Past research provided a beginning understanding of the effects of current military deployments on adolescents in terms of behavioral and emotional changes, but still relatively little is known about the relational changes they experience with their parents throughout the course of deployment. This study gathered a further understanding of how adolescents experience the relationships with their parents over the course of deployment, with both their deployed and non-deployed parents. More specifically, the researcher examined the systemic indicators (e.g., system levels, roles, rules, communication, boundaries, positive/negative feedback, self-reflexivity) of the relationships over the course of deployment. In doing so, the results of this study have added to the body of research on adolescent adjustment within the context of the military deployment, as well as aided in designing treatment interventions with this population.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the literature as it relates to adolescents of military families and the relationships with their parents. First, an overview provides how the military culture impacts family structure. Specific aspects of military life highlighted in this section include, risk of service member injury or death, relocations, and separations from family members (including deployment). Secondly, adolescent adjustment outcomes to deployment have been highlighted. Thirdly, normative changes in the parent-adolescent relationship as they occur in adolescence are mentioned. Lastly, a review of the research on deployment and the effects on parent-child relationships are discussed.

Military Culture and the Family

Historically, the United States armed services had been primarily manned by young, single men. Over the past several decades the demographics of the military and personnel have shifted. Whereas the marriage rate for enlisted personnel in 1952 was 29.7 percent (McCubbin, Dahl, & Hunter, 1976), it currently is at 51.6 percent for enlisted personnel and 70.6 percent for officers (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2005). This large increase is in large part due to the shift from conscription to an all-voluntary military force in 1973 (Segal, 2006). Since that time, emphasis on retaining experienced and already trained personnel has increased, and thus, the military became more of a long-lasting career choice for many; approximately 1.3 million are on Active Duty status along with their 1.8 million spouses, children, and dependents (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2005). Aforementioned, more than 60 percent of military personnel have some family responsibilities, whether it be a spouse, children or both.

Both the military and family life have been described as "greedy institutions" because they are both demanding of time, energy and commitment (Segal, 1986). Not only do military families experience the normative family issues that civilian families experience (e.g., parenting strategies, financial stress, social demands) military families experience unique stressors due to involvement in the military culture. Researchers have identified several aspects of the military culture that place unique demands on families. They are as follows: risk of service member injury or death, long and unpredictable work hours, frequent moves, residence in foreign countries, separations and reunions, certain behavioral expectations of family members, hierarchical military culture seeping into family life, masculine structure of the military not conducive for valuing family, and isolated locations of many military installations (Burrell, Adams, Durand, & Castro, 2006; Frances & Gale, 1973; Segal, 1986; 2006). The following section highlights many of the stressors presented in the military culture, and the affect they have on family structure.

Risk of Service Member Injury or Death

The risk of service member injury or death is a constant presence in the lives of military families. During wartime, the risk is much greater, but even during peacetime deployments and field-training exercises, risks are associated with the military. With vast improvements in combat protection for troops, families not only worry about the physical injuries that a loved one may return with but also less visible psychological impairments. Hosek, Kavanagh, and Miller (2006) found that between 11 and 18 percent of military personnel exposed to combat experiences have returned home with increased stress reactions and mental disorders compared to 9 percent of those without the combat experience. Children and adolescents, in particular, have also expressed their worries about the safety of their deployed parent (Houston, et al., 2009;

Huebner & Mancini, 2005). In fact, in a large-scale Survey of Army Families (SAF V), Orthner and Rose (2005) found that over one-third of the children "seriously worry about what could happen to their deployed parent" (p. 1). Risk of service member injury or death is a very real threat in the lives of military families, and even more so during a time of war, such as the current GWOT.

Relocations

Another unique demand that the military has on family structure is frequent relocations, stateside or internationally. Although civilian families may also have to relocate for various reasons, military families often have to move at a higher rate than civilian families (31 percent compared to 15 percent in the general population) and more often (every 2 to 3 years; Orthner, 2002). Additionally, international moves occur four times higher in military families than in the general population (Pittman & Bowen, 2004).

Frequent moves often disrupt family life, including schooling for children and adolescents, the existence of social and support networks, and spouse employment. If the move is internationally, adjusting to the new culture, potentially a new language, is also another stressor that may be compounded (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Segal, 2006). For some spouses and families, moving may be a more positive experience, but in the SAF IV, Orthner (2002) found many military spouses reported adjustment difficulties surrounding their most recent move (e.g., psychological well-being, physical health, marital satisfaction). Children and adolescents also experience the consequences of moving (e.g., disruption of peer relationships, emotionally vulnerable). Finkel, Kelley, and Ashby (2003) studied geographic mobility specifically in children of military families and found that the longer time spent in one residence, though, the better outcomes the children had in terms of social adjustment and feelings of

loneliness. Their findings suggest that the number of moves did not seem to predict adjustment outcomes compared to the length of time spent in the residence. This demonstrates that the longer time that can be spent in one residence, the better it is for children, however, being apart of the military may make this particularly more difficult.

Separations from Family Members

Military families are often separated from the service member for some time due to trainings, schooling, or deployment. They can last in length from a couple days to several months to a year or more. Separations are a frequent occurrence of the military culture and are often recurring (Burrell, et al., 2006). Orthner and Rose, in the SAF V (2005), found that 61 percent of spouses reported separations from their service member. Over one-third of the spouses surveyed had experienced or were currently experiencing a deployment of their soldier spouse to theater and half of those were for lengths of 12 months or more.

Deployment

Deployments, in particular, greatly impact the structural and emotional aspects of family life. Deployment separations are for usually longer, extended periods of time, they are usually to active war zones where there is an increased risk of injury or death for the service member, and thus there is usually great fear surrounding the service member's deployment. For these reasons, deployment is particularly stressful for families. Researchers on deployment separations in families have divided deployment into four distinct phases: pre-deployment, deployment, reunion, and post-deployment (Hosek, et al., 2006). With each phase of the deployment cycle comes unique stressors and changes for the military personnel and their family to adjust. Pincus, House, Christensen, and Adler (2005) have further documented the emotional cycle of

deployment that families often go through as their loved one is deployed. The phases of

deployment will be explained below as well as the impact each phase has on families.

The pre-deployment phase begins when the service member receives notification that he

or she is being deployed and ends when they depart. During this phase of "ramping up," service

members are often assigned additional duties and tasks to ensure preparedness for deployment.

This phase often involves long working hours. The service member is also arranging for their

absence in their families. This includes completing wills and power-of-attorneys, arranging

childcare, household maintenance, organizing the finances, and completing car maintenance. In

general, this is a very busy time for the service member and their families (Johnson et al., 2007).

Emotionally, pre-deployment is a very difficult time for families. Dealing with the

anticipation of loss can lead to some mixed feelings in family members. Wanting to be close

with the service member but also needing some emotional distance to protect oneself against the

inevitable pain of separation can be difficult for spouses and children and may lead to changes in

their relationships with one another. As the deployment approaches, the service member may

begin to detach from the family as he or she becomes more focused on the mission of the

deployment. This may be difficult for family members to adjust to, since the member is still

physically present in the home. Couples may find themselves having more marital arguments.

Children may sense the emotional changes in the household during this phase of the deployment

as well. They too are trying to adjust to the emotional changes, and this may impact how they

relate to their parents. Furthermore, depending on the age of the child, they might internalize

feelings of guilt and begin to feel lonely (Amen, Jellen, Merves, & Lee, 1988). The pre-

deployment phase, because of the physical and emotional stressors placed on the service member

and their families, can be a potential time of change in the familial relationships or military families.

Deployment begins after the departure of the service member. The service member is focusing on survival in often stressful and dangerous environments. For the families left back at home, the first month of this time is often characterized by disorganization and more mixed emotions. Feelings of sadness, anger, numbness, depression, anxiety, loneliness, and relief are often reported. Somatic health complaints and difficulty sleeping may occur (Pincus et al., 2005). The physical removal of the deployed member creates change in the family system, and marks a new way of communicating and relating to the deployed member. Spouses and children must adjust to how to have a relationship with their partner or parent while they are absent, which more than likely, is different than how the relationship was with them before they deployed. This adjustment phase may also be a potential marker for change in the nondeployed parent's relationship with their children. Spouses may feel particularly overwhelmed with the added family and household responsibilities during this time (Johnson et al., 2007). For children, it may be additionally overwhelming for them to see their at-home parent experience some of these mixed emotions.

Following this initial stage of the deployment, families often progress into an emotional stage of sustainment (Pincus, et al., 2005). The family begins to recover from the initial shock and loss of their loved one and establish new routines for themselves. The family often has to restructure themselves to fill the roles that the member once held. New social supports are often created (Pincus, et al., 2005). This time and phase can be rewarding to spouses and families. It can improve their sense of confidence and independence in the situation (Pincus et al., 2005). While the majority of families seem to adjust to deployment, still a large percentage of families

(29 percent) report the most stressful time of deployment is at the midpoint (National Military Family Association; NMFA, 2005). Increased responsibilities, parental absence, family structural changes, and emotional distress are still present during deployment and can be very taxing on families.

Reunion is the next phase of the deployment cycle. It typically starts one month before the service member is expected to return home. Both the deployed service member and his or her family often anticipate the reunion. There are often feelings of excitement, as well as apprehension as to how the return will go (Pincus, et al., 2005). Deployed members may worry about how they will fit back into their family. Members of the family may begin thinking about how their relationships will be different once the deployed member returns. Married partners may create an idealized version of how their marital relationship will be when the deployed member comes home. Children may also create these idealistic hopes of how their parent will be when they return.

