

## Abstract

Title:                                   **MILITARY FATHERS AND FAMILIES:  
EXPERIENCES ACROSS CONTEXTS,  
SPACE, AND TIME**

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There are approximately 1.8 million U.S. children with at least one parent in the military (Department of Defense, 2010). Maintaining an all-volunteer military force has led to an increase in older, career military members that are more likely to have children (RAND, 2010). Due to extended military commitments and recent deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the need to understand the impact of deployment and military work commitments on children and family relationships has come to the forefront. While a number of studies have explored the influence of deployment and a military lifestyle on children and families, few have explored the impact of military employment and deployment on father-child relationships from the perspective of fathers. This study explored the experiences of fathers as they negotiated the contexts of family and military life, created relationships with their children across physical spaces and over time, and strategized how to foster nurturant father-child relationships. Qualitative interviews with 23 Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Army fathers were used to address these exploratory areas. Among these fathers, 15 were from the enlisted ranks and 8 were officers. Fathers varied in terms of age, race, and socio-economic status but in order to better capture strategies, challenges, and fathering experiences, military fathers had at least one child during at least one

deployment, had been deployed at least once, and were married or had been in a committed relationship. Approximately 90-minute interviews were used to capture and explore father's experiences, as well as field notes of observations detailing site visits and interactions with staff serving military fathers and families.

The discussion of the resulting themes explores the relationship between work and family roles and identity and fathering, expands the view of how Army fathers manage mental health needs through compartmentalization and decompression and personal intervention as well as by being attentive to family needs, and emphasizes how Army fathers may be doing more than simply "making up for" implications related to their deployment but deliberately designing fathering to address the needs of their children in response to deployment and occupational demands.

The theoretical lenses of situated fathering and symbolic interactionism are used to frame and interpret the recorded experiences of military fathers as they navigated the fields of fatherhood and military. The theoretical concepts of ambiguous loss, ambiguous presence, and ambiguous absence are also used to connect the theories of situated fathering and symbolic interactionism, and enhance the exploration of military men's fathering.

MILITARY FATHERS AND FAMILIES:  
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By

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

Research exploring fathering and father involvement has advanced the understanding of father involvement by delineating measurable definitions for father involvement (Pleck, 2010) and proposed theoretical models for examining fathering (Doherty, Kounseksi, & Erickson, 1998). Men may balance a number of different roles (including partner, father, employee, son, friend, community member) and may define success as a man as part of a “package deal” of managing work and family roles (Townsend, 2002).

As men negotiate what it means to be a father and what this role entails, the need for a research focus exploring men’s nurturance and its influence on fathering has come to the forefront. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) suggested that there is a need to understand how nurturance shapes men’s fathering across the life course and how research can better measure men’s nurturant behaviors and father-child relationships. As cultural definitions of what it means to be a “good father” shift and modern fatherhood moves towards more nurturance and involvement (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000; Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001; Hofferth et al., 2007), understanding how fathers create strong, positive relationships with their children is of great interest. This process is even more important to understand as fathers who experience periods of separation or non-residence from their children seek to establish and maintain involved and nurturant relationships with their children. A number of areas of research have explored circumstances which may result in men experiencing periods of nonresidence with their children including divorce, nonmarital childbearing, incarceration, and fathers who travel for work (Arditti, Smock, & Parkman, 2005; Clarke et al., 2005; Mott, 1990; Prinsloo, 2007; Roy, 2005; Tripp, 2009; Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian, 2005). Another notable

group of fathers who transition through periods of residence and nonresidence with their children is military fathers.

The influence of military father absence on children and spouses has garnered some research (i.e. Carlsmith, 1964; Hillenbrand, 1976; Huebner & Mancini, 2005; Jensen, Martin, & Watanabe, 1996; Pedersen, 1966; Yeatman, 1981). The experiences of military fathers and families have come under additional scrutiny in recent years because of numerous military deployments and extended U.S. military obligations around the world. There are approximately 1.8 million U.S. children with at least one parent in the military (Department of Defense, 2010). Maintaining an all-volunteer military force has led to an increase in older, career military members that are more likely to have children (RAND, 2010). Due to extended military commitments and deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, the need to understand the impact of deployment and military work commitments on children and family relationships has come to the forefront. While a number of studies have explored the influence of deployment and a military lifestyle on children and families, few have explored the impact of military employment and deployment on father-child relationships from the perspective of fathers.

The current U.S. Military force is made up of over 3.5 million people (Department of Defense, 2008). This military force is comprised of civilians as well as active duty and reserve personnel. Of the five service branches, the Army has the largest number of active duty service members with 517, 783 persons (DoD, 2008). While the numbers of this military force seem large, there are many others influenced by the military institution not immediately evident in these figures. For the 1,365,571 active duty military members, there are 1,864,427 family members. Among Active Duty members, 38.0% are married with children and 5.2% are single parents (DoD, 2008). While information about the number of military fathers is often not

collected apart from collecting data about military parents (National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, 2008), male military members are more likely than female military members to have family responsibilities of any kind (spouse, child, or dependent elderly family member) (Booth et al., 2007). Recent census data has estimated that there are approximately 64.3 million fathers in the US (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). In comparison, there are 588,743 active duty military parents with children 23 years or younger (DoD, 2008). Because most of these parents are fathers, military fathers may represent approximately 0.9% of all U.S. fathers.

While military fathers may engage in fathering in a unique context, there have been few studies specifically examining the experiences of these men. Military fathers represent a unique population of men that “do fathering” in different ways because of restrictions and changes related to contexts, space, and time. For example, Marsiglio and Roy (2012) posited that military fathers may face additional challenges to fostering nurturant relationships with their children as two different contexts - family demands and military workplace culture - may complicate this process.

Deployment and reunification have been noted as two events that can be stressors to military families; oftentimes reunification is reported as the more difficult process to navigate (Figley, 1993; Huebner & Mancini, 2005). Improving the understanding of how fathers negotiate transitions across contexts (pre-deployment, deployment, reunification) and foster nurturant relationships with their children could facilitate development of services, protocols, and practices available to military fathers but also to other fathers who may experience periods of non-residence with their children. This study explores the experiences of fathers as they negotiate the contexts of family and military life, create relationships with their children across physical spaces and over time, and strategize how to foster nurturant father-child relationships.

The theoretical lenses of situated fathering and symbolic interactionism are used to frame and interpret the recorded experiences of military fathers as they navigate the fields of fatherhood and military. The situated fathering theoretical framework is used to understand how these men father across varying contexts, physical and social spaces as well as time (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). Concepts from a symbolic interactionism perspective are also used to enhance understanding of concepts related to role and identity. Symbolic interactionism is particularly valuable for enhancing understanding of role and identity development, exploration of role strain, and in enhancing the understanding of how military fathers negotiate different contexts for fathering and their familial and military roles, identities, and relationships.

### Questions for Exploration

For men in the military, how do context, space, and time shape their fathering? More specifically:

1. How do men create roles and identities as fathers within and across the military context and the family context?
2. What strategies and resources do fathers utilize to support positive fathering when living with and apart from their families?
3. How does the processes of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification shape men's fathering over time?

A qualitative research approach is particularly attentive to dynamics of process, context, and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) asserted the importance of examining the context and processes that influence outcomes of father involvement and father-child relationships. Utilizing a qualitative research approach for examining the context of

fathering for military men provides a more richly detailed view of the experiences, behaviors, strengths, and challenges of these fathers. It also allows for variation in experiences and is a valuable tool in capturing the diversity found within families (Gilgun, 1992).

Qualitative interviews with 23 Active Duty, National Guard, and Reserve Army fathers are used to address these exploratory questions. Among these fathers, 15 were from the enlisted ranks and 8 were officers. Fathers varied in terms of age, race, and socio-economic status but in order to better capture strategies, challenges, and fathering experiences, military fathers had at least one child during at least one deployment, had been deployed at least once, and were married or had been in a committed relationship. Approximately 90 minute interviews were used to capture and explore father's experiences, as well as field notes of observations detailing site visits, interactions with staff serving military fathers and families, and any additional interactions with fathers and their families.

Data analyses were conducted throughout the data collection process, beginning after the initial interviews with fathers and continuing through the process of obtaining saturation of themes and information from military fathers. Saturation of themes is defined as the point at which "no new data is emerging" as well as having identifiable categories and delineated dimensions within existing data (Corbin & Strauss, pg. 143). It has been noted that qualitative researchers analyze and interpret data throughout the data collection process, and that data coding will use concepts/ themes from sensitizing concepts, or "suggested directions along which to look," and prior research, as well as allowing them to arise from the data (Daly, 2007, pg. 104; Gilgun, 1992). The processes of open, axial, and selective coding were used (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Daly, 2007). Resulting themes included the relationship between work and family roles and identity and fathering, how Army fathers manage mental health needs through

compartmentalization and decompression and personal intervention as well as by being attentive to family needs, and ways that Army fathers may be doing more than simply “making up for” implications related to their deployment by deliberately designing fathering to address the needs of their children in response to deployment and occupational demands.

## **Chapter 2: Theories**

The theoretical perspectives of situated fathering and symbolic interactionism informed this exploration of military fathers' experiences as they navigated various contexts, spaces, and time. The situated fathering framework provides a valuable tool for examining how men enact fathering and work roles across various contexts, space, and over time. Components of symbolic interactionism are particularly salient to exploring and understanding the processes Army dads experience as they concurrently form and modify fathering and military identities.

### **Situated Fatherhood**

When Bronfenbrenner presented his ecological theory of human development, he made the point that it is essential to explore human development within context (Bretherton, 1993). His concepts of microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bretherton, 1993) highlighted that individuals and families are influenced by the various settings, conditions, and changes over time. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory emphasized the need to understand how the interrelationships between these different contexts, particularly during times of transition, influence individuals and families (Bretherton, 1993). The situated fatherhood framework was developed in response to the need to examine fathering within various physical, social, and symbolic settings and contexts (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, 2005). These researchers have emphasized the importance of understanding the influence of context on men's fathering and that how men "do" fathering may be impacted by contextual elements.

The situated fathering perspective is a theoretical framework developed to enhance understanding of the experiences of fathers across physical and social spaces (Marsiglio et al., 2005). This framework uses five primary properties: 1) physical conditions, 2) temporal

dynamics, 3) symbolic/ perceptual, 4) social structural, and 5) public/ private. This theory also utilizes secondary properties as a way to understand and clarify how men “do fathering” (Marsiglio et al., 2005, pg. 4). *Physical conditions* refer to the locations, conditions, and settings (e.g. open, closed, small, private, etc.) that men interact with their children within (Marsiglio et al., 2005). *Temporal dynamics* refer to examining and attending to not only physical locations that fathers interact with children within but how they interact with children over time. The intersection of space and time and how this influences men’s fathering is encompassed in this property (Marsiglio et al., 2005). *Symbolic/ perceptual* refers to the perceptions that individuals, including fathers, have of the settings they father within. These perceptions influence how fathers interact with children and others, and may shift and change with familiarity and experiences within these settings (Marsiglio et al., 2005). The *social structural* property includes how social norms and expectations may influence the conditions fathers interact within (Marsiglio et al., 2005). The *private/ public* property refers to fathers’ perceptions of how public or private the settings that they enact fathering within are perceived to be. This property incorporates both the physical location of fathering as well as the symbolic/ perceptual meaning that fathers, children, and others make in terms of how private or how public the setting is (Marsiglio et al., 2005).

Marsiglio and associates (2005) described a number of secondary properties that enhance the understanding of this theory and describe specific dynamics and influences on how men father. For this study examining the experiences of military fathers, the most salient of these secondary properties include: *transitional elements*, including how fathers negotiate moving from one setting to another or adjust to changes in context of interaction with their children; *personal power and control*, often related to social structure, constraints or privileges within

social norms, physical locations, or identified roles; and *fatherhood discourses*, including the explicit-or not- dialogues, beliefs, values, and supports for fathers which influence father identity development (Marsiglio et al., 2005).

Examining the experiences of military fathers from a situated fathering perspective is a strong fit. This theoretical lens provides many components that can be used to make meaning of and bring theoretical understanding to the experiences of military fathers. There are many restrictions and related dynamics of context, space, and time for military fathers (specifically during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification) as well as constraints related to personal power and control. Military culture may also be rich with social structural elements of what military fathers “do” and beliefs dictating “appropriate” father behavior. The theoretical lens of symbolic interactionism also adds insight to the concepts of role and identity formation and may provide an important framework for how military fathers negotiate the contexts of work and family. Together these two theories provide a useful framework for exploring relationships of military fathers as they engage in fathering over time, in different physical spaces, and across various contexts.

### **Symbolic Interactionism**

The symbolic interactionism perspective helps us to understand how individuals develop personality, self-concept, and certain behaviors in social settings (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Researchers who utilize this theory discuss how people negotiate relationships and situations through the process of making meaning from behaviors, and use symbols in selecting behaviors, shaping interactions and relationships. Families are a social group setting in which children develop their sense of self, identity, and the world through their social interactions within the family and other social relationships (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). When utilizing this perspective,

a dynamic approach to reality is employed - that is, individuals create their own reality based on symbols and meaning making of interactions (Ingoldsby, Smith, & Miller, 2004). The individuals' perceptions make their reality, which in turn influences relationships and the family.