Post-deployment, or reintegration, begins as soon as the deployed service member returns home. For the service member, home life is a big change from the experience of combat deployment. It may take a significant amount of time for the deployed member to become accustomed to the shift. Between 12 and 19 percent of returning OIF and OEF personnel report some mental health concerns (e.g., PTSD, depression, anxiety) just a couple weeks after return (Hoge, Aucheterlonie, & Milliken, 2006). In the post-deployment phase, there is often a short "honeymoon" period (Pincus et al., 2005) following the actual homecoming. Family members are excited to see one another and have things return to "normal." Families begin to go through a period of adjustment because each member of the family has changed over the course of the deployment, and the family itself has changed. During this time families may find themselves

renegotiating rules and routines as the service member has a more physical presence in the

family system. Spouses may feel some loss of independence during this time as the service

member takes back over some of the role in the family assumed by others (Pincus et al., 2005).

Additionally, the service member may feel uneasy as how to rejoin back into the family. While

all these adjustments are taking place, the family is also reacquainting and renegotiating their

relationships with one another; figuring out what the marital relationship now looks like and

what the parent-child relationships now look like.

In summary, deployment is one of the major stressors on families in the military. In

addition to deployment and other separations, the risk of service member injury or death and

frequent relocations, make the military culture particularly demanding on families. It is

important to study the effects of these stressors on families in order to better support this

population.

<div align="center">Deployment and Adolescent Adjustment</div>

Adolescents are unique in that they are in a transient stage of development. They already

experience many normative physical, emotional, and social changes at this stage, so it is

important to understand what happens when an additional stressor occurs at this stage,

particularly when a parent deploys.

Researchers have found that adolescents are susceptible to experiencing negative

outcomes due to parental military deployment. These include changes in behavior, such as

"lashing out" at others (Huebner & Mancini, 2005, p. 30), disciplinary issues (Rosen,

Teitelbaum, & Westhus, 1993; Yeatman, 1981), "demanding attention," (Rosen, et al., 1993),

refusal of communication (Rosen, et al., 1993) and changes in academic performance (Huebner

& Mancini, 2005; Yeatman, 1981). Changes in emotional and psychological health have also

been noted, such as symptoms of anxiety or depression (Chandra, et al., 2010; Huebner &
Mancini, 2005; Jensen, et al., 1995; 1996; Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009; Rosen, et
al., 1993), emotional withdrawal (Huebner & Mancini, 2005), phobias (Yeatman, 1981), and
feelings of loss and uncertainty (Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Huebner et al., 2007). Additionally,
physiological changes in adolescents during deployment have also been studied, such that
deployment is associated with increases in heart rate and blood pressure (Barnes, et al., 2007).

Many of the results of these studies gathered data from both the adolescents and their
parents and found a significant relationship between adolescent adjustment to deployment and
the adjustment of their at-home parent (Chandra, et al., 2010; Jensen, et al., 1996; Medway, et
al., 1995; Rosen, et al., 1993). For instance, the more emotional distress the at-home parent
experiences surrounding deployment predicted more emotional distress or negative behaviors in
their children.

One recent study (Chandra, et al., 2010), conducted phone interviews with 1,507 military
children, ages 11 to 17 years old, and their at-home parent caregivers. Researchers created their
own deployment-related experiences scales, which included asking the child and at-home parent
about their difficulties with both deployment and reintegration. Constructs assessed were
academic engagement, anxiety, behavioral problems, emotional difficulties, peer functioning,
family functioning, and maternal mental health. Results indicated that older children seemed to
have more difficulties in adjusting to deployment and also reintegration than younger children,
and girls more so than boys. Children that lived in military housing seemed to have fewer
difficulties adjusting to deployment than those children whose parent's rented. Additionally,
caregiver mental health was related to child difficulties during deployment; caregiver's with
poorer mental health reported more child difficulties during deployment. Also, the greater

number of months the parent was deployed was significantly linked to more child difficulties during and following the parental deployment. Despite these recent findings, still relatively little is known about the relational aspects of these adolescent-parental relationships in the context of deployment.

<div align="center">The Parent-Adolescent Relationship</div>

As adolescents begin to strive for independence and autonomy, parents of adolescents often find their role and their relationship with their child change. The role of the parent as an "encourager" with school-aged children now shifts to a "counselor" for adolescent children (Hamner & Turner, 2001). Emotional closeness between parents and children often decrease during this developmental stage (Steinberg, 1988). Perceived parental support seems to be a very important factor at this stage of development. It is associated positively with cognitive development, socially appropriate and moral behaviors, an internal locus of control, self-esteem, and academic achievement and negatively with substance abuse, problem behaviors, and low self-esteem (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). Parental support includes general sustenance, continued contact, companionship, and physical affection (Weiss & Schwarz, 1996). More open communication styles between parents and adolescents are also important for fostering support during this developmental stage (Hamner & Turner, 2001).

The parent-adolescent relationship also tends to become more egalitarian (De Goede, Branje, & Meeus, 2009). As adolescents strive for autonomy from their parents, parents navigate how to grant them the autonomy, while still having appropriate parental control. Conflicts can often occur between parents and adolescents at this stage, as they fight over the issue of control (Paikooff & Brooks-Gunn, 1991). Adolescents often want to spend more time with their friends and less time with their parents (Larson, Richards, Moneta, Holmbeck, & Duckett, 1996).

Because the issue of control is such a significant issue for parents and adolescents, parents that express high levels of support and use inductive control tend to do better with adolescents (Hamner & Turner, 2001). The use of inductive control by parents involves creating clear rules and expectations for their adolescent, and providing consequences if behaviors fall outside of those rules and expectations. Inductive control allows adolescents to feel more in control because they get to make some decisions on their own, while still allowing parents to assert power when their expectations are not met (Hamner & Turner, 2001). Despite the normative changes that occur in the parent-adolescent relationship during adolescence, little research has focused on how deployment impacts these normative processes.

<center>Deployment and the Parent-Adolescent Relationship</center>

Huebner and Mancini (2005) and Huebner and colleagues (2007) added greatly to the understanding of adolescent adjustment to deployments as well as starting to understand the relational changes that occur between adolescents and their parents over the course of deployment. Using focus groups of adolescents (n=107) between the ages of 12 and 18, they gathered qualitative data from the adolescent perspective on coping through the course of deployment. Many of the adolescents were currently experiencing a parental deployment or had previously. Results indicate that prior to deployment, the adolescents reported experiencing changes in their relationship with their deploying parent before they left. Some adolescents in this study reported noticing themselves emotionally withdrawing from their deploying parent or even starting fights with them. Many adolescents reported that the "worst thing about deployment" was the change or loss of the relationship with their deployed parent (p. 19). During deployment, some adolescents reported getting in more "fights" with the at-home parent and some shared feeling like they were "promoted to co-parent" (p. 27). Some adolescents felt

they were able to use their at-home parent as a way to decrease their stress, still some adolescents were not able to do this. Approximately half of the adolescents reported spending more time with their at-home parent during deployment and half reported having less time with the at-home parent. This study primarily focused on the overall adjustments of adolescents to deployment, however, it was evident from the adolescent reports that adjustment also had a relational component to it. From a systems theory perspective, change in these adolescents would also occur within the context of relationships, including those with their at-home parent, deployed parent, and other important relationships in their life.

Similarly, Mmari and colleagues (2009), gathered qualitative data pertaining to adolescents and their adjustment to deployment. They organized separate focus groups of adolescents (n=39), parents (n=25), and school personnel (n=35) to understand the impact of deployment on adolescents and their families and to strategize ways in which to help adolescents cope with deployment. Similar adjustment difficulties in youth (i.e., emotional stress, anxiety, concern about deployed parent's safety, behavioral problems at school) were described during deployment, supporting previous literature. Some adolescents were also able to "describe how their mothers were becoming either physically sick because of their stress and worry or more emotional and angry and, in turn, hurting their relationship with their children" (p. 462). Additionally, both adolescents and parents described shifts in the roles of the home. Mothers (most often the at-home parent) reported having to take over the "father role" (p. 464). Adolescents reported difficulties in this process when the deployed parent returned home. Some parents reported that their adolescent "adapted and became accustomed to the particular parenting style of the remaining parent during deployment but then experienced confusion after the deployed parent returned" (p. 464). This study has added to further understanding of the

adolescent experience of parental deployment by triangulating data sources, from adolescents, parents, and school personnel. It also provided a beginning understanding of the parental-adolescent relationship processes that occurred over the course of deployment by noticing relationship changes with the at-home parent during the deployment and changes occurring with the deployed parent upon reintegration.

Houston and colleagues (2009) gathered qualitative data from children of National Guard troops and their perceptions of deployment. Participants (n=24) ranged in age from 6 to 17 years, with 50 percent of the sample falling between the ages of 10 to 17 years. Participants were separated from their fathers due to a training before their long-term deployment to Iraq. The authors argue that while these interviews were not technically done during the deployment of their fathers, the children knew their father was not home and was going to be deploying. Results on how children were dealing with their parent's absence support existing literature. Additionally, researchers asked the participants, "How do you think the deployment will affect you long-term?" (p. 808). Two children responded that they thought there would be changes in the relationship with their deploying parents. One child thought the experience would bring her closer to her father, and one child thought the separation would be problematic and difficult for his relationship with his father. The other remaining children provided answers unrelated to the relationships with their parents. This study supported some of the findings of the other two studies, but also made the distinction of the National Guard population. It also highlighted the possible disparate results on how deployment potentially impacts parent-adolescent relationships.

It is important to further examine the extent to which deployment impacts the normative progression of adolescent relationships with both of their parents, deployed and non-deployed over the course of deployment. Existing literature provided some insight into some of the

possible changes occurring, but further examination is needed for a couple reasons. One, the three studies previously cited did not focus the inquiry of their research into relational changes in the adolescents' lives with their parents over the course of deployment. The interviews from the original study (for use in this study), on the other hand, were structured around questions that asked participants to describe and talk about their relationships with their parents over the course of deployment. Two, previous studies have been largely atheoretical. While they have been informing into some of the processes occurring between adolescents in the context of their parental relationships and families, they do not provide a theoretical lens to organize and make sense of the data. This study, on the other hand, provides a heavy theoretical underpinning in family systems theory that guides the interpretation of the data. Lastly, this study also focuses on both relationships between the adolescent and their parents throughout the deployment, which also allows for a more systemic interpretation of the findings.

In conclusion, this chapter provided an overview of the literature and research on the military culture and its effects on family structure, the effects of deployment on adolescents, normative changes the parent-adolescent relationship experiences, and a review of the research on parent-adolescent relationship changes in the context of deployment.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Design of the Study

This study is a qualitative study that relied on the use of secondary focus group data, previously collected by Drs. Angela Huebner and Jay Mancini in 2008, of adolescents that have experienced parental military deployment. The researcher sought to use this data to examine how adolescent and parental relationships changed over the course of deployment, based on the adolescents' retrospective accounts and experience of deployment with both of their parents, deployed and non-deployed. Criterion sampling was used to identify the focus group best suited for analyses (Miles & Huberman, 1994). To examine this data, the researcher used the constant comparative method to analyze the qualitative research data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Sample Participants

Participants from the original study were adolescents who attended Operation Military Kids (OMK) camps in the summer of 2008 in 5 different states: Florida, Maine, North Carolina, Ohio, and Pennsylvania. OMK camps are sponsored for youth in military families that have experienced deployment by OMK (U. S. Department of Army) and Cooperative Extension (CSREES), so they were at no-cost or low-cost to the participants. Attendees registered for the OMK camps, were also asked if they would participate in the research project. Parental consent was required for participation in OMK camps, as well as the research project. Informed assent was also obtained from the adolescents in the study.

Participants of the original study were 85 adolescents from 11 different focus groups across the 5 different camps. Participants ranged from 11 to 18 years of age. Each focus group had between 6 and 10 youth participants. Gender of the participants was about equal (50.6% female, 46.4% male). Ethnicity of the participants was reported as follows: 73 % White, 11%

African-American, 2% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian, 1% Native American, and 8% biracial.

There were slightly more participants that reported their parents as Active Duty (25% Army, 4%

Navy, 8% Air Force, 8% Marines, 2% Coast Guard) compared to National Guard (41% both

services) and Reserves (2% all branches). 7% of participants reported having parents in multiple

services, and 2% reported being unsure of their parent's service affiliation.

For the present study, the sample (see Table 1) was a focus group consisting of 9

participants, 5 female (56%) and 4 male (44%). All participants were either 12 or 13 years old.

All participants reported having experienced parental deployment, and seven (of the nine) had

experienced at least one full deployment cycle. Approximately half of the sample had

experienced multiple deployments (n=5; 56%). Most of the participants had parents on Active

Duty (n=8; 89%) compared to National Guard (n=1; 11 %), with some dispersion among

branches of the Active Duty service (44% Army, 11% Navy, 11% Marines, 11% Air Force).

Most of the participants had a father as the service member parent (n=7; 78%), one had a mother

(n=1; 11%), and one had a step-father (n=1; 11%). Most of the participants lived with their

service member parent (n=8; 89%).

Table 1: Participant Demographics

Name	Gender	Age	Race	Parent in Military	Branch in Military	Number of Deployments
Robert	Male	13	White/Caucasian	Father	National Guard	1
James	Male	13	White/Caucasian	Father	Navy	Multiple
Tom	Male	Not provided	White/Caucasian	Step-father	Army	Multiple
Jennifer	Female	12	White/Caucasian	Father	Army	1
Shaniqua	Female	12	African-American	Father	Air Force	1
Beth	Female	13	Asian	Mother	Marines	Multiple
Danielle	Female	13	African-American	Father	Army	Multiple
Eva	Female	12	African-American	Father	Army	Multiple
Justin	Male	13	White/Caucasian	Father	Air Force	1

Procedure

In the original study, focus groups were conducted with the adolescents at the OMK

camps that had parental consent to participate in the research project, as well as provided their

own assent. The 11 focus groups, depending on the location, lasted between 60 and 90 minutes

in length and had between 6 and 10 participants in each group, 85 in total. Depending on the

camp, some of the focus groups were divided by gender and age. All focus groups were digitally

audio-recorded and later transcribed.

Focus groups were semi-structured, and a general interview guide was used by the

researchers to facilitate the interview process. Participants were first asked to share some brief

information about themselves and about their military parent. Participants were also asked to

respond to a variety of open-ended questions that followed the structures of the deployment cycle

(i.e., pre-deployment phase, deployment, reunion). These included asking the participants about

how their family prepared for deployment and to describe their relationships with both of their

parents during and after the deployment (see Appendix A for Interview Protocol).

Concluding the interviews, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire asked participants for basic demographic questions as well as questions about their military parent and experience with deployment. The questionnaire also included the following measures: the parental scales of the Revised Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment (IPPA-R, Gullone & Robinson, 2005), the Children's Depression Inventory (CDI, Kovacs, 1983), and the Family Climate Inventory (Kurdek, Fine, & Sinclair, 1995). Additionally, resources were offered to all adolescents, but especially for any participant that experienced emotional distress from participation in the focus groups.

For the present study, one focus group from the original study was selected based on criterion sampling followed by intensity sampling. Criterion sampling is typically used to ensure participants in a sample meet some criterion or have experienced the phenomenon of interest (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The criterion for inclusion in the present study were: 1) majority of the participants in the focus group to have experienced parental military deployment; 2) majority of the participants in the focus group to have experienced at least one full deployment cycle; 3) majority of participants in the focus group are able to reflect back on their experience with deployment and abstractly describe their relationships, a criterion that seems to be somewhat tied to developmental abilities. In doing this first round of sampling, three focus groups were identified from the original data set that met all the criteria. Based on the scope of the project, the sample was narrowed down from three focus groups to one. The researcher used intensity sampling for this process. Intensity sampling is a sampling procedure that utilizes the selection of cases based on the intensity that the phenomenon of interest is being shown (Patton, 2002). For this study, intensity sampling was used to find the focus group of participants that were most able to notice and describe their relationships with their parents (see criterion 3). This was

quantified by the number of words in which participants used to answer the focus group

questions, as words are the unit of analysis in qualitative research. The more words used by the

participants to describe the phenomenon, the more data were yielded. This sampling procedure

was not conducted to find extreme cases within the original study but rather to find information-

rich data.

<div align="center">Analyses</div>

The current study sought to explore the parent-adolescent relationship over the course of

deployment by relying on previously collected qualitative data. Analysis of the data utilized the

constant comparative process outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The first part of the analysis began with open coding. During open coding, the researcher

coded for systemic indicators of the parent-adolescent relationship as influenced by the systems

theory lens (e.g., boundaries, roles, rules, communication, positive/negative feedback, self-

reflexivity). For the purposes of this study, boundaries were defined as separations either

between the subsystem (i.e., deployed parent-adolescent relationship, nondeployed parent-

adolescent relationship) and the greater system (i.e., family) or within the subsystem itself.

These varied in degree from open to closed, and rigid to flexible. Roles were defined as explicit

or implicit positions members of the family take on. Rules were defined as explicit or implicit

expected norms of the system. Communication included what and how the system

communicates. Positive Feedback was defined as ways in which change is promoted. Negative

feedback was defined as ways in which change is prevented. Self-reflexivity included ways in

which the system reflects and/or adjusts to change in the system. Throughout this process, the

researcher also used the constant comparative method to compare and contrast the data in open

coding. This allowed for the reinforcement of the current codes or the creation of new codes

(e.g., at-home parent adjustment, deployed parent adjustment).

Additionally, in open coding the rule code also informed the researcher that there

appeared to be various rules that seemed to be present in different family systems. For example,

in some families there was an implicit rule of not showing emotions. There seemed to be other

rules that many of the families shared (e.g., getting "used to" deployment, trying to "get over"

deployment). These rules seemed to be shared by a large number of the adolescents. Upon

further analysis it may be that these rules of the family systems are influenced by the larger

military system. It seems that these adolescents were "used to" deployment and that it was best

to "get over it" and deal with it as quickly as possible. Regardless, these rules also informed the

axial coding process.

The next level of coding, axial coding, allowed to researcher to make connections within

the data and established codes. The codes of positive feedback, negative feedback, and self-

reflexivity informed this process and provided more information into how the patterns of the

adolescents and their relationships with their parents tended to change over time and throughout

the course of deployment. Positive feedback provided insight into how the adolescent and

system changed based on feedback they were given throughout the deployment cycle. Negative

feedback provided insight into how the system maintained throughout the deployment cycle.

Self-reflexivity provided insight into the adolescents' reflections on these processes (i.e., system

change, system maintenance).