Assumptions of the symbolic interactionism framework reflect three major themes: 1) the importance of meanings for behaviors, 2) the importance of self-concept and its development and maintenance, and 3) views on social processes in society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Included in these three main themes are seven additional assumptions that reflect the concepts of the themes. The first theme, the meaning that people place on certain interactions and behaviors, is reflected in three additional assumptions. The first assumption is that people act toward things based on the meaning that they have for these things and the cognitions and thoughts that occur between a stimulus and subsequent behavior (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The second assumption is that meaning is created through the interactive process that occurs between people, and the third assumption posits that these meanings are modified and used as a person reflects on and interprets the symbols and relationships encountered (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The second theme of the symbolic interactionism theoretical framework is that the development of self-concept and self-esteem is an important part of human development. There are two assumptions that expand this second theme. First it is assumed that people are not born with a sense of self but develop this through social interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Second, it is also assumed that developed self-concept in turn influences behaviors. The third theme of symbolic interactionism discusses how society influences individuals and groups in their behaviors, beliefs, and role expectations. Two more assumptions highlight that individuals and small social groups are influenced by cultural and societal influences and that social structures develop out of everyday social interactions between individuals (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). As an individual

interacts both with society and his/her family, roles and expectations are conveyed and used by the individual to determine identity and self-concept.

The development of roles and a sense of the part an individual plays within different relationships across contexts have been explored by contributors to symbolic interactionism. Through interactions within different relationships and contexts, individuals learn what is expected from them to fulfill different roles (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). Roles are described as the rules of behavior for certain positions, including those within the family (White & Klein, 2007). A number of factors might influence how a person enacts different roles. This may include the expectations that an individual has for a certain role as well as the expectations of others (White & Klein, 2007). The clarity of understanding individuals have for certain roles may also influence how successful they are at enacting the roles (White & Klein, 2007). If a person lacks clarity in understanding of how to enact a role, the individual and others may experience frustration as the role is unsuccessfully played out. Role strain can result when the individual lacks resources to enact a role, or when a person must play a number of roles with conflicting expectations or overwhelming requirements (White & Klein, 2007).

As an individual determines which roles are most salient in his life (often dictated or influenced by social norms and contextual expectations), he constructs a sense of identity (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). White and Klein (2002) discussed how the actions of the individual must be understood by unveiling the meanings of the actions to the actor, as well as examining the context and situation of the behavior. Understanding an individual's role enactment within contexts and relationships can enhance understanding of identity formation. Individuals will choose behaviors and how to enact roles based on their perceptions of salience hierarchy (White & Klein, 2007). This salience hierarchy provides a method for individuals to determine how to

play different roles and when to utilize different identities based on situations and contexts (White & Klein, 2007). As individuals determine different roles they play and in what contexts, they engage in identity construction. Salience hierarchy may influence how a person constructs who they are within different relationships contexts and how they choose to act out their roles and identity. This concept of salience of identity also allows for individuals to enact a number of roles at any one point in time and across the life span (White & Klein, 2007). These changes in role and identity may be influenced by society, family culture, the workplace, and other influential relationship settings.

In the symbolic interactionism theoretical perspective, the unit of analysis may be the individual and their use of symbols and paradigms in selecting behaviors and managing relationships. It is also essential to emphasize relationships as a unit of analysis because it is within relationships that individuals enact roles and behaviors. Individuals are embedded within relationships and it is these different contexts that add insight and understanding to how individuals choose to enact roles and form identity. Individuals' experiences and their interpretation of symbols, both verbal and nonverbal, shape their reality and individual and family relationship outcomes (Ingoldsby et al., 2004). In order to gain an understanding of an individual's experiences, it is important to understand how behaviors are chosen to enact roles, in turn shaping identity, and how these roles play out across different contexts and spaces, as well as how these may change or remain static over time.

Father roles and identities are developed through interactions with children, mothers of children, and many others that are connected to the family, through familial ties or community interactions. Fathers incorporate societal messages about fatherhood as well as their own beliefs and experiences within their families and the immediate environment. Society may initially

dictate certain expectations about what it means to be a “good” father. Families may also have additional requirements or beliefs about how the father role should be enacted. Individuals are exposed both to cultural messages about fatherhood as well as expectations from their families of origin and families of procreation. The workplace, in this case the military, may also send messages about what it means to be a father within the military context and how fatherhood identity interfaces with military identity. As fathers interact with family members, friends, colleagues, and other service members, their sense of roles and identity as a father may be affirmed or challenged. Military fathers continue to develop role expectations and identity over time as changes in partner relationships, aging of children, and workplace conditions (such as deployment and reunification) inform these processes. Examining the experiences of military fathers from this theoretical perspective creates a window into how men construct elements of their father role, develop father identity within family and military contexts, and employ different behaviors to sustain positive, involved relationships with their children across contexts, physical spaces, and over time.

### Chapter 3: Literature Review

The study of military fathering exists at the juncture of two literatures: research on fathering and research on military families. While there have been some studies that have explored concepts related to military fathering and the experiences of military fathers, there are few studies that have examined military fathering from the perspective of these men. I locate myself in the overlap between these two literatures, by drawing on relevant findings from both bodies of work and identifying how they will inform my focus on military fathers' experiences across contexts, spaces, and time.

#### Fathering

**Definitions and a Framework.** Research on fatherhood relies on a long-established definition for father involvement. Lamb, Pleck, Charnov, & Levine's (1985) definition of father involvement included three dimensions: 1) *interaction*, which has later been described as *engagement* (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998), 2) *accessibility*, and 3) *responsibility*. These dimensions have been empirically tested and expanded. The first dimension, *engagement*, referred to the direct contact between father and child in terms of shared activities and caretaking (Lamb et al., 1985). *Accessibility* referred to the availability of a father to his child whether currently interacting with the child or not, and *responsibility* referred to the role fathers take in making sure children are cared for and have access to resources that they need (Lamb et al., 1985).

Hofferth and associates (2007) have studied the importance of including the additional dimensions of *warmth* and *monitoring/control* measures for assessing father involvement. The amount of warm behaviors (described as closeness between father and child, displays of

affection, and expressions of love), as reported by parents, has been shown to be useful in differentiating level of father involvement for younger children (Hofferth et al., 2007). Parents' reports of warm behaviors were not an accurate predictor for older children and these authors recommended that older children report on the warmth of the father-child relationship for themselves (Hofferth et al., 2007). Research on father involvement has begun to show the importance of focusing on positive interactions between fathers and children versus just observing interactions. These studies have highlighted the need to better understand the bond or connections that fathers form with their children- a positive connection or relationship that goes beyond day-to-day activities.

In a revised conceptualization of paternal involvement, Pleck (2010) clarified that the construct of paternal involvement used in research should include five elements. This reconceptualization included elements that have been used traditionally in father involvement research as well as a clarification of some of the dynamics of father-child relationships that could be more explicitly examined (Pleck, 2010). He described these five elements as 1) *positive engagement activities*, 2) *warmth and responsiveness*, 3) *control*, 4) *indirect care*, and 5) *process responsibility*. *Positive engagement activities* included interactions between fathers and children that are positive and intensive in nature, such as spending time together playing or engaging in other activities likely meant to promote development. *Warmth and responsiveness* included hugging or showing affection, expressions of love and appreciation, and closeness between fathers and children. *Control* referred specifically to monitoring and a father's involvement in decision-making for their child. Pleck (2010) described *indirect care* and *process responsibility* as two auxiliary components that are distinct and important for understanding the nature of father involvement but that may have been obscured in the earlier conceptualization of father

involvement as *responsibility*. In this reconceptualization *indirect care* referred to purchasing of material goods or arrangement of services for the child. This also included a child's peer and community connections (Pleck, 2010). *Process responsibility* referred to a father's monitoring to ensure that a child's needs for the first four defined elements of involvement are being met (Pleck, 2010).

This reconceptualization of the construct of paternal involvement may more accurately reflect how father involvement research has been conducted, as well as suggest the need for additional exploration of distinct components of father involvement in future research (Pleck, 2010). It also provides a structure for exploring father involvement that may describe a range of dynamic paternal-child relationships, whether residential, nonresidential, or characterized by periods of residence and nonresidence. While father involvement has been defined using these five elements, the term *fathering* has been described as reflecting beliefs, meanings and attitudes (as dictated by society and the family) about father roles and identity, and behaviors or involvement that fathers engage in (Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson, 1998).

Research in recent years has documented the positive impact of fathers in children's lives, including positive cognitive development, social competence, child well-being, emotional regulation and control, academic achievement and enjoyment of school, and other desirable emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). In examining the social cultural context within which fathers "do fathering," Cabrera and associates (2000) asserted that directions for fatherhood research in the 21<sup>st</sup> century include the need to examine the experiences of nonresident fathers and how their involvement influences child development.

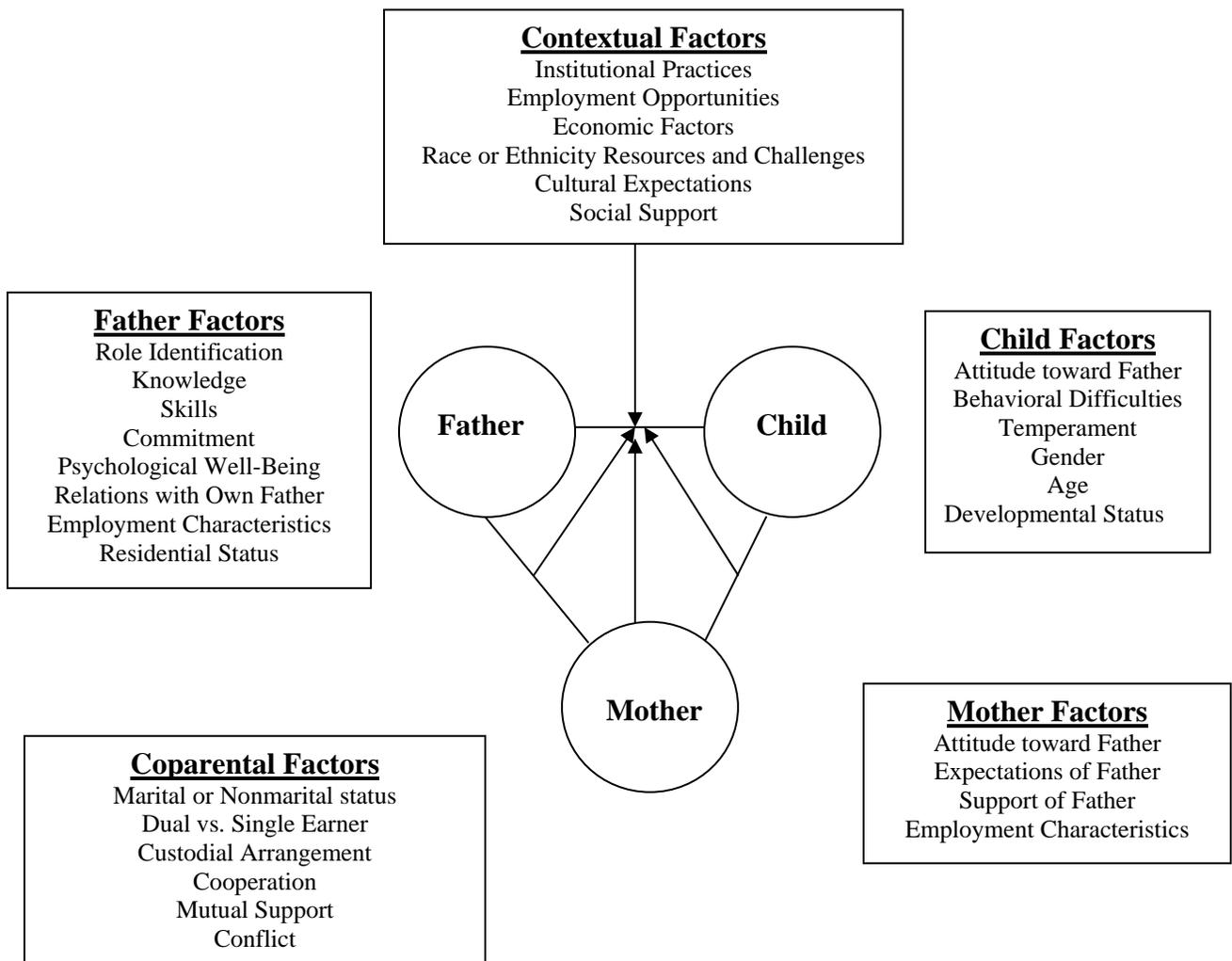
The field of family research has recognized that understanding the relationships between children and fathers goes beyond simply labeling them as residential/ nonresidential or father present/ father absent. There is an increased awareness of the need to understand context and process when examining father involvement and father-child relationships. Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) reiterated this shift in conceptualization and research related to fathering:

[This] increase in supportive evidence has been accompanied by increased awareness of methodological and conceptual complexity of association between paternal involvement and children's development. The research agenda has thus shifted from whether paternal involvement has positive consequences to questions about the *context* in which and the *processes* by which paternal effects occur (p. 256).