From this process, patterns emerged that informed the results of this study. The

researcher also used the constant comparative method in analysis by utilizing the resource of

another coder, the Thesis Committee Chair, Dr. Angela Huebner, which ensured credibility and

trustworthiness throughout the process.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Systems theory was used as the guiding lens to explore how deployment impacts the

relationship between adolescents and their parents. To this end, systems indicators as defined in

the previous chapter (i.e., boundaries, roles, rules, communication, system levels,

positive/negative feedback, self-reflexivity) were explored in open coding. These system

indicators were evident in various degrees across all three phases of the deployment cycle (i.e.,

pre-deployment, deployment, post-deployment). In the course of exploring the relationships

among the codes via axial coding, many themes emerged within two main patterns: 1) processes

that promoted relationship closeness, and 2) processes that promoted relationship distance. Given

these patterns, the analyses are organized into two sections such that the pattern indicated by

relationship closeness will be explored through all three phases of deployment followed by an

exploration of the pattern of relationship distance through all three phases of deployment (see

Appendix B, Figure 1).

Processes Promoting Relationship Closeness

Pre-deployment

From the moment the service member is made aware that he or she is going to be

deployed, the family is faced with new and different experiences that are unique to this

population and the experience of military deployment (e.g., how to disclose to the adolescent of

their parents' departure). From the adolescents' perspectives and reports of how deployment

occurred in their family, there were ways in which their parents and family functioned that

seemed to promote relationship closeness. This was especially evident in how the adolescent

was informed of their parent's deployment, how the family was able to talk about the

deployment, and how the adolescent was able to say good-bye to the deploying parent.

For many participants, it seemed that it was beneficial for all members of the family to be able to clearly communicate about the details of the deployment and their thoughts and feelings throughout this process. This included a bi-directional process, of both parents being able to communicate to the adolescent and the adolescent feeling like they could talk with their parents. This was often evident in the deploying parent being a part of the disclosure process to the adolescent, and parents communicating to the adolescent how the adolescent's role in the family may change during deployment. In addition to more open communication patterns in families contributing to relationship closeness during pre-deployment, some adolescents also reported spending more time together as a family before the service member parent departs. This was reported fondly by the adolescents, and therefore, seemed to contribute to felt closeness during this stage of deployment as well. Thus, processes that promoted relationship closeness at this stage in deployment were characterized by the following (and will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent section): 1) open communication throughout this stage, including the deploying parent being a part of the disclosure process to the adolescent and upcoming adolescent role shifts being made explicit, and 2) increased family togetherness.

Open Communication

Communication in this study was broadly defined as "what and how the system communicates." Communication was operationalized as the transmission of information, thoughts, and emotions. Open communication, thus, describes the communication in the family system that has limited restrictions or boundaries and is often more direct and clear. During the pre-deployment phase of deployment, open communication within the family and especially between the adolescent and their parents was demonstrated in two ways: a) the deploying parent

being a part of the disclosure process to the adolescent, and b) communication to the adolescent

of upcoming role shifts.

   Deploying parent part of disclosure process to adolescent. Some of the participants

shared that their deploying parent was involved in informing them about the upcoming

deployment. For the majority of these adolescents, it was both parents together telling the

adolescent together that he (usually the father) would be leaving. In these instances, it was clear

that the parental subsystem knew before the adolescent that the father would be leaving. The

flow of this information went from the parental subsystem to the children, and it seemed to be an

intentional process set in motion by the parents.

   Tom: …Like he leaves three months and then like he'll stay for a bit and leave

   three months again, and usually like our family sits down and talks about it...

   For these adolescents, it seemed beneficial to have the deploying parent be part of this

disclosure process. It seemed to demonstrate an open style of communication because the

deploying parent was there to provide them details about the upcoming deployment. This often

included what the parent would be doing, their location during the deployment, and when the

parent would be departing. The family was able to communicate to the adolescent about the

deployment in a way that made sense to the adolescent. The adolescents also acknowledged that

when it was done this way, they had time to process and cope with the news.

   Role shifts made explicit. Some participants were told by one or both of their parents that

they were going to have to take on additional responsibilities, and or roles, in the household

while their parent was deployed. The adolescents that were explicitly told by their parents to

take on a new role in the family remembered the conversation well, as it was a part of how their

parents prepared them for changes to occur during the deployment. It also seemed to be a clear

expectation set by the parents to which the adolescent was expected to comply. The roles that

the adolescents reported being informed about, were to be the "man of the house" and a caretaker

for younger siblings.

James: Before my dad leaves, he tells me to be the man of the house because he's

gone for like six to eight months at a time, and he tells us, like, two or three weeks

in advanced so we have time to get over it.

Togetherness

Some participants reported spending more time together, especially with the deploying

parent during the pre-deployment stage. Some families seemed to come together during this

time before the deploying parent would leave, which seemed to foster increased closeness with

one another. The adolescents reported this time as enjoyable and memorable and appreciated the

time with their deploying parent especially.

Jennifer: What me and my dad and my family do is like the last week before he

leaves we'll spend as much family time, like, we'll go do things that my dad enjoys

like golfing or camping.

Increased togetherness or closeness seemed to be a way for the family to prepare for the

deployed parent's upcoming absence. This seemed to positively enrich the relationships between

the adolescents and their parents during the pre-deployment stage.

Deployment

During the actual deployment, the family is faced with multiple challenges that affect the

entire family system. From the adolescents' reports, the relationship closeness in their families

seemed to be demonstrated in three ways: 1) more open external boundaries to allow supports to

influence the system 2) adolescent closeness with at-home parent, and 3) flexibility of internal

boundaries, which includes tolerating varied and different communication with the deployed parent and flexibility of role shifts during the deployment. These adolescents tended to report feeling closer to their at-home parent during deployment, while still attempting or trying to stay connected to their deployed parent. Some found the benefit of external supports to help them during the process. In general, strategies for maintaining or enhancing family cohesion, or closeness, were evidenced.

Openness of External Boundaries

Some participants reported that during deployment, other people external to the family system took more of an active role in the family. For these participants, it was often extended family or friends.

> *Tom: Uhm, well, while he's gone sometimes I go over and stay at my grandma's house sometimes because me and my grandpa get along a lot, and I have a family member, my cousin, who is here and his dad is, he trained and teaches the soldiers for Iraq and all of that. He hasn't been deployed for a while and next year he's going for about four months and so while either my step dad or his dad is gone, we just go and hang out and do what we normally do.*

The permeability of the external boundaries in the family system, allows external supports to influence the family system, including its members. For the at-home parent, it seemed to provide respite from some of the child caring responsibilities that they normally had. Some of these people also seemed to serve as confidants for the adolescent during their parent's deployment. The adolescents mentioned the value in having people that could understand their experience, whether it was because they had some experience with the military or deployment themselves.

Adolescent Closeness with At-Home Parent

Many adolescents reported a sense of closeness with their at-home parent during the deployment. Some of the adolescents reported having always been closer with their at-home parent, so the deployment experience did not necessarily change that relationship,

> *Beth: I spend more time with my dad I guess... It's always been the same.... I've*
>
> *always been closer to my dad.*

Interestingly, adolescents that reported their relationship with their at-home parent was always close and therefore did not change with deployment also reported having experienced multiple deployments of their service member parents.

Other adolescents, however, reported feeling an increase in closeness with their at-home parent when the deployed parent is gone.

> *Tom: 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.*

In some cases, this closeness seemed to be linked with the change in the adolescent's roles in the household. These adolescents seemed to be taking on many more responsibilities in the home, through stepping into a caretaker role in their family, similar to a parental role. Still others' reports of closeness with their at-home parent during deployment did not seem to be linked with having an elevated role in the family system.

Increased communication between at-home parent and adolescent. A part of the closeness felt by many of the adolescents and their at-home parents was evidenced by communication with their at-home parents during deployment. The adolescents that reported

this seemed to enjoy the conversation with their at-home parents, which also seemed related to a felt sense of closeness.

> *Justin: We [My mother and I] had started talking a little bit more than when my dad was around, and I thought that was really nice.*

Some adolescents also seemed to access or communicate with their at-home parent in an effort to find out about their deployed parent. For these adolescents, it was apparent that the at-home parent knew more information and was more connected with the deployed parent during the deployment. Communicating with the at-home parent, therefore, seemed to maintain communication with the deployed parent as well.

Flexibility of Internal System Boundaries

For many family systems, it seemed positively adaptive and useful to have flexible internal boundaries. The less rigid the internal boundaries within the family system, the more able the family seemed to adapt to the needs and challenges of the deployment.

Frequency and form of communication between deployed parent and adolescent. Participants had varied experiences of how often they were able to communicate with their deployed parent. Most of the adolescents experienced not being able to communicate with their deployed parents very often. Some talked about changes in the forms in which they would communicate. For example, some talked about using email and web cams to be able to communicate with one another. Most adolescents said they wished they were able to talk to their deployed parent more frequently.

Flexibility in roles. Several adolescents reported having more responsibilities during deployment, whether it was taking care of younger siblings, pets, or more of the day-to-day tasks to contribute to the household. This shift seemed to be a common occurrence for these youth.

For these family systems, how these roles shifted in the household often demonstrated flexibility in the family's internal role boundaries.

>*Eva: Well, my mom and I still have the same relationship. We're both really close to each other, but like when my dad's not here I have to take on more responsibility because I'm the only child left in the house so I have to take out the trash, walk the dog, all of that stuff.*

A couple of the adolescents in the focus group reported emotionally caretaking for their at-home parents and younger siblings, in addition to taking on extra tasks of the household, similar to what their other peers experienced. This, however, seemed to represent being in more of an elevated parental role in the family system. This scenario seemed to be associated with a maladaptive process in the family system. As such, it will be discussed later in this chapter.