Doherty and associates (1998) offered a theoretical framework for understanding responsible fatherhood that could be valuable for examining fathering across understudied contexts and processes. One of the unique and valuable aspects of this conceptual model is that it included and applied to the experiences of residential and nonresidential fathers (Doherty et al., 1998). This responsible fathering model also incorporated theoretical elements from historical, social constructionist, and systems perspectives (Doherty et al., 1998). Individual, relationship, and contextual factors are all included in the model describing influences on responsible fathering (see Figure 1). At the center of the model is the father-mother-child triad and influential factors for responsible fathering surround this triad. These influences include: 1) *father factors* such as role identification, knowledge, skills, commitment, psychological well-being, relations with own father, employment characteristics, and residential status; 2) *coparental relationships*, including marital vs. nonmarital status, dual vs. single earner, custodial arrangement, relationship

commitment, cooperation, mutual support, conflict; 3) *contextual factors*, such as institutional practices, employment opportunities, economic factors, race or ethnicity resources and challenges, cultural expectations, and social support; 4) *child factors*, including attitudes toward

Figure 1. Doherty, Kouneski, & Erickson (1998) Responsible Fathering Conceptual Framework



fathers, behavioral difficulties, temperament, gender, age, and developmental status; and 5) *mother factors*, such as attitudes toward father, expectations of father, support of father, and employment characteristics (Doherty et al., 1998).

This model is designed to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the processes and contexts that may shape father behaviors and father-child relationships. It moved research and conceptualization away from looking at “linear, deterministic influences” on men’s fathering towards focus more on the systemic picture of process and context in men’s fathering (Doherty et al., 1998, pg. 289). The factors in the model influencing fathering are additive in nature (Doherty et al., 1998) and the complete context and variety of processes should be included in examinations of fathers’ experiences.

**Father-child Bond.** The father- child bond has been described as the summative result of father involvement and father nurturance. The concept of father-child relationships and nurturance has been described in research using terms such as closeness, paternal sensitivity, or attachment in family science research (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). In an attempt to clarify how nurturance relates to fathering, Marsiglio and Roy (2012) utilized Dowd’s (2000) definition of nurturance as physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual care linked to children’s positive development. They highlighted how recent cultural changes of fathers providing more direct care for children reflect this expectation for more nurturant fathering (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). Marsiglio and Roy (2012) also postulated that additional elements of father nurturance include: familiarity, trust, self-disclosure, emotional vulnerability, and physical intimacy, how to express these to children in different contexts over time, and fathers’ responsivity to a children’s needs. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) made the argument that additional research and exploration of father nurturance is needed, and some studies have attempted to enhance understanding of connections and bonds between fathers and children.

In examining the transition to fatherhood identity in early pregnancy, Habib & Lancaster (2006) attempted to clarify the definition of paternal bond (for this study, specifically as

paternal-fetal bond). The authors discussed how in earlier literatures there has been interchangeable use of the terms “attachment” and “bonding”. They asserted that it is important to draw the distinction that parents do not attach to their child, in the sense that attachment has central to it the concept of psychological dependence- rather that children attach to parents (Habib & Lancaster, 2006). Parents form a strong emotional connection or psychological bond with their child, which may in turn influence fathering behaviors (Habib & Lancaster, 2006). This description of paternal bond reflected the idea that it is the quality of relationship that influences how connected fathers and children feel to each other, which may influence behaviors.

Another study examined how father involvement and fathering quality predicted father-child attachment in early childhood. Brown, McBride, Shin, & Bost (2007) found that positive father-child attachment was not solely influenced by amount of father involvement. The nature or quality of parenting was a key element that influenced whether father-child attachment benefited from father involvement. When fathers engaged in positive parenting behaviors, level of father involvement did not seem to impact the father-child attachment (Brown et al., 2007). Yet when fathers engaged in high levels of involvement but enacted low quality parenting, father-child attachment was negatively influenced (Brown et al., 2007). This study highlighted how a more complete understanding of the bond between children and fathers must include both measures of father involvement and a description of the quality of interaction between fathers and children.

Some research has sought to capture the nature of the father-child bond but there is still much work to be done both in the definition and research of this concept. Marsiglio and Roy (2012) discussed the need to better understand how father nurturance shapes men’s fathering

across the life course, noting specifically the need to examine men's experiences with fathering and nurturance across context, space, and time. They noted that a father's development of a nurturance skill set enables men to recognize and respond to the emotional needs of their child, and that many factors could influence this process, including work conditions and societal norms (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012). Many fathers – including fathers who travel for business or military fathers - faced challenges to this nurturant relationship in light of their workplace demands, and researchers should note strategies that fathers employed to create quality time, as well as examine how to create adequate measures of closeness and nurturance between fathers and children (Marsiglio & Roy, 2012).

**Role Management.** When men are partners and parents, these familial roles intersect with individual and workplace roles. In examining the influence of role identity on father involvement, Rane & McBride (2000) collected interview and questionnaire data from 89 predominantly White, middle-class fathers. They noted that fathers did not differ in level of involvement with children based on whether they reported father or worker roles as being most central in their lives (Rane & McBride, 2000). What did influence father involvement was role identification with nurturance. Fathers who reported nurturance as being more central to their role identity were more involved with their children than fathers who reported low centrality for nurturance (Rane & McBride, 2000).

This study is of interest because it noted that what men reported as being more central in their identity, work or fatherhood, was not related to their involvement with their children. What was more important in predicting level of father involvement was their perception of the importance of nurturance in their parenting role. Identification with nurturance as a part of the father role is something that individuals may develop because of individual experiences or

decisions made, but immediate environment and culture could also foster (or inhibit) development of nurturance as a part of the father role.

Some research has examined how American men view the different roles that they play, and how they put these together to form a sense of identity, simultaneously creating measures of success or adequacy. Following interviews with 39 American men who graduated from high school in the early 1970s, Townsend (2002) described how these men discussed expectations about what it means to be an American man as including the elements of work, marriage, home ownership, and having children. He argued that it is essential to understand all of these elements and how decisions and role expectations regarding these elements shape men's behaviors and ultimately identities. Townsend (2002) noted that men saw their lives in terms of a "package deal" and that success in one area (e.g. work) did not necessarily equate to overall success. When making decisions in one area, men described considering how these decisions would affect the other elements of the "package deal" (Townsend, 2002). The interviewed men also discussed four different facets or roles that made up their identity as a father and reflected on how the elements of the "package deal" influenced these different components of the fatherhood identity. These four facets of fatherhood were emotional closeness, provision, protection, and endowment (Townsend, 2002). Men reported that providing was the most important of these elements but that they were all interconnected as well. Showing love and closeness with your children, providing for their needs, keeping them safe, and preparing them for success in the future through opportunities and experiences were each described as important, related roles that fathers played (Townsend, 2002). Fathers discussed the importance of balancing all of these roles in meeting the needs of children as well as how fatherhood was closely influenced by their work, marital relationships, and home owner role (Townsend, 2002). The balance of these

different roles- worker/ provider, partner, and parent- and how these are integrated into forming a sense of identity as a man and as a father are tasks that men must manage and that can have implications for father involvement and connections with children and families. Townsend's (2002) exploration of men's identity formation, roles, and evaluation of success in the "package deal" emphasized the importance of examining the interconnectedness of work and family roles and how they shape men's experiences, identity, and relationships.

Palkovitz (2002) reviewed how the roles of American fatherhood have changed over time and how contemporary conditions have made a call for "new fatherhood" or fathers who are highly involved with their children across the life of the child, provide daily child care, and are equally involved with sons and daughters. From his interviews with a diverse group of fathers, Palkovitz (2002) noted that these fathers described their father role as being a composite of a number of elements, including being an economic provider, providing opportunities for child growth and positive development, and being a positive role model or leader. These fathers also discussed struggles they faced in balancing these elements of their father role but also additional roles they played such as friend, spouse, community member, or worker (Palkovitz, 2002).

Findings of another study examining men's construction of the father role supported the idea that contemporary fathers want to be more involved in the direct care and nurturance of their children than what they experienced with their own fathers (Bolzan, Gale, & Dudley, 2004). Bolzan and associates (2004) conducted qualitative interviews with 40 Australian, first-time fathers to explore how they negotiated changes related to their change in parental status. These fathers discussed how becoming a father led to their re-evaluation of what it meant to be a male as well as their frustrations with the lack of social structure support for fulfilling the desired role of involved father. Fathers who wanted to play a more involved father role but had conflicting

employment demands reported feeling more stress and less satisfaction with how these competing roles played out (Bolzan, Gale & Dudley, 2004).

As the definition of fatherhood evolves and what it means to be a “good” dad shifts over time, men must examine how their work life influences their fatherhood. Eggebeen & Knoester (2001) discussed the developing “new fatherhood,” which places new appreciation on the role of men in children’s lives, and how this impacts the lives of men, specifically their work patterns. This study utilized a nationally representative sample of men, aged 19 to 65 years from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). It was hypothesized that men who lived with their dependent children would work fewer hours (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). Contrary to this hypothesis, men with dependent children (across all living arrangements) worked more than men with older children and men that are not fathers (Eggebeen & Knoester, 2001). This distinction highlighted the demands of work on men, or the value placed on the provider role, and the challenges that men may face in balancing work and family roles.

**Ambiguous Roles Across Contexts.** The concepts of ambiguous loss, boundary ambiguity, ambiguous presence, and ambiguous absence may provide insight into the fathering experiences of men in a variety of different contexts. Some fathers may go through periods of absence or distance from their children and this can influence how they conceptualize their role as a father and fathering behaviors they engage in. Three areas of fatherhood research that reflect these concepts and dynamics include the study of: 1) nonresidential fathers, 2) incarcerated fathers, and 3) fathers with extended periods of travel for work.

**Nonresidential Fathers.** Beliefs about (and subsequent research documentation of) the positive influence of fathers on child well-being, changes in marriage and divorce patterns, and

an increase in non-marital childbearing have all led to research exploring the consequences for children when their fathers do not reside with them. In a meta-analytic examination of nonresident fathers and the well-being of their children, Amato & Gilbreth (1999) wanted to “provide a more comprehensive picture of how dimensions of the nonresident father-child relationship are linked with children’s well-being” (pg. 558). These researchers noted that a majority of studies supported the hypothesis that there was a link between child well-being and father’s payment of child support and authoritative parenting. Regular visitation from nonresident fathers did not guarantee that a high-quality relationship existed between fathers and children, while authoritative parenting (as indicated by engaging in positive interactions with children, such as listening to problems, giving advice, monitoring school performance, helping with homework, and noncoercive discipline methods) was the most consistent predictor of child outcomes (Amato & Gilbreth, 1999). The findings of this meta-analysis underscored the idea that it is not how often fathers interact with their children but the quality of interactions when they are present.

Patterns of residence with children and the understanding of what it means to be a “nonresidential” father is something that Mott (1990) explored. Using the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) data set, Mott explored patterns of father presence and absence and if these terms truly reflect the relationship between fathers and their children. By using weights for the data, this sample from the NLSY data set was nationally representative for U.S. fathers and children of a similar age range (Mott, 1990). He highlighted that some statistics reporting on “nonresidential” fathers and children may actually mask continued contact between fathers and children. Mott (1990) argued that children may experience a pattern of flux (periods of presence and absence) versus simply father absence or father presence. He also stated that reports of father

absence may conceal continued contact that children have with fathers or father figures despite not residing with them (Mott, 1990). Some racial differences (black vs. white) were noted for fathers and children in this study. Mott (1990) described that a significant portion of children, particularly Black children, had not ever lived with their father but that reports of nonresidence hid continued contact children had with fathers or father figures. He argued that notions of nonresidence and residence, and how these are measured in research, should be rethought to reflect dynamics of this process of flux as well as the possible availability of fathers and father figures that may not be residing (or ever have resided) with the child.

Another study examining the impact of changes in residence for fathers noted some of the challenges that divorced fathers face in relationships with their children. Catlett, Toews, and McKenry (2005) discussed a number of reported changes in men's fathering related to changes in physical space as they no longer resided with their children due to divorce. This study included predominantly white fathers who had divorced within the last two years. These fathers described emotionally close relationships with children prior to divorce but also pointed out that these relationships were often impacted by the marital relationship (Catlett et al., 2005). Challenges to fathering that these fathers discussed included loss of a family space to parent and connect with children within (Catlett et al., 2005). Fathers also described how changes in residence seemed to undermine authority they had as a father and that visitation rights, or lack thereof, also left them feeling powerless in the lives of their children. Catlett and associates (2005) noted how many fathers felt that they are unable to father their children in ways similar to how they did pre-divorce and that this called into question their identity as a father and a man. These researchers encouraged supporting fathers no longer residing with their children due to

divorce by focusing on the personal connections and responsibilities of fathering that still exist even though fathers may not have daily physical contact with their children.

While physical contact and restrictions of physical space are important dynamics to consider when examining men's fathering and relationships with their children, Amato & Gilbreth (1999) established the importance of also describing the quality of relationships between nonresidential fathers and children. Harper and Fine (2006) started with the findings of the Amato and Gilbreth (1999) meta-analysis and designed an additional study to examine different role and identity influences on positive relationships between nonresidential fathers and children and on child well-being. These researchers examined the relationships of 129 nonresidential fathers that had regular contact (saw their child 12 or more days within the last year and saw their child within the last month) with their children, ages 3- 12 years (Harper & Fine, 2006). This sample was drawn from the 1997 Child Development Supplement to the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID). These researchers found that the relationship between father warmth and child well-being was mediated by the quality of the father-child relationship (Harper & Fine, 2006). They also found that father warmth and support were positively related to the father-child relationship quality (Harper & Fine, 2006). Limit setting by fathers was positively related to father-child relationship quality, and the authors hypothesized that these types of behaviors may strengthen the father-child bond despite living apart from each other (Harper & Fine, 2006). Father distress was described as resulting from challenges to fathers' identities of husband and father, and the difficulties of adjusting to these modified roles with ex-spouses and children following divorce (Harper & Fine, 2006). Father distress was found to be negatively related to father's reports of child well-being (Harper & Fine, 2006). The authors hypothesized that this may reflect the importance for men of maintaining psychological health and emotional

well-being because children may “sense the distress of their father, and are thereby negatively affected” (Harper & Fine, 2006 pg. 303). This may include redefining roles and identity as a father in satisfactory ways following divorce and residential separation from children.

Understanding the connections between fathers’ identities and their relationships with their children underscores the need for better understanding of how residence and physical space impact father roles and identity formation.

**Incarcerated Fathers.** Another distinct population of fathers that experience periods of absence from their children is incarcerated fathers. Tripp (2009) utilized qualitative interviews with 25 incarcerated fathers (ages 21- 59 years, 17 African American fathers and 8 white fathers, all non-violent offenders) to explore their connections with their children and how they managed the identities of father and inmate. These fathers expressed a desire to stay involved with and connected to their children but also a reluctance to have children visit them while imprisoned. Some of this reluctance stemmed from a desire to be a good role model and not being able to fulfill this role while imprisoned (Tripp, 2009). Fathers reported not wanting to have their children see them while they were inmates and that they wanted to limit their child’s exposure to the prison system (Tripp, 2009). This ultimately resulted in limited contact and communication between children and fathers.

These fathers discussed the challenges of wanting to be involved with their children but also wanting to do what was best for the child, even if that meant not interacting with them. Fathers described how they planned to resume fathering responsibilities that they could not currently carry out (such as being fully accessible to a child) when they were released from prison, but also recognized that there may be a period of readjustment as they negotiated changing roles and behaviors with their child (Tripp, 2009). The experiences of these

incarcerated fathers reflected some of the challenges that exist when physical space limits the ability to father. These fathers seemed to be caught in limbo- trying to continue fathering but facing overwhelming obstacles. The ambiguity that ensued when fathers may be psychologically present but physically absent can prove extremely challenging for family relationships and fathering (Roy, 2005).

In another study examining the fathering experiences of incarcerated men, Arditti, Smock, & Parkman (2005) employed a contextualized approach for exploring incarcerated men's fatherhood and father involvement. The fathers included in the study had an average age of 35.5 years, were 19.6% African American, 62.7% Caucasian, 9.8% Latino, and 6% Native American, and reported more than one child from more than one union (Arditti et al., 2005). The fathers described a number of difficulties they experienced in fathering while imprisoned. They discussed how they were unable to engage in activities with their children that they used to do and that were important elements of being a "good father," such as being able to check up on their child or having "face to face" contact (Arditti et al., 2005). Some fathers described how they tried to maintain connections with their children through weekly phone calls but also expressed frustrations they felt in trying to provide discipline, support, and protection from a distance (Arditti et al., 2005).

Mothers played an important role in providing access to children. While some facilitated contact between children and fathers, other mothers tried to exclude fathers from their children's lives (Arditti et al., 2005). Uncertainty in access and the ability to enact the father role also resulted from changes in the relationships of the mothers of children (e.g, getting a new boyfriend ), and resulted in additional frustration and ambiguity for fathers as they were uncertain of where their children were or how to contact them (Arditti et al., 2005).

This sense of ambiguity for incarcerated fathers was discussed as Roy (2005) described some of the challenges and constraints these men faced. Many of the policies of prison and work release programs provided significant barriers to interaction with children and family. These included such things as difficulty in phone communication due to lack of privacy or the hours of availability for making phone calls (Roy, 2005). Some fathers in work release programs were granted time to visit with family and children outside of the work release site, but fathers could only travel so far to children before all of their allotted time was used up in transit. It was noted that both the quantity and quality of contact with children deteriorated while fathers were incarcerated (Roy, 2005). These difficulties for fathers in contacting their children left them feeling unable to enact different father roles, such as being there for children and providing protection (Roy, 2005). For many incarcerated men, their identities as fathers seemed to be in a “holding pattern” (Roy, 2005). This was influenced by their short-term stay in work-release programs, and that some fathering behaviors were supported while others were against the rules (Roy, 2005). Because of the ambiguity in father’s roles and abilities due to restrictions of physical space some children even viewed their fathers as lost or dead depending on how their father’s incarceration was explained or processed (Roy, 2005). Fathers developed different strategies as means to maintain connections and relationships with their children. These included such things as relying on their mothers and the mothers of their children to provide support and space for father involvement, and finding creative ways to bend institutional rules to increase contact with children, such as seeing children during lunch breaks at work (Roy, 2005). Other fathers used incarceration as a time to “craft preliminary scripts for new fatherhood roles” as they planned for increased communication and renewed commitments to involvement in their children’s lives following release (Roy, 2005, pg. 178). Ambiguity in fathering and father

identity was something that incarcerated fathers faced everyday due to the necessity of adjusting roles in the face of spatial restrictions (Roy, 2005).

In order to gain better insight into how the restrictions of physical space impact fathering, Clarke and associates (2005) studied the experiences of fathers in English prisons who reported that they planned to have contact and some responsibility for children following their release from prison. Incarcerated fathers may be unable to provide economically or be physically and emotionally accessible to children (both of which reflect U.S. and English cultural norms of what it means to be a father). These restrictions necessitated that incarcerated fathers create personalized “scripts” for fathering (Clarke et al., 2005). Some fathers in the sample reported difficulty with generating these scripts because of their perceived inability to act as a father within the prison context (Clarke et al., 2005). Prisonization, or the process of prison experiences shaping identity, was noted to also impact men’s identities as fathers (Clarke et al., 2005). Some fathers described the difficulties of staying connected to children and “being there,” while others noted that prison had become a turning point in their fathering. These men reported that their prison time spurred a recommitment to being more involved with their children and fathering responsibilities (Clarke et al., 2005). In general, many fathers felt that they had trouble being a father while incarcerated and that their identity as a father seemed fragmented or unsettled despite strong feelings of closeness to children (Clarke et al., 2005). Several fathers reported the challenges of condensed family interactions through phone conversations and visits from children while in prison (Clarke et al., 2005). The authors highlighted the need for more father-sensitive resources as fathers transition back into family settings and again revisit what it means to be a father post-incarceration (Clarke et al., 2005). This recognition of the importance of strengthening the father-child bond for incarcerated fathers has led some to develop specific

fathering programs for prisons as a means to enhance men's fathering abilities and connections with their children (Prinsloo, 2007).

**Traveling Fathers.** Work conditions or requirements may also take fathers away from their children and families, creating periods of residence and nonresidence, and creating a context of physical distance for fathering. Zvonkovic, Solomon, Humble, & Manoogian (2005) explored how families managed the absence and presence of a father who was absent due to job requirements and demands. These researchers made the argument that families with work separations due to jobs within the trucking and fishing industries may be similar to military families because of frequent and possibly lengthy separations, and similar job elements of risk and requirements for physical stamina. These researchers discussed a number of observations pertaining to the relationships of husbands and wives but more notably discussed strategies fathers used to maintain connections with children and manage the ambiguity of periods of presence and absence.

Children described the importance of being able to reach their fathers by phone and the need to know that fathers were thinking of them even though they were far away (Zvonkovic et al., 2005). Some families managed quick visits and videotaped important family events. Fathers described the importance of having "bonding time" and spending as much time as possible with children when they were home (Zvonkovic et al., 2005). It was noted that mothers played an important role in connecting children and fathers and that families described the importance of adapting communication and connection patterns to fit their unique needs (Zvonkovic et al., 2005).

These three populations of fathers- nonresidential fathers, incarcerated fathers, and traveling fathers- all experience dynamics of ambiguity due to periods of absence and presence

in their children's lives. There are times during military fathers' lives where they may be considered "nonresidential" with their children because of the nature of their employment. MacDermid and associates (2005) noted that military fathers have some similarities to nonresidential fathers due to periods of deployment. These periods of deployment are repeated over time, they cannot visit their children when they like during deployment, and they must rely on mothers for contact with children. Yet, one additional element that differentiates these "nonresidential" military fathers from other nonresidential fathers is the added element of risking their lives when deployed to combat settings (MacDermid et al., 2005). While studies of the three aforementioned populations of fathers experiencing periods of absence from and presence with their children describe challenges and multiple strategies used to manage ambiguity and maintain fathering, the unique circumstances and attributes of military families and fathers warrant further exploration into how these men manage fathering when living with and apart from their families.

Military fathers are a unique group of fathers that are often excluded from studies exploring fathering and father involvement. Hernandez & Brandon (2002) noted that military fathers are often missed in national samples because "most household surveys" do not collect information about military fathers due to patterns of presence and absence in the household related to deployment. Physical presence and absence is something that may influence the father-child relationship as well as paternal involvement in military families, but this dynamic needs further examination and theoretical development for this specific population.

### **Fatherhood and The Military**

What does it mean to be a father in the military? There are a number of gaps existing in the body of military family research, specifically around the experiences of fathers (MacDermid

et al., 2005). One of these gaps includes measurement of father involvement for military fathers and their children (Hernandez & Brandon, 2002). The context of military employment may shift how fathers are involved with their children and may make some of the dimensions of father involvement difficult to assess or measure. Is it the experience of all military children that their fathers are less involved because they may not be accessible at all or times or does a positive father-child relationship (or bond) manage lack of formal father involvement? Improved father contact through the use of email, phone, and other communication technology during deployment reflected the military's increasing recognition that family connections and relationships are extremely important (Bell, Schumm, Knot, & Ender, 1999; Ender, 1995). Further research could potentially enhance resources available to fathers during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification as they transition across these contexts and seek to maintain positive family relationships and fatherhood identity.

In one of the few studies that explicitly focused on the experiences of military fathers, MacDermid and associates (2005) conducted focus groups with 27 fathers at Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington DC. These fathers had at least one child under the age of 18 years, did not have life threatening or incapacitating injuries or cognitive impairment, and had returned from deployment within the last 12 months. The structure of these focus groups used the situated fathering theoretical framework. The following experiences of fathers were discussed when describing fathering across the contexts of space and time.

Fathers described how communication facilities available to service members varied based on global location and conditions. Even less technological forms of communication, like mail, may have been disrupted due to conditions at the deployment location (MacDermid et al., 2005). Timing elements were reported by fathers to complicate family communication (e.g. time

changes, coordinating schedules, and location movement), and some fathers reported feeling ambivalent about communication with home because of the potential for feeling unable to help with problems or the potential of being distracted during duty (MacDermid et al., 2005). Privacy was an issue for fathers, especially since they rarely were alone and never really “off-duty.” They reported trying to manage concerns for revealing too much information to family members, while still wanting to provide reassurance to them (MacDermid et al., 2005). Electronic communication provided a means for deployed fathers to have a psychological presence in their children’s lives by interacting with them in “real-time,” but also came with the added responsibility of monitoring communication in order to preserve safety and security for self and others (MacDermid et al., 2005).

In examining the sociocultural context of military fathering, servicemen reported that commanders had a lot of discretion about being supportive or not of family roles and duties (MacDermid et al., 2005). Some commanders were reported to be very supportive of responding to family needs, while others acted in reflection of the military slogan “Mission first; family second” (MacDermid et al., 2005). Service members of higher ranks often had better access to communication and other institutional privileges. Military fathers also reported feeling little control over employment duties, like timing and location of deployment and assigned duties, as well as little control over the ability to influence child behavior when fathering from a distance (MacDermid et al., 2005).

Describing the interpersonal context for fathering, military fathers discussed gendered views of their family roles, with tasks of providing and being an authority figure at the forefront of their identity as father and husband. At the same time these fathers highlighted the flexibility of their family roles during deployment (with wives managing both traditionally “masculine” and

“feminine” tasks while they were gone) and their involvement in more traditionally “feminine” tasks of home and child care when at home with their families (MacDermid et al., 2005). Some fathers also discussed how their serviceman identity influenced how they provided structure and discipline for their children, and how their father identity shaped their interactions with other service members during missions. One serviceman described the importance of being able to clearly distinguish serviceman roles and father roles and the need to be able to quickly flip between the two (MacDermid et al., 2005). This same father also noted the struggles of not letting the caring father role jeopardize the safety of self and others, which is at the forefront of focus during enactment of the serviceman role (MacDermid et al., 2005).

Transitional elements were especially salient for military fathers as they negotiated deployments and reunifications. Servicemen reported needing to rely on patience and allowing time to help family relationships to stabilize (MacDermid et al., 2005). The quality and nature of the father-child relationship before and during deployment influenced this transition and the strategies fathers used to manage reunification as well (MacDermid et al., 2005).

There is a great need for additional research to explore the fathering experiences of servicemen. There is a dearth of research focusing on the experiences of military fathers with their children, especially examining how these experiences vary across the contexts of pre-deployment, deployment, reunification. MacDermid and associates (2005) emphasized the possibility that additional concepts or experiences may arise from individual interviews (versus focus groups). They also noted that elements of communication between fathers and families (e.g. form, frequency, content), and the impact of deployment and reunification on father-child relationships warrant further exploration. These researchers proposed that tracking father-child relationships prior to deployment and how these change through the deployment and

reunification process, while examining communication during the deployment period, is also needed (MacDermid et al., 2005). Certainly many quantitative and qualitative research opportunities exist for exploring and expanding knowledge about the experiences of military fathers and families.