Post-Deployment

The post-deployment phase of the deployment cycle marks the time when the deployed parent returns home, and the family tries to reorganize and reintegrate the service member back into the family system.   Families that positively adapted during this stage, seemed to attempt to reorganize their family back to how it was before the parent deployed, while still acknowledging and incorporating the changes that had occurred during that time. This was evident in 1) how the family shifted roles back to include the deployed parent, including the reestablishment of the deployed parent in a parental role, 2) togetherness between the deployed parent and adolescent, and 3) closeness with the at-home parent. From the adolescents' perspectives, it seemed reassuring and adaptive for the family system to attempt to restore mostly to the way they were before the deployment and be flexible enough to build upon the change and progress that had occurred.

Role Shifts to Include Deployed Parent

The majority of adolescents in the sample reported things in their family seemed to return back to how they were before the deployment. While the family could not truly go back to the way things were before the deployment occurred, it seemed reassuring to the adolescents to notice that certain elements were going back to "normal."

> *James: Yeah, when my dad gets back, he's pretty much normal... So we do the*
> *regular things that we do when he gets back.*

This seems to suggest that various roles that people had in the family during the deployment shifted once the deployed parent returned to try and reintegrate the deployed parent back into the family system.

Parents rejoin to create parental hierarchy. During the post-deployment phase, the adolescents provided instances of how the parents were working together to parent in the family. This seemed to be a way that they were rejoining as parents to reestablish the parental hierarchy in the family. Examples of this included the arrangement of surprise reunions by the parents in the family system to surprise their children. Similar to the disclosure process of deployment, this seemed to be an intentional process from the parental hierarchy for the adolescent.

> *Tom: Just like Danielle was saying a few times he, one time we were sleeping one*
> *morning and he walked in the house, and we didn't even know and he came in our*
> *rooms and woke us up, and we were all excited. And then another time it was*
> *about eight o'clock, eight thirty at night and my mom said she was going to Wal-*
> *Mart or whatever and she came back and I was in her room and she brought him*
> *in there and I was the only one that knew right that second. I was so happy. And*

> *then we all walked in the living room and all the kids were like bouncing up and*
>
> *down.*

This example also seems to demonstrate the intentionality of the parental subsystem to surprise this adolescent first, before his younger siblings. Both parents working together in the parental hierarchy seems to demonstrate a process promoting relationship closeness post-deployment.

Togetherness between deployed parent and adolescent

Several adolescents reported spending more time together with the deployed parent upon their return. This seemed to be especially important and a shared experience for the boys in the sample. This time together seemed to be a way to try and reestablish the deployed parent-adolescent relationship. This time together seemed to promote closeness between the adolescent and the deployed parent as well. It also seemed to be a way to make up for lost time between them.

> *Tom: When he gets back, usually we go hang out and do something. And then like*
>
> *after the first or second day he starts to get back used to being doing all the*
>
> *routine and all of that, but the first day we just go out and hang out and*
>
> *everything and he starts getting back into normal.*

Increased Closeness between At-Home Parent and Adolescent

Several adolescents noticed positive changes in their at-home parent's mood, behaviors, and in their interactions with them upon the deployed parent's return. These adolescents reported a sense of relief that their mothers were "back to normal."

> *Danielle: When he comes back, my mom usually has more, she's usually more*
>
> *enthusiastic about things. And she likes to do more things like if she knows he's*

coming back, like, in a week or so she'll do more stuff with us because she knows

he's going to be back soon. And when, like, when he gets home or whatever, she's

just, like, I don't know, she like moves more or something.

Processes Promoting Relationship Distance

Pre-deployment

This section will highlight the processes within the family systems that are associated with relationship distance during the pre-deployment phase. This was especially evident in some of the processes that must occur in this stage, including how the adolescent was informed of their parent's deployment, how the family was able to talk about the deployment, and how the adolescent was able to say good-bye to the deploying parent.

Some family systems demonstrated less open communication. For these families, it was evident there were boundaries that restricted communication from flowing through the family system and its members. These boundaries seemed to be bidirectional, in that, they prevented the flow of information from the parents to the adolescents and from the adolescents to the parents. This included information about the deployment as well as the thoughts, feelings, emotions, and reactions that often occur in the pre-deployment stage. Restricted communication, thus, was often evident in how the adolescent found out about his or her parent's departure, how the family was able to communicate about the upcoming deployment with one another, and how the good-bye process even occurred. These family systems evidence restricted communication around information and emotions.

Restricted Communication

Some participants reported that there were things not being communicated within their family during the pre-deployment stage. This often included their own thoughts and feelings

about the deployment. Adolescents also commented on being able to notice it in other family

members as well.

>*Danielle: I try to like before he goes we try not to talk about it too much because I*
>
>*mean we've been through it a lot so it's not like something we haven't experienced,*
>
>*but we try not to talk about it and like the day he leaves or the day before he*
>
>*leaves or something we just like say our goodbyes or whatever, but we try to like*
>
>*keep talking about it over and over while he's gone or fight before he leaves*
>
>*because then he might still get sad over everything.*
>
>*INTERVIEWER: OKAY. IS THAT, UHM, DANIELLE IS THAT INTENTIONAL?*
>
>*LIKE YOUR FAMILY DECIDED, OKAY, OR IS IT JUST KIND OF NOBODY*
>
>*TALKS ABOUT IT SO WE DON'T TALK ABOUT IT?*
>
>*Danielle: I would say it's intentional like my dad, like my mom, like my sister it's*
>
>*intentional for us not to do it so we don't have to bring it up around him, but for*
>
>*my dad he probably just doesn't want to talk about it because he's leaving and*
>
>*stuff.*
>
>*INTERVIEWER: OKAY. SO, DID SOMEBODY IN YOUR FAMILY SAY, OKAY,*
>
>*WE'RE NOT GOING TO TALK ABOUT THIS OR IT'S JUST THAT NOBODY*
>
>*TALKED ABOUT IT SO NOBODY TALKS ABOUT IT?*
>
>*Danielle: Just fell into place.*

In this example, Danielle noticed her family's lack of communication about deployment.

There also seemed to be boundaries that existed in her family about showing and communicating

emotions to one another. For this family system, openly communicating about deployment and

the emotions that came with it was not something that the system allowed. It seemed like they

would avoid talking about the deployment to protect each other from feeling sad about the

father's departure, but it did not change the sadness present. While the restriction of

communication seemed protective in the family system, it also seemed to create a boundary or

distance in the family because they were not talk about this certain aspect of their lives. This

seemed to be something that just occurred, or "fell into place" for this family and was a part of

how they were dealing with upcoming deployment.

     Deploying parent not a part of disclosure process to adolescent. Two of the participants

reported specifically that their deploying parent was not a part of the deployment disclosure

process. Instead it was their at-home parent (both mothers) that shared with them about

deployment. This seemed to demonstrate a boundary, or a restriction, in how communication

flowed in the family system.

     One adolescent said that his mother told him about the impending deployment, but it

seemed to be an unintentional process, and the father was not present. This seems to

demonstrate a boundary present in the family surrounding who tells the adolescent what. This

restricted communication in the family system, may suggest a lack of closeness between the

parents or between the deploying parent and the adolescent. It could be attributed to the at-home

parent-adolescent subsystem being closer, and the at-home parent feeling more at liberty to share

this with the child. This closeness (between the at-home parent and adolescent) could be

explained by prior shared experiences of the parent being deployed.

     Robert: Uhm, I guess it's the same they kind of tell us is like my mom just kind of

     says it. We'll just be doing something and she'll kind of say it kind of thing I guess.

     We'll just be like doing something like we'll be coming back from shopping or

something or just say it while we're picking up groceries and stuff. Just out of the

blue kind of thing.

Another adolescent shared that he was not informed about his parent's deployment until

his father was already gone.

Justin: My dad had already left like the day after when I asked my mom where my

dad had went. She told me after he had deployed for a couple of months and I was

a little sad at first...

INTERVIEWER: WHAT WAS IT LIKE NOT TO HEAR IT FROM YOUR DAD?

JUST TO HAVE HIM UP AND BE GONE?

Justin: It was really sad at first.

This lack of communication in the family system seemed to negatively affect this

adolescent. He expressed feeling sadness that neither one of his parents informed him of his

father's departure. This seems to suggest a communication boundary between the parental

subsystem and the adolescent and possibly a lack of closeness as well.

Negative emotional expression. Another adolescent mentioned how the good-bye

process unfolded between her and her father. She disclosed that it seemed better to withhold her

emotions than show them to her father during the good-bye process.

Eva: Don't like always show your emotions like when they're leaving because that

makes them sad that you're leaving them and it makes them want to cry also.

INTERVIEWER: SO DON'T SHOW YOUR EMOTIONS WHEN THEY ARE

LEAVING. HOW DID YOU LEARN THAT? HOW DID YOU COME UP WITH

THAT?

Eva: Well, because the first time when he deployed out I was feeling really sad,

and I started crying a lot and he looked at me and started crying.

INTERVIEWER: DO YOU THINK THAT'S A GOOD THING OR A BAD THING

OR? BECAUSE MY SENSE IS THAT YOU DON'T THINK YOU SHOULD DO

THAT.

Eva: Well, it doesn't make sense to…It makes them think about you the whole

time.

The message that this adolescent seemed to hear from her parting interactions with her father was that sadness should not be expressed. The adolescent believed that the expression of her emotions encouraged her father to also express the same emotions, and for this adolescent, it was not preferred. This adolescent's attempt at restricting her emotions seemed to be a way to protect her father as well as herself.