In a more recent study examining military fathers perceptions, Willerton, Schwarz, MacDermid Wadsworth, and Schultheis Oglesby (2011) utilized focus group data to explore military fathers' perspectives on their involvement with their children. These researchers moved beyond simply examining fathers' observable behaviors of involvement but also included the exploration of cognitive and affective components to father involvement (Willerton et al., 2011). A number of themes were noted in the following three areas of involvement: cognitive involvement, affective involvement, and behavioral involvement.

In the area of cognitive involvement, fathers described a number of family roles including the importance of being a good provider, providing unconditional love and support, being a good role model and friend, being consistent, and instilling values in their children (Willerton et al., 2011). Fathers described how they utilized an internal working model of their role as a father that was build upon experiences with their own fathers and families. Some of the fathers described difficulties with disciplining children from afar and knew of the importance of tracking child development and how this impacted fathering. Additional themes related to cognitive involvement were specific to deployment (Willerton et al., 2011). Fathers pre-planned such things as care packages or celebrating birthdays and other milestones prior to deployment as a means to maintain connection during separation. Some men had difficulties during reintegration following deployment as they struggled to establish disciplinarian roles and emotional and physical connections (Willerton et al., 2011).

Affective involvement with children included such things as the desire to create an atmosphere of acceptance and trust in their home and ways of expressing love and affection (Willerton et al., 2011). Deployment often led to feelings of frustration and anxiety due to missing daily experiences in children's lives and the desire to protect children from fears for fathers' safety during deployment. Some fathers reported withholding involvement and emotional connection as a means to detach prior to deployment (Willerton et al., 2011). This protection and detachment continued during deployment as fathers limited the amount of information they shared with children and families.

Willerton and associates (2011) also briefly discussed some behavioral means of interacting with children. The authors described how fathers utilized creative means to connect with children during deployments, including communicating and sending home packages. Fathers also stressed the importance of quality time prior to deployment and described participation in everyday activities like bed time routines as well as fun activities like amusement park trips (Willerton et al., 2011). While these descriptions highlighted how fathers desired to make up for lost time during deployment, they seemed more reactionary to the deployment versus strategic preparation for deployment. It could prove useful to explore the nuances of fathers' involvement and strategies surrounding preparations for or reactions to deployment and the impact on paternal-child relationships. Willerton and associates (2011) added that additional study of the relationship between father identity and role construction and how this shapes father involvement is needed.

These studies have provided an excellent start at a deeper understanding of father-child bond and how these impact father identity and fathering. Examination of the bond between fathers and children, fathering within competing work and family contexts, and fatherhood roles

and identity all warrant further investigation within the unique population of military fathers. The concept of the father-child bond is something that transcends simply exploring father involvement, and exists over different contexts and across time, It is a valuable concept to explore as a means to understanding the relationship between military fathers and children. While a military father may not engage in as high of a level of involvement during deployment, a positive father-child bond may continue to facilitate a close, positive relationship as fathers continue to enact nurturant behaviors or rely on past nurturance. Negotiation of work and family roles and identity is something that many fathers manage but military fathers may face unique challenges as they manage the demands of two “greedy institutions” (Segal, 1986). While some studies have explored the process of attending to the demands of both work and family and how this influences roles and identity formation for military fathers, further research attention is needed. A number of different influences may impact how men form fatherhood identities and select behaviors to enact these roles.

In their responsible fathering model, Doherty and associates (1998) noted that father-child relationships are “more strongly influenced than mother-child relations” by *coparental factors* as well as large *contextual factors* (pg. 286). Additional research has noted that mothers often monitor, regulate, or act as “gatekeepers” of relationships between fathers and children (DeLuccie, 1995; Fagan & Barnett, 2003) and this fathering model incorporates this process. Military wives/ mothers may play the role of facilitator or monitor, especially when fathers are deployed and children may require additional assistance in gaining access to and communicating with fathers. Therefore, it is important to understand some of the relationship dynamics, strengths, and challenges that face military couples.

**Marital Relationships and Fathering.** There is a growing recognition of the influence of a military lifestyle on couple relationships. Adler-Baeder, Pittman, & Taylor (2005) compared U.S. military couples to couples in the U.S. civilian population and noted a number of differences. Service members married, divorced, and remarried at younger ages and a substantial percentage of all service members have experienced divorce (20%) (Adler-Baeder et al., 2005). There was a difference in divorce and remarriage rates for those within the military as well. Higher divorce and remarriage rates were observed among military personnel with lower SES levels (Adler-Baeder et al., 2005). These authors hypothesized that these differences in rates for military personnel based on SES may truly reflect that divorce and remarriage occur at a higher rate for enlisted ranks versus officers.

Kelty, Kleykamp, and Segal (2010) explored how military service and having an all-volunteer force has shaped a variety of workplace and family dynamics. One area that they explored was how military service has influenced family formation. The authors noted that in transitioning to an all volunteer force, a greater number of service members are married and the number of dual-service couples has increased as well (Kelty et al., 2010). Military personnel are slightly more likely to be married than their civilian peers and the authors discussed how a supportive military community, current supportive family policies, and opportunities for educational advancement and development of financial security could foster resiliency in marriages (Kelty et al., 2010). Kelty and associates (2010) also described how current research regarding deployment in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and divorce rates do not present any strong evidence that deployment negatively impacted marriage. They did note that once military members left military service that their divorce rates were higher than their civilian peers,

suggesting that somehow military service may buffer against marital stressors (Kelty et al., 2010).

Understanding influences and stressors on military couple relationships, including differences that may exist for enlisted service members and officers, may offer a more complete picture of fathers' relationships with their children. The relationship between mothers and fathers may influence fathers' access to and relationships with their children, and it is important to gain a better understanding of how parental relationships influence father-child relationships for men in the military.

**Ambiguity and Distance.** Military families may experience periods of absence or distance from their fathers as they transition through the contexts of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. The concepts of boundary ambiguity and ambiguous loss have been applied across many different research topics and to multiple family experiences (Carroll, Olson, & Buckmiller, 2007) and are very applicable to the experiences of military fathers and families across context, space, and time.

As boundaries blur between work and family, some individuals may experience ambiguous loss or even boundary ambiguity as the unsure terrain of family and work roles and responsibilities are navigated. Faber and associates (2008) discussed family adjustments to deployment and reunification through the theoretical lens of ambiguous loss. Participants included members of an Army Reserve unit as well as a family member of each service member (Faber et al., 2008). During deployment, the phenomenon of ambiguous absence, or having the family member being physically absent but psychologically present, was observed. Family members reported having elevated levels of boundary ambiguity when the safety of the military service member was in question during deployment, as well as struggling with how to reallocate

roles and responsibilities (Faber et al., 2008). Family members also reported worrying about how to return to family roles and responsibilities during reunification (Faber et al., 2008). Family Support Groups (FSGs) were described as a means of managing ambiguous absence. These groups provided a means for connecting reservist families together to create an emotionally supportive environment (Faber et al., 2008).

During the reunification period, families often experienced ambiguous presence, or having the service member physically present but psychologically absent (Faber et al., 2008). During this period of time, ambiguity existed about roles and responsibilities and the reallocation of these (Faber et al., 2008). These researchers noted that for reservists, there can be added ambiguity as they make the switch from military life back to civilian life as they return to family and work responsibilities. It was noted that 56 percent of the reservists in this study were parents but there was not extensive discussion of how boundary ambiguity impacted resuming parenting or fathering roles. Faber and associates (2008) also recommended that additional longitudinal studies be used to examine the experiences of military families with ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity through deployment and reunification because of the small, convenience sample they used for this study.

**Work and Family Life.** Balancing work and family demands is a critical concern for many, and military families are not an exception from this. Because of the lifestyle and highly structured nature of the military, demands of work can have an even greater influence on family functioning and boundaries. Segal (1986) described this balance as a struggle between two “greedy” institutions: family and the military. She highlighted that both of these institutions make demands of complete loyalty, high time requirements, and high levels of commitment from

their members (Segal, 1986). This concern with family and work boundaries, balance, and the ambiguity of these boundaries may pose as an additional stressor for families and fathers.

There are a number of different organizations that compete with military families and individuals for time, loyalty, and commitment and may influence how families enact roles and responsibilities. These organizations may range from religious institutions to the more secular workplace arena. Orthner, Bowen, & Beare (1990) discussed the concept of the “Organization Family” and how this applies to military families. Characteristics of the “Organization Family” are described as workers lives being “deeply intertwined with the work organization,” and that the worker’s family is also “tightly bound to the work organization through its expectations and values” (Orthner et al., 1990, pg 16). These authors discussed how it can be difficult for service members and their families to draw distinct boundaries between work and family. At the same time, families seemed to adapt well to the demands of the military institution. This adaptation may have emerged because of occupational selection, meaning that couples jointly decide on enlisting or one marries a service member with foreknowledge of the demands of their occupation, and selective attrition, meaning that families or persons that do not want to conform to the demands of the institution will either leave the marriage or the military institution (Orthner et al., 1990). These researchers also discussed how in recent years there has been recognition of the need of the military institution to relax its demands on the family. While some changes have occurred, the pull on individuals between the two greedy institutions of work and family still exists.

Work and family contexts also influence each other reciprocally, in complex ways. Pittman (1994) examined how perceived fit between work and family mediated the relationship between marital quality and work hours for male Army members. Work/ family fit, which was

conceptualized using questions about the balance in the exchanges between family and work, was found to mediate the relationship between work factors and marital tension (Pittman, 1994). For husbands enlisted in the Army, work hours and job satisfaction predicted greater levels of work/ family fit. For these Army wives, their view of their husband's work environment also influenced her sense of work/ family fit, and work/ family fit directly and negatively predicted marital tension (Pittman, 1994).

With the increasing recognition of the need to balance marriage and family relationships with work demands, the military has made a number of changes related to family policies and practices. One study examined what changes the military has made towards balancing family and military needs (Albano, 1994). Six different trends in the military family policy arena that mark this recognition of balancing work and family demands, included: 1) moving to a partnership philosophy with families, 2) shifting from informal to formal support systems for families, 3) changing to universally supporting all military families versus only the families of certain military ranks, 4) moving from local, private funding to federal funding and oversight of support networks and resources for military families, 5) providing a mixed benefits system, and comprehensive resources to all military families, for both male and female service members, and 6) shifting to a proactive, planned approach for family support and services (Albano, 1994). This researcher described how the military has recognized the importance of attending to family needs of its work force (Albano, 1994).

In their study exploring a number of different facets of military life, Kelty and associates (2010) also described how a number of military policies are "relatively pro-natal" (pg. 192). While the dynamics of deployment and absence may be difficult for families to manage, a number of military programs and policies were supportive of childbearing and families. These

included such things as quality health care, child care programs, youth recreational programs, housing stipends based on family size, and access to good schools (Kelty et al., 2010). Military installations may also provide support for child development through accredited child development centers (Kelty et al., 2010). They also discussed how military cultures may shape family dynamics and practices. The authors described how military culture puts a lot of pressure on military families to conform to certain standards of behavior because the family's behavior reflects on the military service member. It was also noted that officers' wives may feel an added level of this pressure due to expectations that they be actively involved in a number of activities related to their husband's units and the military community (Kelty et al., 2010). Kelty and associates (2010) also highlighted that there is a high rate of intergenerational transmission of military service and that children of military members disproportionately serve in the military. A military lifestyle may have influential impact on the identities, beliefs, and resultant behaviors of military family members as well as individual soldiers.

Military employment may offer added flexibility in attending to family needs in comparison to civilian jobs. Military service members may more easily gain time off to attend to family needs, such as doctors visits or parent-teacher conferences, without having to use vacation time or taking unpaid leave (Booth et al., 2007). Having the flexibility to manage both work and family responsibilities can lead to improved satisfaction with the balance between these two arenas.

The military has been interested in morale and satisfaction of service members, especially as it relates to retention. An element that contributes to service member satisfaction is the relationship between work and family life. Schumm & Bell (2000) examined influences on morale, duty performance, and satisfaction with Army life during overseas deployment. For

married service members, rank was an important predictor for the above three variables. Perceived leaders' support for families, and expected effects of the deployment were also important predictors for performance of duty (Schumm & Bell, 2000). This study also highlighted the possibility for leaders to boost morale during deployment through providing support to families as a means to improve job performance and satisfaction (Schumm & Bell, 2000).

**Technology and Military Family Communication.** Managing different roles, especially during deployment, and access to real-time communication technologies, like telephone, email, webchatting and webcamming, may present added challenges and benefits to military fathers. It could prove beneficial to explore how technology, such as email or phone use, influences the ability to manage varying roles. Understanding the management of these roles and use of communication technology could benefit service members as they transition across the contexts of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification.