<div align="center">

Deployment

</div>

During the deployment, there are still many stressors and challenges occurring for families. For some families there appeared to be processes from the adolescent's perspective that attributed to distance in family relationships and tended to be more maladaptive. For these adolescents, the processes that seemed to influence this were: 1) at-home parent disengagement and 2) maintaining a parental role in the family system. Adolescents that experienced either one of these processes, typically relied on others for support outside of the family system or themselves. Additionally, in this stage of the deployment there was also the presence of unchanged roles in the family and restricted communication in some family systems. This included the adolescent in communication with either of their parents. This restricted

communication also seemed to create distance in the adolescents' relationships with their

parents.

At-Home Parent Disengagement from Family System

One adolescent reported that her mother became distant or disengaged from her and the

family during deployment.

> *Danielle: Me and my mom we don't talk as much no more. We don't have like this*
>
> *as close as we were from like my dad, he's kind of like the head of the family so he*
>
> *keeps everything together and so like when he leaves my mom doesn't talk as*
>
> *much to like us. She mostly goes to her friends or something, and when we do talk*
>
> *it's mostly about my dad and where he is at right then or he's coming back and*
>
> *stuff like that.*
>
> *INTERVIEWER: OKAY. SO IT SOUNDS LIKE WHEN YOUR DAD IS AWAY*
>
> *YOUR MOM AND YOU BECOME MORE DISTANT?*
>
> *Danielle: My mom becomes distant.*

Becoming more disengaged from the family system seemed to negatively affect this

adolescent. She noticed that it was her mother that was not as connected to her as normal. This

process also appears to be linked to adjustment in the at-home parent during deployment, as this

adolescent described her mother having a difficult time dealing with the deployment of her

father. Perhaps the better adjusted the at-home parent is to the deployment, the more the parent

can stay connected to the family system to deal with the deployment stressors. This process also

seemed to be linked with who the adolescent turns to support during the deployment. If the

parent disengages from the family and the adolescent, the adolescent may not feel as able to confide in the at-home parent.

Adolescent Takes on a Parental Role

Two adolescents reported taking on what seemed to be an elevated parental role in the family system while the deployed parent was absent. This role seemed to include emotionally caretaking on some level for their at-home parent and younger siblings.

> *Jennifer: It has a lot more stress on my mom because she has to do everything like take my siblings places and I have to watch my little brother a lot more.... And it makes it so we have to sacrifice more like we can't do everything, like, all the sports and stuff....And it really adds more tension to my mom....Yeah. Me and my little brother fight a lot more and my mom really depends on me more...*

This seemed to be a maladaptive process when the role became too much for the adolescent to handle. The adolescents also reported being closer with their at-home parents during the deployment. Adolescents taking on parental roles in their families also seemed to be linked with them turning outside of the family for support and guidance (i.e., older friend) or turning inward and having to support themselves during times of need. Having this elevated caretaking role in the family perhaps prevented these adolescents from being able to express their emotional needs to their at-home parent.

Unchanged Roles

One of the adolescents reported that roles or responsibilities did not change during deployment for her and her family.

> *Danielle: So, I'm used to him not being around that much, but before he deploys, he just tells us he's going to be going, he tells us where he's going and then we*

still are with our mom and none of the responsibilities change because we do a lot

of work with my mom and stuff around the house.

This seems to be a maladaptive process in the family system, as it may suggest that the

family never fully reintegrated the deployed parent back into the family system before he (in this

case) deployed again.

Restricted Communication between At-Home Parent and Adolescent

A couple of adolescents reported having boundaries in the communication with their at-

home parent during the deployment. For some, it seemed that discussing deployment, and the

thoughts and feelings surrounding that, as well as general communication with their at-home

parent was restricted.

> *Danielle: It's okay because I understand what she's going through because we've*
>
> *been through it so much and I don't feel like talking that much either because you*
>
> *don't want to just like, sometimes you just don't feel like it when your dad's not*
>
> *there… So, when she leaves, when she doesn't want to talk to us or something or*
>
> *she feels like talking to her friends or sleeping in or something because she don't*
>
> *want to talk about it, I just leave her alone.*

Negative emotional expression. Additionally, some adolescents shared the difficulty in

seeing their parent's sadness during the deployment.

> *Justin: It's just really hard to see her cry like that and I really don't want to see*
>
> *her like that again.*

Similarly to the process previously reported in the pre-deployment stage between the

deploying parent and adolescent, it was difficult for some adolescents to see their at-home parent

experiencing distress or expressing sadness. It seems important for this adolescent to not see his

mother in distress again. It seems that the adolescent may be trying to establish a boundary

between himself and his mother regarding the expression of emotion. On the one hand, this

seems like a strategy to protect one another from painful feelings; on the other hand, it also

seems to create distance in the relationships.

Adolescents who found themselves having more restricted communication with their at-

home parent seemed to rely on and go to others outside the family system or themselves for

support during the deployment.

> *Danielle: I used to go to like my mom or my grandma to talk to them, but like I*
>
> *saw that I started making them like sadder when I started crying or something.*
>
> *So, I just started like talking to myself or I'll talk to like one of my friends.*

This adolescent talked about no longer wanting to express or communicate her feelings,

as she saw it affecting her at-home parent and her grandmother. The adolescent seems to be

making a choice to keep her emotions in or go to one of her friends to protect the emotional well-

being of her mother and grandmother. The adolescent, thus, is restricting what she is sharing to

their at-home parent. This also seems to demonstrate how the expression of emotion is tolerated

in the family and how restricting the communication of the emotions seems to be a protective

function.

Restricted Communication between Deployed Parent and Adolescent

A couple of the adolescents reported boundaries in what was communicated with their

deployed parent during the deployment. It seemed like there a boundary especially in the

emotional disclosure of what was occurring for the adolescent and the deployed parent.

> *Danielle: You can't really, well, my dad I can't really ask him how his day went. If*
>
> *he asks me I can tell him, but he has to like, he says he can't tell us everything that*

he does so like I'll be what are you doing? He'll be like just working. He can't like

tell us nothing so it's hard not knowing what he's doing and if he's really okay or

not.

INTERVIEWER: SO HOW DO YOU FEEL WHEN YOU DO ASK HIM IF HE'S

OKAY?

Danielle: Yeah, are you okay? He'll be like, yeah, I'm fine, but I know he's really

not because like the little web cam thing you can see his face, and he wasn't liking

it.

INTERVIEWER: HE WASN'T LIKING IT. WHAT'S THAT LIKE FOR YOU TO

HAVE THAT KIND OF A CONVERSATION?

Danielle: Well, I try. Every time they do the web cam I try not to be around or

nothing because I don't really want to see him like that…Because I know, like,

he's having a hard time over there so I don't want to see him mad and upset and

stuff.

Danielle seemed to know that there were times when what her father was saying and what she was seeing were not matching. This incongruent communication bothered her, along with seeing her father in distress. She talked about how this then deterred her from watching the web camera to even communicate with her father. It seemed that their communication boundaries served a purpose in protecting them from experiencing negative more negative emotions, but it also seemed to create more distance between them. This seemed to be a reinforcing process, in that, the more communication was restricted the more emotionally distant the adolescent felt and vice versa. Additionally, it seemed to create a distance from their parent that they seemingly were trying to avoid.

Another adolescent talked about how she found herself withholding also what she told her deployed parent during the deployment.

> *Eva: Well, I talk to my dad, well, I actually get to talk to my dad everyday because he gets to call so I tell him how I am doing and everything and so we just keep a relationship going.*
>
> *INTERVIEWER: OKAY. DO YOU FIND THAT THERE'S STUFF THAT YOU, I MEAN BECAUSE YOU SAID YOU DIDN'T WANT HIM TO SEE YOU CRY, YOU KNOW, BEFORE YOU LEFT. IS THERE STUFF THAT YOU LEAVE OUT WHEN YOU TALK TO HIM?*
>
> *Eva: Yeah, sometimes.*
>
> *INTERVIEWER: YEAH. SO WHAT KIND OF STUFF WOULD YOU LEAVE OUT?*
>
> *Eva: Like if I got hurt or something.*

Similarly to the previous quotation, this also seemed to be an attempt by the adolescent to protect the emotional well-being of the deployed parent. While these boundaries in communication between the adolescent and their at-home parent seem to serve as a way to protect one another's feelings, it also seemed to promote distance in the relationship.

Post-Deployment

Post-deployment is one of the most challenging times of the deployment cycle for families. Participants shared processes that occurred in their families that seemed to contribute to maladaptive adjustment during this phase of the deployment. After reunion, some of the adolescents noticed differences in their deployed parent. These included behavioral and affective changes and less attentiveness to the adolescent and the family. It seemed in some

families the deployed parent was disconnected from the family system for some time.

Additionally, for some of the families the at-home parent-adolescent subsystem and relationship

remained closely connected through the return of the deployed parent. This seemed to be

associated with a maladaptive process because it seemed to be a barrier to the deployed parent's

reintegration back into the family. Similarly, in at least one family, it was evident that the

adolescent had not surrendered from the parental role in the family. These processes seemed to

perpetuate maladaptive patterns of adjustment during this phase of deployment, because they

prevented the family from coming back together as one unit. These processes, thus, are also

indicative of relationship distancing, which are: 1) the deployed parent's disconnectedness from

the family system, 2) the sustainment of the at-home parent-adolescent subsystem that excludes

the deployed parent, and 3) the adolescent staying in a parental role in the family system.