Advances in electronic communication have dramatically changed family communication during deployment. Bell and associates (1999) described some of the uncertainty of whether the use of communication technology on the warfront between service members and their families was a "benefit or a hazard for the soldier and the Army" (pg. 510). They noted that electronic communication during deployment boosted service member morale (although it is not the most important factor related to this), and that having rapid and reliable communication available boosted spouse morale, reduced spouse stress, and ultimately resulted in better service member retention (Bell et al., 1999). Difficulties for battle front communication included security issues, and, when service members are unavailable for communication, the added stress and concern of families that may have developed (Segal & Segal, 2003).

The cost of phone communication may also be prohibitive to service members and some military leaders noted the difficulty, for themselves and others, of trying to manage familial problems over the phone (Ender, 1995). Commanding officers described concerns with the financial hardship of some of the phone bills that service members accrued, as well as service members' or spouses' expressed perceptions of inequality in phone access (Ender, 1995). It was also noted that technological advances in communication have erased boundaries between leisure and work roles (Ender, 1995). Further examination of this is needed to understand how these technologies may complicate or ease transitions between different work, family, and leisure activities and roles. Rapid communication between service members and families has many benefits and can be a valuable tool in strengthening familial relationships and preserving father-child relationships. Yet the dynamics, costs, and the implications of these communication technologies are important to explore as well.

**Deployment and Reunification.** Early research examining military families often used a deficit lens to explore the dynamics of the military family. The term “military family syndrome” was coined to reflect the prevalent idea that children from military families experienced higher levels of behavioral problems and other types of psychopathology than the civilian child population (Lagrone, 1978). This negative family label was refuted in additional research documenting the lack of any statistically significant differences in mental health diagnoses for military children and adolescents in comparison to their civilian counterparts (Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991; Morrison, 1981). While the concept of “military family syndrome” has been refuted, military families face unique challenges as family relationships are enacted throughout the processes of preparing for deployment, deployment, and reunification and within the military context.

Deployment and reunification are two major events seen as possible stressors for military families. Some have noted that reunifications may be more stressful to families than the departures (Figley, 1993). This may be because of the need to relinquish responsibilities and reorganize roles. Some returning parents may not recognize children who have matured with added responsibility and the family may (unsuccessfully) return to pre-deployment patterns of functioning that may no longer fit the needs of the family (Huebner & Mancini, 2005). Because of the nature of military jobs and roles, parents, specifically fathers, have often been physically absent from the family home. Over time, methods of connection and contact during deployment between fathers and their children may have changed, but interest in the impact of deployment and absence of fathers has been a focus of research across time.

A number of older studies have examined the influence of paternal and parental absence due to deployment on children (Carlsmith, 1964; Hillenbrand, 1976; Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1988; Jensen et al., 1996; Pedersen, 1966; Yeatman, 1981). In a more recent study it was noted that both children and spouses of a deployed service member reported higher symptom levels of depression and higher levels of stressful events during the deployment period, even when controlling for baseline measures of depression pre-deployment (Jensen et al., 1996). It should be highlighted that while child depressive symptom reports were elevated for the children in the deployed group, the total scores were well below the clinical cutoffs, which indicate depression (Jensen et al., 1996). The authors recommended viewing children's symptoms during deployment as a family affair, meaning that whole families must be involved in the management of symptoms and needs (Jensen et al., 1996). It is also noted that younger children and boys were slightly at greater risk for developing symptoms following deployment but that deployment

rarely caused otherwise healthy children to develop pathological symptomology (Jensen et al., 1996).

Methods to ease paternal separation for children have implications for children in a variety of family arrangements. Hiew (1992) posited that more was known about father absence related to marital discord or death (and associated negative effects) than for work related father absence. He hypothesized that such things as perceived social support and coping strategies would influence the effect of military father absence (Hiew, 1992). When examining the experiences of mothers and their children, ages 8-11 years, who had a father deployed with the Canadian military force, those who reported experiencing stress related to father deployment and successfully sought social support also reported more adaptive behaviors versus problematic behaviors (Hiew, 1992). Children who sought social support and mothers who perceived social support help available to them were able to adjust more successfully to paternal deployment and absence (Hiew, 1992).

In a post Cold War era of a smaller military force with a wide range of military commitments, Rohall, Segal, & Segal (1999) explored the impact of deployment on family adjustment and how different elements, like rank of the service member and personal and organizational support resources, influenced this adjustment. There were no differences in level of concern for family between junior enlisted service members and higher ranking enlisted service members but higher ranking enlisted service members reported higher family adjustment (Rohall et al., 1999). It was hypothesized that this was due to increased experience with deployment and the support resources higher-ranking service member families may have available to them. Perceptions of leader support and satisfaction with resources to communicate with home were also related to positive family adjustment, but the best predictor for family

adjustment among enlisted service members was morale (Rohall et al., 1999). This study noted the importance of leader support for family adjustment as well as the need to provide adequate support resources for families, and, when possible, reliable communication for service members to their families.

**Strengths, Support, and Strategies.** Negative attitudes towards military families seem to have been more of a concern in the past than today, as we see many rallying around and supporting service members and the military family. Public sentiment towards returning Vietnam veterans and their families was appallingly negative and such terms as the “military family syndrome” reflect a history of negative stereotypes and beliefs about military families. Yet at the same time this body of past research has reflected an interest and concern for the developmental and behavioral outcomes of children from military families (Carlsmith, 1964; Hiew, 1992; Hillenbrand, 1976; Jensen et al., 1988; Jensen et al., 1991; Jensen et al., 1996; Pedersen, 1966; Yeatman, 1981). In light of this concern, subsequent studies have not always examined and considered strengths of military families in light of the stressors they face. Also, many of these studies have not explicitly explored the experiences of fathers as they seek to strengthen relationships with their children over different contexts, spaces, and time (MacDermid et al., 2005).

A number of resilient family characteristics have been observed among military families including a solution focused attitude for problem solving, openness of communication, flexible roles and responsibilities, the absence of violence, the infrequent use of substances, high tolerance for other family members, and direct expression of family commitment and affection for and to each other (Figley, 1993). Fathers may utilize these family characteristics to strengthen family relationships and bonds with their children in order to facilitate positive relationships

across the contexts of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. These attributes may also enable fathers to develop effective strategies for managing family relationships while they are away.

Having improved access to deployed fathers through the use of modern communication technology may act as a potential resilience factor for military families (Figley, 1993). Understanding the implications for fathers and their fathering as they have much faster, real-time access to their children and negotiate challenges of physical space and time that come with rapid communication needs more exploration. All of these family strengths and resiliencies could be activated to continue to support and sustain positive fathering behaviors and connections between fathers and children, as well as to design more family friendly communities.

With the creation of websites such as [www.militaryonesource.com](http://www.militaryonesource.com) and [www.Armyonesource.com](http://www.Armyonesource.com), information about managing family relationships during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification may be more readily accessible for fathers and family members. Recent books written for the deployed military father, programs designed to support military fathers, such as the National Fatherhood Initiative's 24/7 Dad program, and resources available through Army Community Service (ACS) centers and Family Readiness Groups (FRGs) are all directed towards supporting fathers and their families as they negotiate pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. How fathers utilize these resources and what is useful to them in supporting their fathering is also important to understand as they negotiate family relationships across challenging contexts, spaces, and over time.

### **Questions for Exploration**

In recent years, researchers exploring fathering have become more concerned with examining fathers' experiences, roles, behaviors, and identity from a contextual and process

focused orientation (Doherty et al., 1998; Marsiglio & Roy, in press; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2004). There are a number of ways that men may face ambiguous expectations for fatherhood, including nonresidential fathering (Catlett et al., 2005; Harper & Fine, 2006), incarcerated fathering (Arditti et al., 2005; Clarke et al., 2005; Roy, 2005; Tripp, 2005), and fathering while traveling for work (Zvonkovic et al., 2005). Military fathers are another unique population that face ambiguity in fathering and in managing family and work contexts.

The lack of research studies examining experiences of military fathers (MacDermid et al., 2005; Willerton et al., 2011) make this population of men especially interesting for research exploration. The two “greedy” institutions of family and military make significant demands for time, loyalty, and commitment (Segal, 1986), and a number of questions arise related to these demands on military fathers. These include how military fathers manage ambiguity related to roles and identities within the family and military contexts, over physical distance, and as children age, or - more simply stated- how military fathers negotiate fathering across context, space, and time.

For men in the military, how do context, space, and time shape their fathering? More specifically:

1. How do men create roles and identities as fathers within and across the military context and the family context?

This first question seeks to explore how men establish different roles and form identities related to fatherhood and as a military serviceman as they interact within the different contexts of family and military.

In order to explore the processes of how men gain access to and use specific institutional resources in their daily lives, the following question is proposed:

2. What strategies and resources do fathers utilize to support positive fathering when living with and apart from their families?

Finally, fathers' perceptions of their roles and identities, as well as their fathering, are likely to change with the passage of time. As children age and as men and their families experience such things as changes in deployment status, fathering is likely impacted by time. In a third question, I focus on changes over time:

3. How does the process of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification shape men's fathering over time?

## **Chapter 4: Methods**

### **Why A Qualitative Approach?**

A qualitative research approach is particularly attentive to dynamics of process, context, and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Daly (1992) has also highlighted the unique strength of qualitative research to capture the experiences and “meanings, interpretations, and subjective experiences of family members” (pg. 3). Gilgun (1992) explained that families come in many diverse forms and that qualitative research can provide a valuable tool for capturing this diversity. Doherty et al., (1998) asserted that fatherhood, even more so than motherhood, was sensitive to contextual forces (pg. 278), and one of the preeminent features of qualitative research is the ability to capture “holistic” views of family (Daly, 1992, pg. 4). Pleck and Masciadrelli (2004) have noted that studies examining father involvement and the effects for children have moved beyond simply focusing on whether father involvement is important to positive child development but rather to understanding the complex nature and influence of context and process on fathering.

For this study, the qualitative approach was employed in order to capture the details and depth of military fathers’ experiences, specifically focusing on father-child relationships and fathering. This study explored how father-child relationships and fathering are influenced by the changing contexts of pre-deployment, deployment and reunification. The qualitative approach illuminated many of the details and nuances of military fathers’ experiences and interactions with their children through transitions in context, including negotiating family and military contexts, in physical spaces, and changes over time.

## **Sample and Data Site**

The sample included active duty Army, Army National Guard, and Army Reserve fathers, who were stationed at Ft Meade, MD or National Guard installations in the Washington DC metropolitan area. Convenience sampling methods were utilized for recruiting initial study participants. This initial recruitment of Army fathers was coordinated through an Army Community Service center specialist and Soldier and Family Assistance Center (SFAC) personnel. Initial recruitment began as the ACS specialist identified a couple of military units at Fort Meade that fell under the scope of command leadership for which access was permitted. Fort Meade is an Army Garrison with a large number of tenants that fall under different command leadership. Because of this, it was difficult to locate a large number of deploying Army units under the command leadership that had granted permission to conduct interviews. When two appropriate units were identified, commanding officers were notified of the study and provided with informational fliers and email scripts to introduce the study. The researcher also attended morning formation for one unit in order to introduce the study, distribute recruitment and contact information, and to collect names of fathers willing to be interviewed. SFAC and ACS staff assisted in distributing recruitment emails to fathers on their rosters, which led to the recruitment of some fathers. The command leadership of the other unit distributed information about the study during their morning formation and had fathers sign up if they were interested in participating in the study. These names were then conveyed to the researcher and interviews were coordinated.

Utilizing snowball sampling techniques, fathers were asked to identify other fathers that they felt could contribute to the study. This process yielded a few names of potential participants. Because the study sought to explore dynamics across enlisted and officer ranks, stratified

purposeful sampling was utilized. Stratified purposeful sampling was utilized because of the attentiveness given to characteristics of subgroups of interests and to aid in comparisons of these subgroups (Patton, 2002). Recruitment of additional fathers who were military officers in units beyond the two initially identified for recruitment was conducted. Names of additional officer fathers were obtained through both convenience and snowball sampling methods.

Fathers' participation was completely voluntary. Fathers were able to withdraw from the study at any point in time. Fathers were not compelled or pressured to be involved in the interviewing process or to continue on during the interview.

Fathers were initially recruited and/or selected based on a number of characteristics (see Appendix A). Fathers varied across the characteristics of age, race, and socio-economic status, but the sample strategically included 8 officer fathers and 15 enlisted fathers. Including interviews from both enlisted and officer fathers allowed for variations across military rank to arise from the data. Of the 517, 783 active duty Army service members, 84, 682 (or 16.35 %) are officers and 433, 101 (or 83.65%) are enlisted, yielding an officer to enlisted ratio of 1 to 5.1 (DoD, 2008). It has been noted that all active duty military members have obtained a higher level of education than the U.S. average (DoD, 2009). Among active duty enlisted members, 93.7% have completed a high school degree and/ or some college (compared to 84.1% for the U.S. adult population over 25 years) and 86% percent of active duty officers have obtained a college degree or higher (compared to 27% for the U.S. adult population over 25 years) (DoD, 2009). Including interview data from both enlisted and officer fathers allowed for any differing characteristics to arise from the data.. These different subgroups of military fathers may utilize different strategies to enact father roles and collecting information from both groups enhanced the understanding of military fathers' experiences.