Deployed Parent Disconnectedness from Family System

In some cases, even though their deployed parent was home, it was apparent that he or

she was still disconnected from the family system. This was evidenced by the adolescent's

descriptions of their returned parent:

> *Danielle: When my dad gets back, it's like the first month or so there's like this*
>
> *dazed where he can't get with it because he's used to being over there like where*
>
> *all the battlefields so he's not used to be around his kids and stuff. He just like*
>
> *looks rough and he looks like he's been through a lot and last time he deployed*
>
> *and came back he had a shooting game and he would sit on the computer and*
>
> *play that like all day. That's what he was used to and usually that's how it goes*
>
> *the first month. After that he'll like start to get back into it and start talking to us a*
>
> *lot more, but he still can't like tell us what he did over there so we don't know*

what he actually went through. All we know is that he went through something

and it made him upset.

The adolescents reported noticing a certain amount of time when their deployed parent was "different." This adolescent was able to describe how distant he seemed from her and the family. This lack of connectedness to the family seems to prohibit the family from returning to a state similar to how it once was before the deployment. It also seems to prevent connection in the relationship between the adolescent and their previously deployed parent. The deployed parent's disconnectedness seemed to be related to poorer adjustment following the deployment.

Closely Connected At-Home Parent-Adolescent Subsystem that Excludes Deployed Parent

For some families it seemed that the at-home parent-adolescent subsystem closely connected despite the deployed parent's return. The adjustment of the deployed parent upon their return seemed to be linked with how well the adolescent and at-home parent incorporated the parent back into the family. One participant shares how she knew that her mother was keeping things from her father.

> *Jennifer: Uhm, last time my dad was deployed one of his friends was killed so he*
>
> *came back with anger management problems.… It kind of scared me because if I*
>
> *did one little thing bad, I'd get into a lot of trouble, but he's in therapy and so it*
>
> *was kind of hard dealing with that.*
>
> *INTERVIEWER: OKAY. AND HOW DID THAT IMPACT YOU?*
>
> *Jennifer: A lot because my mom had to keep everything from him, I mean not little*
>
> *things, but big things from him.*

This adolescent talked about knowing that her mother kept things from her father after he returned from the deployment. It also seems that the adolescent was somehow involved or aware

of this process, so it promoted the closeness of their relationship while at times leaving out the

deployed parent. This process seems to be related to the stress of the deployed parent's

adjustment upon the family system and also to how easily the adolescent was able to step out of a

parental role in the family system (see the subsequent section for this). This seems to be a

maladaptive process in that it would create some distance between the deployed parent and the

adolescent.

Adolescent Remains in Parentified Role

Aforementioned, the adjustment of the deployed parent when they returned seemed to

influence how well the adolescent was able to step out of more of a parental role and back into

their child role. For Jennifer, it seemed that she needed to maintain her role to help her mother

and family deal with her returned father. The adjustment of the deployed parent, seemed to

influence the ability of the system to reorganize back to fully reintegrate the deployed family

member, even though the deployed parent had physically returned to the system.

"Used To" Being with At-Home Parent

A rule that was evident from a couple of the adolescents was the idea of being "used to"

being with the at-home parent.   This seemed to represent also a transition in this phase of

deployment, going from the "at-home" subsystem to incorporate the deployed parent back into

the system. It seems like this rule of the system if held on could continue to lead change in the

system that might ever lead to full reintegration of the deployed parent back into the system.

> *Jennifer: And he was gone most last year for training so I haven't seen him in a*
>
> *while and so I'm kind of used to just being with my mom.*
>
> *Beth: I spend more time with my dad I guess. It's always been the same. I've*
>
> *always been closer to my dad.*

For these adolescents, it seemed like their deployed parent seems to be less integrated into their family system than compared to some other adolescents in the focus group. This could be influenced by the fact that the at-home has been present with the child for so long, that it may be difficult to incorporate the absent father again.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis of this study revealed many themes of how adolescents described the relationships with their parents over the course of parental military deployment, from which, two main patterns emerged: 1) strategies that promoted closeness, and 2) strategies that promoted distance. This chapter will provide further discussion of these findings, the limitations of this study, the clinical implications, and finally, suggested areas of future research.

Further Discussion of the Findings

Pre-deployment

Adolescents who seemed to adapt better to the deployment process also seemed to be adequately informed, able to talk about their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the news, and seemed to be prepared by their parents for the deployment. This was demonstrated through their communication of the upcoming deployment, including sharing thoughts and feelings, and some of the upcoming changes to be expected because of the deployment (i.e., changing of roles). These findings from this study seem to demonstrate a more open communication style, which from the literature, seems to foster a more supportive parent-adolescent relationship (Hamner & Turner, 2001). This also seemed to help the adolescents process the news of their parents deployment. This also supports previous research, in that, "psychological preparation is also predictive of a family's ability to adapt during deployment" (Booth et al., 2007, p. 32). Psychological preparedness is also about the service member and the family having a mutual understanding of how things will be when the service member deploys (Booth et al., 2007). This was evident from the adolescents' descriptions from how they were told about the deployment to what they were or were not told about how things may change in their families.

An interesting finding in this study is the value of togetherness in the family before (and after) deployment. The adolescents reported that this was important to them to be able to spend time with their deploying parent before they left and when their deployed parent returned. On the one hand it seems to make sense that the adolescents would prefer to spend time with their soon to be absent or absent parent, and on the other hand, it seems slightly surprising given the normative transition of many adolescents to become increasingly more oriented to peers over their parents (Larson et al., 1996). Given the context of these families in the military culture, however, the presence of the service member may be more valued by the adolescents when they are home, compared to civilian adolescents that do not have experience with their parent(s) deploying. This may be a possible difference that exists between parent-adolescent relationships in military families compared to civilian parent-adolescent relationships.

Deployment

Similarly to the increased togetherness by the adolescents in their families before and after the deployment, several of the adolescents reported they became closer with their at-home parent during the deployment. However, from the literature on the normative development of parent-child relationships over the course of adolescence, emotional closeness between parents and adolescents tends to decrease (Steinberg, 1988). This difference, between this study's findings and what is typically normative in the literature, may be explained a couple of ways. It could be that the adolescents in this sample are describing closeness with their at-home parent because there is no other parent present. A couple of adolescents in this study that were elevated in their roles, almost to a parental level, described being closer to their at-home parent, but when asked who they can turn to when scared, one adolescent reported her friend and the other adolescent reported sometimes his mother or himself. In this study, these adolescents seemed

closer to their at-home parent, but the emotional dependability on the at-home parent potentially decreased. Additionally, the closeness also may be related to the lack of reintegration of the deployed parent back into the family system. Closeness with the at-home parent could be maintained if the deployed parent is experiencing adjustment difficulties post-deployment or is not fully reintegrated back into the family. On the other hand, this could be a pattern unique to military families going through deployment.

Several of the participants talked about the benefit of supports outside of their family system during the deployment. These adolescents talked about the usefulness of these people, often because they had experience with deployment or knowledge of the military or deployment. Additionally, it was evident that their at-home parent used these supports as well. Social support includes the relationships individuals have with people or groups that aid in helping them fulfill their various needs (Booth et al., 2007). Social support has been found to help people deal with the effects of stress (Booth et al., 2007). Social support can be found in formal or informal sources. For this study, the majority of the participants were referring to the value of informal supports. These often include relationships with extended family members, neighbors, friends, and others. "Social support is an essential ingredient for maintaining well-being and adjusting to the demands of Army life" (Booth et al., 2007, p. 102).

The findings of this study suggest that some adolescents experience their at-home parent as being distant or disengaged from them and the family system during deployment. Some of the participants also reported seeing sadness in their at-home parent. Both of these seem to present as possible symptoms of depression. Furthermore, both of these symptoms seemed to affect the adolescents in their response to the at-home mothers, such that these seemed to restrict some of the communication the adolescent would have with the at-home parent. This context of

disengagement and sadness also seemed to be linked with the adolescent turning outside of the family system for emotional support or turning inward to themselves. The research on deployment-related stress having a negative impact on the mental health (i.e., anxiety, depression) of at-home parents has been well-researched (Black, 1993; Blount, Curry, & Lubin, 1992; Medway, et al., 1995; Rosen et al., 1993), as has the relationship of the mental health and adjustment of the at-home parent to the adjustment of the adolescent (Chandra, et al., 2010; Jensen, et al., 1996; Medway, et al., 1995; Rosen, et al., 1993). For instance, the emotional distress the at-home parent experiences surrounding deployment predicted emotional distress or negative behaviors in their children. In addition to the adjustment of the at-home parent to deployment being related to the adjustment of the adolescent's, the findings from this study may suggest that the changes in the relational dynamics of the at-home parent and adolescent may contribute to individual and family adjustment.

Post-Deployment

Several adolescents from the study reported seeing their deployed parent come back "different," which included behavioral, physical, and affective changes. They noticed their deployed parent being "dazed," "distant," or with "anger problems." Returning service members from combat deployments, especially from Iraq or Afghanistan, are at-risk for psychological problems, including depression, generalized anxiety, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD; Hoge et al., 2004). There is currently little research on the effects on children and families of service members returning home with clinical symptoms after their tours in OIF or OEF. This study begins to identify families in which adjustment difficulties were noticed by the adolescent in the deployed parent and some of the other family processes that were also occurring. For instance, two of the adolescents that especially reported adjustment difficulties in their deployed

parent upon return, also experienced a lack of connection with their deployed parent during this time, and one adolescent in particular seemed especially connected with her at-home parent during this time and seemed to remain in a parental role in the family system. The findings of this study may suggest that difficulties with post-deployment adjustment and reintegration of the deployed parent, may not all be on the onus of the deployed, but may also be a result of the processes and interactions of the family during the deployment itself.

<div align="center">Clinical Implications</div>

There are several clinical implications that can be gleaned from the findings of this study. The deployment process is often stressful and challenging for families to experience. It is important to support families in processing the thoughts, feelings, and reactions that come with the experience rather than hiding or restricting these communications with one another. Families that were able to have more open styles of communication with one another seemed to adapt better to the deployment experience than those families in which it was more restricted. With that being said, clinicians should strive to help families communicate openly throughout the entire process of the deployment cycle. They should encourage parents to prepare adolescents for the upcoming deployment by providing them adequate information about the deployment and any changes they may expect to encounter in their family because of it. Additionally, acknowledging the emotional difficulty in the situation and having an environment that is supportive and conducive for adolescents and parents to discuss these issues openly is of the utmost importance. Clinicians should help clients acknowledge and express their hurt and sadness of the experience while reconciling their ability to hold onto some of the values and influences from the military culture that may be present in their families and belief systems (e.g., being strong, just dealing with it).

Clinicians should also consider the social network of the military families they are seeing. A balanced level of reliance on both informal and formal support networks will greatly aid in the adaptation of families to deployments. This would also help at-home parents deal with many of the additional stressors that come with having their spouses deployed. When considering the social network for clients, consider both military and non-military supports to keep the family connected within the context of the military but also the civilian community if it is desired.

Adolescents also reported that they enjoyed the time they were able to spend with their family before and after the deployment, but especially with their deployed parent. Clinicians should be attuned to this, as it seemed to be very important to these adolescents. Clinicians can encourage families to engage in activities or rituals to promote family closeness before and after the deployment. The benefits of family rituals to mark important points in time for families have been documented (Wolin & Bennett, 1984).

The actual deployment can be a particularly stressful time for families. The absence of the adolescent's parent can be especially distressing if their at-home parent is also not adjusting well to the deployment. Clinicians should know that adjustment in the adolescent to the deployment is related to the adjustment of the at-home parent. Clinicians, thereby, can support youth through helping their at-home parent adjust to the deployment. Clinicians can work with the at-home parent-adolescent relationship as well, to help promote a more secure attachment (Allen, 2008); one that involves more clear communication and a balance of closeness and separateness. Clinicians can also support youth by helping them open up about the difficulties and experiences of the deployment, especially to people that are supportive of them during this time.

A particular stressful time for military families is post-deployment/reintegration. There are multiple changes occurring in the family, and the family is trying to figure out how to reincorporate the service member. Clinicians can first help prepare families and adolescents for this transient time by making them aware of the changes they might experience. These might include experiencing differences in the returning parent and having a time of uncertainty into how the service member fits back into the family. Clinicians can also help clients by normalizing any anxious feelings they may be experiencing about this time in the deployment cycle, whether it is about what the returning service member might be like, or how to relate to him or her again. Clinicians can also normalize some of the challenges present in this stage as well. Additionally, clinicians should also be knowledgeable of the signs and symptoms of PTSD or other mental health disorders that may become apparent in the returning service member. These do not always present immediately upon return, so it is important to be able to properly assess for these.

<div align="center">Study Limitations</div>

This study sought to understand more fully how the adolescent and their relationships with their parents changed over the course of parental military deployment. This was done by analyzing previously collected data of adolescents in a focus group setting. It is important to note this study's limitations to interpret findings appropriately.

One limitation of this study is the sample of adolescents that were used for inclusion in this study. These adolescents were research participants based on their registration and participation in an Operation: Military Kids support camp. Adolescents who participate in such a support activity may be different compared to other adolescents in the military, in that they may already have a more supportive relationship with their parent(s), based on the fact that their parent had to enroll and take them to this camp. This could influence how the adolescents in the

study experience change in the relationships with their parents over the course of deployment, especially if they are more generally supportive.

Another potential limitation of this study is the method of qualitative collection as it relates to the participants' developmental age. Focus groups have their strengths and limitations in how they are designed to collect data from participants. While strengths include the ability to capture group dynamics, such as highlighting consensus and areas of differences within the group, and is fairly a quick and easy way to gather data, participants' disclosures can also be influenced by the disclosure of their peers or the group process (Creswell, 2007). This is especially of importance to note, as adolescents may be keenly attuned or influenced by what their peers are sharing.

Another potential limitation of the current study is the sampling procedures used to obtain the participants for inclusion in this study. Criterion sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) was done to ensure that the focus group selected for inclusion in this study had the majority of participants that had experience with at least one full deployment, and that the majority of participants were able to abstractly describe the relationships with their parents, something that seems to related to developmental abilities. Additionally, intensity sampling (Patton, 2002) further selected one focus group where the participants were most able to abstractly describe the relationships with their parents. Both of these sampling procedures are considered purposeful (Patton, 2002). On one hand, it can be suggested using purposeful sampling allows for the selection of information-rich cases to be studied in much more depth, which can be identified as a qualitative methodological strength (Patton, 2002), it can also be suggested that it may have biased the results. For instance, being able to talk more or provide more narrative about the relationships with their parents could demonstrate a variety of things; it could be that the

participants potentially had better relationships with their parents, or they possibly had a better sense or insight into themselves to be able to talk about the relationships. Thus, by selecting a focus group with participants providing more narrative from the entire sample could have influenced the results accordingly.

<div align="center">Future Research</div>

This study provides an initial framework and understanding of how adolescent and parent relationships change of the course of parental military deployment, but still much is left to understand and learn from future research.

Future research should not only include the perceptions of adolescents, but also the perceptions of both of their parents in how the relationship shifted over the course of deployment. This triangulation of data would perhaps provide more insight into some of the systemic changes the adolescents reported in this study. The parents could provide more information regarding their adolescents' adjustment, their own adjustment, and how that affected their family system and relationships over the deployment cycle.

This study only had one participant whose parent was a part of the Reserve Component of the military. It is important to consider how the parent-adolescent relationships in career military families may differ when faced with deployment than families where the parent is in the National Guard or Reserve. Families in the Reserve Component often are not accustomed to some of the typical lifestyle and demands that usually comes with being in the military (Booth et al., 2007). Because the Reserve Component families are often geographically dispersed from military installations, they are often removed from formal and informal military support services that can be extremely beneficial to families dealing with deployment. Additionally, many of these service members carry civilian full-time jobs, and deployment often disrupts this for them,

which can create financial stress on the family. The additional stressors that the Reserve Component force deals with during deployment may have different affects on the parent-adolescent relationships in these families.

Future research should also extend to study older adolescents and relational change with their parents over the course of deployment. This study had all youth in the early stages of adolescence, but adolescents who have maybe had more experience with deployment in their families throughout their adolescence may be of special interest. Additionally, comparing findings between genders in the adolescents as well as comparing the genders of the deployed parent may be also useful. For instance, how does a female adolescent's relationship change or shift if her father was the deployed service member versus her mother? Making these distinctions could better inform clinical practice and points of intervention.

Additionally, the development of a longitudinal study would be a necessary next step to understanding parent-adolescent relationships in the context of the military, but also over the course of deployment, or even several deployments. This longitudinal design could capture the change as it is occurring in the relationships as well as gather quantitative data from the participants (ideally both parents and adolescents) along the way.

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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 <u>*a teen's perspective*</u>.

To do this, we plan to ask questions and then let you talk and help us to understand. Our role will be 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………..***
6.   When you think about deployment, what words, phrases, or pictures come to mind?

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.
[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**.]

I. 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.

A. 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***?*

B. 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?
 [what are they noticing in terms of change or stability—in all familial relationships]

10. Tell me about the relationship you have **with your <u>at home</u> parent during deployment** (**[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 <u>deployed</u> parent while they are deployed. [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**?

C. 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? **[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?**
<div align="center">[More questions on post deployment on next page]</div>
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?***

D. Now we'd like to talk about your experiences with MULITPLE 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?*

E. 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 <u>sad/scared/ or lonely</u>? [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?*

II. 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?

III. 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.

Appendix B
Figure 1
p. 77

	PRE-DEPLOYMENT	DEPLOYMENT	POST-DEPLOYMENT

Processes Promoting Relationship Closeness

Open Communication

Deploying Parent part of Disclosure

Role Shifts Made Explicit

Togetherness

Openness of External Boundaries

Adolescent Connectedness with At-Home Parent

Increased Communication between At-Home Parent & Adolescent

Flexibility of Internal Boundaries

Frequency & Form of Communication between Deployed Parent & Adolescent

Flexibility in Roles

Role Shifts to Include Deployed Parent

Parents Rejoin as Parental Hierarchy

Togetherness between Deployed Parent & Adolescent

Increased Connectedness between At-Home Parent & Adolescent

TIME

Processes Promoting Relationship Distancing

Restricted Communication

Deploying Parent Not Part of Disclosure

Negative Emotional Expression

At-Home Parent Disengagement

Unchanged Roles or Adolescent in Parental Role

Restricted Communication with At-Home Parent

Negative Emotional Expression

Restricted Communication with Deployed Parent

Deployed Parent Disconnected from Family

Closely Connected At-Home Parent-Adolescent Subsystem that Excludes Deployed Parent

Adolescent Remains in Parentified Role

"Used to" being with At-Home Parent