Fathers in the sample had at least one child under the age of 18 years at the time of deployment, had been deployed at least once, and were or had been married or in a committed relationship. Some research (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007) has noted that teens and younger children may have different concerns during their fathers' deployment and fathers of different ages of children may also have different experiences based on their child's age. At this stage of exploration, interviewed fathers might have children who may be a variety of ages. Fathers may have been more able to engage in a wider variety of interactions with older children, moving beyond simply providing essential caretaking activities, but described a number of ways that they were involved with and connected with children of the full age range. While fathering behaviors and experiences varied somewhat due to age of the child, fathers employed some similar strategies to stay connected to and involved with their children during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification.

Utilizing interviews with fathers who have been deployed at least once provided insight into strategies fathers have used to maintain connection with children during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. It also allowed them to consider strategies they would utilize during future deployments or changes that they had in fathering behaviors during subsequent deployments. Having deployed at least once before, fathers were better able to discuss successes, challenges, and changes they would like to make for future deployments in how they maintain connections with their children through these contextual changes and across various physical spaces. Interviews with fathers who are officers and who are in the enlisted ranks captured some differing experiences with fathering and role and identity construction. Because of the influence of mothers on father involvement and behaviors, speaking with married men or fathers who were or had been in committed relationships limited some of the variation or additional barriers fathers

may face for involvement because of the relationship with the mother of their children. Any additional variations and notable characteristics of the fathers, such as type, length, or frequency of deployments, or a family history of military service, were noted, and findings were framed within the context of fathering and characteristics of the fathers. For more information about these fathers see Appendix B.

Corbin and Strauss (2008) described two key concepts that were employed in the sample selection process for this study: theoretical sampling and saturation. Theoretical sampling is described as the process of collecting data based on themes and concepts that may arise from the data in order “maximize opportunities” to capture variation, depth, variations, and relationships of themes of data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, pg. 143). This approach to sampling allowed for the researcher to analyze data throughout the process of data collection and to collect additional data from sources that helped to expand the understanding of themes and concepts that emerged unexpectedly during interviews.

Small (2009) discussed that qualitative researchers often rely on methods drawn from the quantitative research tradition in determining sample size needed to obtain adequate information for their studies. He further argued that qualitative researchers should think of each interview as an individual case and that information gathered from this case may lead to refinement of the interview protocol. Through this process of refining the interview protocol and collecting additional information, the researcher will develop an intricate picture of the studied phenomenon but also begin to hear patterns of repetition of experiences reflecting saturation (Small, 2009). Small (2009) challenged the researcher not to see qualitative studies as small sample studies but rather multiple case studies. Case study logic would dictate that each case in the sample should provide an “increasingly accurate understanding” of the studied phenomenon,

is designed not to be representative, and may experience a different questionnaire due to changes that are made following previous interviews (Small, 2009 pg. 24). Earlier interviews, or cases, inform questions for the next interview, and the last case should provide little new information due to achieving saturation (Small, 2009). This form of sampling was discussed in contrast to sampling logic, which would dictate having a predetermined sample size with the goal to achieve statistical representativeness (Small, 2009).

Corbin and Strauss (2008) described the concept of saturation as the point at which “no new data is emerging” as well as having identifiable categories and delineated dimensions within existing data (pg. 143). Total saturation is not likely to be achieved but it is possible to obtain sufficient information to delineate concepts and relationships for the scope of a proposed study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). After interviewing these 23 fathers, identifiable categories were present and there was a high level of repetition of themes and ideas arising from the data.

### **Data Collection**

Retrospective interviews, drawing from elements of a grounded theory methodology, were used to obtain information from these fathers about current fathering behaviors as well as past experiences that may have shaped current fathering practices and life experiences. Grounded theory methods utilized included the concept of theoretical sensitivity (Daly, 2007). This is described as a process used from the outset of the research study in which concepts emerge through the process of data collection (Daly, 2007). Information obtained from earlier research and/ or professional experience influenced interview question development but a grounded methods approach allowed the data to more fully “tell the story” of these fathers as concepts and themes arose from the data itself. The interview protocol developed and utilized for this study

reflected this process of utilizing existing theoretical concepts as well as being adaptable to concepts emerging from ongoing data collection and interviews (see Appendix C).

While retrospective interview techniques may receive some criticism, this allowed the researcher to more fully understand how fathers created the dominant story and themes related to fathering across contexts, space, and time. Retrospective reports have received criticism because they require the interviewee to recall information and reflect on it in the present. Interviewees may describe past experiences differently in the present than if asked to report on their experience in the moment that it occurred. While this point may be a valid one, present reflections and meanings that fathers make from past experiences influence their current behavior, enactment of roles, development of identity, and construction of their dominant story about what it means to be a father in the military. This method of data collection provided insight into how fathers' identities and role construction changed over time, influencing their identity as a military father and their fathering behaviors. The challenges of collecting data from fathers during deployment made retrospective report a more viable option for gaining information to better understand their fathering experiences.

Additional data was collected in the form of timelines of events in the fathers' lives and of field notes of observations, detailing site characteristics and interactions with fathers and staff at the ACS center. A timeline was generated for each father interviewed noting important life events (such as joining the military, marriage, birth of a child, deployment, reunifications, etc.). This provided additional visual information about the timing, transitions, and contexts within which fathers interacted. This timeline was analyzed by noting specific transitions to fatherhood, military involvement, and pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. The timeline tool was utilized to support and validate different elements of the interview. As a stipulation of gaining

access to military fathers at Ft. Meade, command leadership requested that participating soldiers not be compensated in any way. Fathers were offered access to all findings and reports resulting from this study. One time, approximately 90 minute interviews were conducted with each father included in the study. Informed consent was obtained from these fathers prior to the interview (see Appendix D). Interviews were electronically recorded using a digital audio recorder.

### **Data Management and Processing**

Data management software was utilized to organize all resulting documents and information. All interviews, field notes, and additional forms of data were transcribed and stored in an Atlas.ti generated database. This software program provided not only storage of the data, but also allowed for the coding and organization of themes and concepts that arise from the data. In the processing and reporting of the data, pseudonyms and ID numbers were used to preserve anonymity of participants. Any identifying information within the interviewed was removed or replaced with a similar pseudonym. Any documentation with identifiable information was and continues to be maintained in a secure location within a locked file cabinet with limited access to the researcher.

### **Data Analysis**

The process of analyzing the data began and continued through the data collection process as well as after saturation of themes and information. Gilgun (1992) clarified that qualitative researchers analyze and interpret their data during the data collection process and her described guidelines for conducting qualitative research were reviewed and applied to this study. These guidelines included: examining previous knowledge about the area of research from a variety of sources, literatures, or experiences, developing sensitizing concepts, entering the field as open mindedly as possible, using field notes and memos, developing “initial definitions of

emerging concepts” from the outset of data collection, continuing development of conceptual definitions throughout data collection and analysis, using theoretical sampling, and testing of formulations against theoretical concepts, existing relevant literature, and additional collected data, making modifications to the formulation as necessary (Gilgun, 1992).

Sensitizing concepts were used to guide inquiry and provided “suggested directions along which to look” (Daly, 2007, pg 104). Sensitizing concepts may come from professional experience in the topic area, existing research and theory, or by examining previous empirical research (Daly, 2007). Some of the expected sensitizing concepts were discussed below and were used to design an interview protocol that was sensitive to collecting information that included these concepts.

When coding the data, this examination included both coding for the presence of sensitizing concepts as well as allowing for additional themes and concepts to emerge from the data. Corbin and Strauss (2008) described the process of coding for themes and concepts as including open coding and axial coding. They defined open coding as breaking apart the data into discernable concepts that can stand alone in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). They described axial coding as linking the different concepts from open coding to each other (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Additionally, they recommended the use of early data analysis (beginning following the first interview) and memos to record identification of possible concepts, themes, or properties and dimensions of concepts and themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). When developing coding terms or labels, in-vivo codes, or using the actual words of the participants to describe a concept was utilized (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Daly (2007) also added to the definitions of the levels of coding. He provided steps and a suggested order to the process of coding. He described the first stage as open coding and creating

concepts (Daly, 2007). Next, categories for the concepts being coded for are created, followed by the process of axial coding, or seeing how the different pieces- categories and concepts- fit together in the big process. Daly (2007) described these first two stages as dissecting the data into meaningful parts and then rejoining it together through the process of axial coding to see the big picture. The process of selective coding involves finding a way to present the story of the data within context and trying to offer explanation in terms of relationships, theories, or processes (Daly, 2007). This has also been described as finding a metaphor or story that provides sufficient description but that is flexible enough to allow for the variation of the data and experiences (Daly, 2007). This process of coding was followed for data analysis.

The initial codes and framework for analysis were created from the interview protocol. This interview protocol was developed as a means to obtain information about how these Army fathers navigated different contexts for fathering, specifically family and work contexts. The questions were also designed to capture how these men engaged in fathering in different physical spaces, including while away from children due to deployment or other work obligations and when living at home, and how fathering behaviors and relationships changed over time and through the experience of deployment. The codes developed from the interview protocol were a starting point for coding. During the coding process, additional codes, such as “kids not soldiers,” which described how fathers tried to remember that their children were not their soldiers and they had to acknowledge in their fathering style, came from the data. These were added to the coding framework and utilized during the data analysis process.

During this process of coding, discussions with my supervising research advisor helped to clarify how to create different codes and organize resultant information. In organizing the results and answering the three proposed questions, themes, concepts, and stories that reflected

the experiences of fathers and how they balanced work and family relationships and developed a sense of fatherhood roles and military father identity were organized into the first results chapter focused on answering question 1. Themes and concepts that seemed to address how these men engaged in fathering behaviors and fostering nurturant relationships with their children when living at home with their children or while separated due to work requirements or deployment were compiled into the second results chapter focused on answering question 2. Themes and concepts that described the experiences of fathers during pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification were then used to address question 3, which explored how these changes in space shaped men's fathering over time. While the questions may have been designed as an attempt to answer these three questions, it was difficult to separate out fathers' responses as addressing dynamics of just one question. A number of fathers' responses and experiences reflected elements of multiple questions. These themes were included in response to the question that they seemed to best address. Dynamics of context, space, and time overlap in the experiences of these fathers and the results chapters attempt to highlight predominant themes that address the three different questions (see Appendix E).

### **Expected Concepts and Themes**

In reviewing the existing literature pertaining to military fathers and families, I anticipated that these fathers would discuss a number of themes. I expected that fathers would discuss how their military life shaped their family life and relationship with their child- dimensions of their father role and identity, nurturance, and involvement with their child- and how fatherhood in turn influenced who they are as a serviceman. Expected concepts and themes helped me as I developed a framework for open, axial, and selective coding. The literature review helped me in generating these themes, the concepts that fell under each of these, and

development of open codes. For example, the literature about role and identity development of fathers and the two “greedy institutions” of family and the military (Segal, 1986) lead me to believe that men will discuss concepts that reflect this pull between military roles and identity and father roles and identity. In review of previous research, I identified concepts like *military culture*, *nurturance*, *bidirectional influence of military and family*, *father identity*, and *interface of father and military identities* as possible open codes. I then coded the interviews using these. When this process concluded, I pulled out all the quotes reflecting one of these open codes. For example in looking across all the quotations about being an *Army dad*, I was able to see variations in fathers’ experiences, as well as being able to describe different categories and concepts within this code, and how these all fit into the larger process of *Army dad* culture influencing men’s fathering. After axial coding concluded, I then utilized selective coding to examine what a larger story or metaphor was for how military culture and men’s perceptions of what it meant to be an *Army dad* and how this influenced men’s fathering, military membership, and how men negotiated these two contexts.

Additional themes and concepts that I anticipated in the interviews and resultant coding are described below. I anticipated that military fathers would have developed different techniques or behaviors in order to build strong, connected relationships with their children that could be employed during times of deployment. Yet at the same time I anticipated that these fathers would likely discuss challenges, barriers, and difficulties with maintaining involvement and the paternal bond with their children. I wondered if this was related to institutional factors such as beliefs in military culture about the importance of fatherhood and what it means to be a good father. I speculated that it might also be related to commander support of familial roles and availability of communication resources.

I expected that fathers would discuss the many roles they play- father, husband/partner, serviceman, son, friend, brother- and that some elements military life would assist in managing these roles, while other would complicate this process. Identification of these elements and how useful or detrimental they are to role management was of great interest. I also anticipated that these fathers would discuss challenges in managing different roles and that policy changes, such as increases in length and frequency of deployment, complicate these processes, possibly rendering certain strategies ineffective or leading to the development of new techniques. Attentiveness to father's discussions of how military culture, U.S. culture, and family culture shape the meaning of fatherhood and how this in turn influences their fathering was of great interest.

It was suspected that fathers would likely identify ways that they had built the father-child relationship, created nurturant relationships, and how these had changed over time. Because of the nature of father-child bonds, it was anticipated that some fathers would identify strong, connected relationships with their children across the contexts of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification, despite lower levels of father involvement with their child during deployment. I expected to find that military fathers would take active measures and engage in certain behaviors in order to prepare their children and their paternal-child relationships for deployment and manage relationships during deployment, in addition to using some type of behaviors to reconnect when they come home.

I also anticipated that while these fathers would discuss different strategies and resources that they used to strengthen their relationships with their children and facilitate their fathering, there would also be many reported challenges, possibly even some new or growing difficulties related to extended, more frequent deployments and combat experience. As I developed my

coding framework throughout the data collection and analyses processes, I considered and amended all of these expected concepts and themes.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of qualitative data is a concern that some critics have voiced. While brief, retrospective interactions may not provide a complete picture of the experiences of these fathers, techniques were employed to strengthen the validity of the data collected. In addition to conducting interviews to the point of saturation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), additional field note observations were used to strengthen the observation of themes and concepts in the interviews.

As a method of verifying that identified themes arising from the interviews and field note observations reflect the experiences of these fathers, “member checks” were conducted. These were conducted by asking later interview participants about their experiences with different concepts or phenomena that arose from earlier interviews and comparing their responses.

Methods of triangulation were also utilized to strengthen data trustworthiness. Patton (2002) described triangulation as a process of strengthening a study through combining methods. He identified four different types of triangulation: 1) data triangulation, 2) investigator triangulation, 3) theory triangulation, and 4) methodological triangulation (Patton, 2002). Data triangulation involves using a variety of data sources like field notes, participant interviews, and interviews with related others. Investigator triangulation involves the use of several researchers or evaluators. Theory triangulation is the use of multiple perspectives or lenses to interpret the data and methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study the topic of interest (Patton, 2002).

In this study, different aspects of these types of triangulation were employed. Different sources of data were collected (interviews, field notes, interviews with staff and other

professionals) through prolonged engagement at the data sites. Multiple theoretical lenses were used for interpretation of findings, concepts, and themes arising from the data.

## **Reflexivity**

Patton (2002) described reflexivity as the process of identifying self-awareness in the research process, including identifying political and cultural influences as well as individual perspectives and interpretations. The process of reflexivity involves knowing yourself and your lens of interpretation and being willing to question “what [you] know and how [you] know it” (Patton, 2002, pg. 64). Daly (2007) also described this process as reflecting on what you bring to the research process and how personal values and interests may shape data collection and interpretation. Three key questions are included as means to assist in reflexivity. Daly (2007) posed the following:

- 1.) How will I maintain a posture of sensitivity, and how will I incorporate these personal insights into the research?
- 2.) How will I keep track of key decisions as the research progresses?
- 3.) How will I work through my own meaning-making process and ensure that I have a record of this? (pg. 183)

In response to these questions, written field notes were used to capture some reflections of the researcher. Memos were created and logged as any related insights arose during data analysis sessions, specifically highlighting any theoretical or analytic insights or decisions.

Daly (2007) emphasized the importance of understanding how we are socially situated when we conduct qualitative research. He noted that because our research goals, motives, and attributions will influence interactions with interviewees, it is important to reflect on how we present ourselves as the researcher (Daly, 2007). I attempted to monitor my perceptions of my

researcher role as well as my thoughts on the perceptions of interviewee related to my researcher role by including these observations in field notes.

Some veins of thought question whether someone with different perspectives, life experiences, even of a different gender, can adequately capture, theorize about, or even understand the experiences of another. Daly (2007) recommended that reflexivity about social position, including such characteristics of race/ethnicity, age, class, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or power that we may possess in the role of “interviewer”, is a necessary means to understanding how the researcher influences the empirical process.

Some notable differences existed between me and the Army fathers that were interviewed. One prominent difference was that I am a female, graduate student who is not a member of the Army on active duty. While it is difficult to predict in what ways this influenced the interview process, it was important to reflect on my perceptions of these dynamics throughout the interviewing process. For a portion of the interviews I was pregnant or had a young infant with me. In some ways this seemed to provide a bridge between me and the participant fathers because of our shared parenthood.

My motivations for capturing the experiences of military fathers have included a desire to strengthen paternal bonds and connection and build resiliency across challenges of context, space, and time, ultimately improving the relationships and lives of families. Related personal values included the importance of strong families, healthy father-child relationships, and focusing on strength and resiliency of families under stress.

A number of experiences in my professional life and personal life have shaped my interest in military fathers. Among my professional experiences, my training as a marriage and family therapist has reflected my desire to support families and assist them as they seek to face

challenges in positive and constructive ways. This training has influenced how I view and conceptualize family processes and dynamics. I believe that family relationships must be understood within the family context and that individuals can provide one unique view of their family experience.

I have participated in some research related to boundary ambiguity through my involvement in an earlier review of published research related to this topic. This experience introduced me the theoretical concepts of ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity and has spurred my continued interest in exploring these concepts further. My knowledge of ambiguous loss has influenced how I conceptualize different family dynamics and experiences, including those of military fathers and families. My research experience with fathers has spanned a number of years. Most recently I have worked with Kevin Roy on a number of different projects exploring such things as the experiences of low-income fathers- as both fathers and partners- and the connections between fathers and their young adult children. Working with Kevin Roy has not only expanded my knowledge and experience with fatherhood research but has greatly shaped my familiarity with qualitative research methods. I also assisted in a research study examining the experiences of combat veteran students returning to university life. I assisted in organizing the focus groups, data transcription and management, and was a part of the discussion of and organization of resultant themes.

Experiences in my personal life have also influenced my desire to work with military fathers and families. Both of my grandfathers served honorably in the U.S. military. I have additional family members and friends who have been connected and continue to be connected to the military. I also have a number of friends who are a service member or are married to a service member. While their experiences may not reflect the experiences of other military

families and service members, hearing their insights has enriched my understanding of military families. These friendships and connections helped me to establish rapport with other military fathers and families.

Military families have faced and continue to face many challenges related to the cycle of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification. Military families often face the unpredictable possibility of repeat deployment and threats to the safety of the soldier. Because of these many sacrifices, military family members should be treated with respect and represented in a light that highlights their resiliency and strengths, as well as noting some of the challenges they face. Many fathers have fostered strong relationships with their children and remain involved in their children's lives despite colossal challenges and barriers. In light of these sacrifices for country, this area of research should focus on easing burdens and providing support to military fathers and families and with current military deployment conditions this research is certainly timely and worthwhile.

## Chapter 5

### Creating Identities and Roles Across Military and Family Contexts

For men in families, balancing different roles and responsibilities is a constant struggle and endeavor. For military fathers, this process of finding balance is exacerbated by unique work requirements and settings. Both the military and family contexts have high demand for time, loyalty, and involvement. Army fathers discussed a number of different experiences and strategies for fulfilling roles and creating identities both within and across work and family. This chapter utilized information from interviews conducted with 23 Army fathers. More specifically, this chapter focuses on answering the question:

How do men create roles and identities as fathers within and across the military context and the family context?

The experiences of these Army fathers are discussed below as they described what it is like to create and maintain roles and identities in families and as a member of the U.S. military. While elements of context, space and time may be difficult to separate out from each other, when exploring experiences of military fathers, the themes noted in this chapter predominantly reflect elements of context as Army fathers described their experiences navigating family and work contexts (see Appendix E).

#### **“Blood, Sweat, and Tears”: I Am A Father**

The fathers in this study were all members of the Army Reserve, Army National Guard, or Active Duty Army members and had devoted time, energy, and their lives to serving and protecting the United States. These men also identified the great importance of and prioritized their father roles. They described themselves with a number of different paternal attributes including being role models, protectors, guides, and providers. While these attributes are often

used to describe what makes a good father, military fathers enact these roles under different circumstances and contexts based on work-related demands. Many of these fathers discussed how their work roles while important, especially as means to support their family, could not be allowed to overshadow family, partner, and father roles and obligations. Life experiences, including those from work, shaped the nature of their fathering roles and skills but also could draw away significant amounts of time and energy. Michael highlighted the importance of managing work obligations but not at the expense of the family:

In my last command we had soldiers from time to time go to deploy or whatever and one thing I always told them was that your experiences when you come home are going to make you a better father, make you a better husband because you're going to go there and you're going to see some things that just makes you more appreciative for what we have here. The other thing that I always try to tell people that are just getting married is that, sooner or later, the Army is going to tell you to get lost and if you haven't taken care of your family, your kids and your wife along the way, you're going to be at a loss. You'll wake up 20 years later and you just retired from the Army and you don't have anybody at your side because you kicked them out or you just haven't done what you're supposed to do in taking care of them. They aren't going to hand around and put up with being neglected or abused or whatever. Family always comes first.

Work circumstances and conditions, especially those unique to the military like deployment to combat, have shaped men's identities and roles as fathers. In this chapter I discuss how fathers create fatherhood identities, fulfill work and family roles, and meet different demands and responsibilities while navigating additional, unique stresses and circumstances of a military lifestyle.

**What does it mean to be a father?** These Army fathers listed a number of important duties and roles that shaped who they were as fathers or what they viewed as important attributes they struggled to portray as a good father. These included attributes such as being a good role model, guide, teacher, protector, provider, and leader. These attributes are often viewed as essential characteristics of a good father by many individuals, not just those in the military. Max,

the father of three daughters described how he believed the role of the father was something that transcended occupation and that while there may be unique circumstances for military fathers, the importance responsibilities remained the same. He noted:

Being a dad is being a dad. Now, the only thing that's going to change is circumstances. Despite the circumstances, when you hold your child and you realize... you can get that revelation and the commission from God that you are a father...when you hold your first child, you realize these babies now are my responsibilities and I will uphold them. ...You might be in the military subject to deployment. You might be a contractor, so you are used to having your contract, civilian contract, to having your contract cancelled at any time. You may be a wealthy sports athlete or actor or something, whatever those circumstances are, your responsibilities are unchanged and you become acutely aware of them and you're going to fulfill them... a dad is a dad. The only thing that changes is circumstances and despite the circumstances a true father is going to meet his responsibilities.

Military experiences and contexts may shape the experiences and circumstances a father enacts roles within. Max described the process of becoming a father as a "commission from God," similar to the terminology used to describe becoming a commissioned officer in the U.S. military, receiving occupational assignment, responsibilities, and duties. Most of these Army fathers described a similar sense of importance in their obligation to raise and protect their child. Utilizing a military metaphor for framing fatherhood reflected the integration of military identity with father identity and roles. While the definitions and experiences of a good father may be very similar for these Army dads and others fathers, the military and family context shaped how these fathers enacted fatherhood.

In describing the role of a good father, a predominant theme that these Army fathers discussed the importance of sacrifice and fulfilling responsibilities. Henry explained what it meant to be a father:

It means a lot of responsibility. It means a lot of happiness too and some struggles, a lot of growth, personal growth, and it means a lot of sacrifice for the good of my children. Putting my own wants and needs aside so that I can advance theirs.

This concept of personal growth and sacrifice described by Henry was not a unique description of what fatherhood means. Many fathers discussed the experience of sacrificing for their children and focusing on how to help them grow into moral, healthy adults. James, an older father of two boys, also described how his perceptions and ideas of what a good father is have shifted slightly since becoming a father:

Early on when my wife first told me that she was pregnant and that we were going to have a family, I automatically went to all the physical things that I felt like I needed to be a good provider. By default, you go to the nice house in the suburbs where your kids are getting a great education, and got a picket fence, and you got a dog, and all of those things. While still important, the creature comforts are not as important as having the ability to be there to help to provide your kids the guidance, the support, and develop a relationship... it's just really the relationship building. The connectivity – being able to provide them the guidance and develop that relationship with them that you realize is much more important than the stuff.

A few of the fathers discussed how they recognized that connected fatherhood included more beyond being a provider and taking care of the physical, immediate needs of a child. A connected father is present in his child's life and tries to empower them to make appropriate choices for a positive future. Nik summarized this desire:

Being a father to me means, obviously, I'm responsible for these little lives, and I have to do everything I can to make sure that I raise them right without messing them up along the way. That's ... as long as you do everything you can to take care of them, and make sure they're raised right, to me, that's a father.

Marcus also expressed similar thoughts but expanded on the process of “raising them right” and sacrificing for the good of your children. He explained what a good father does:

[I have a] sense of responsibility for my kids, and integrity. Being a man or woman of your word. If you say something, that's what you're about. As far as responsibility, just teaching them those work habits, those things that are going to help set you up for success in life. Those are the kind of things that I want to instill. Hard work. Don't sit there and expect everything to be given to you. ... You spend time with them; show them love. I guess spending time with them is all part of love as well. Provide for them, even if it means you going without; they have what they need.

These fathers were very invested in a positive future of their children. At times the sacrifices they made for the benefit of their children included time and personal safety as a member of the military. In describing why they joined the Army, a few of fathers cited not only a sense of a “calling” to serve or the importance of the work they did but also the financial stability and benefits for their family. Some fathers felt that they wanted to be more or do more for their families and the Army offered opportunities for financial stability as well as personal development, in terms of doing something admirable in protecting and serving others. A couple of these fathers joined the military after becoming a father. Some of their reasons for this timing included military service as a means to provide more financial stability to their families in terms of, not only income, but additional benefits, such as housing subsidies and health care coverage.

While many of these fathers discussed sacrifice for their child and teaching them how to work hard and make good choices, a few fathers also discussed how to enact this by encouraging independent development of moral behavior in children. They felt it was important to not only be a guide and role model but to also allow their children to personally develop those attributes.

Tyrell explained that balance between guiding and protecting and allowing for personal choices and mistakes:

You teach them things, and you kind of let your kids find out a little bit of things on their own. Just, you tell them what to do, of course, the right and wrong, but you know kids always are going to kind of do their own little thing and try to figure out things on their own. So you let them do that, and you let them realize why you told them certain things that they do. You let them find out the hard way. I know I do that with my kids, I let them find out certain things the hard way. I tell them don't do this, don't do that, or this could happen, this can happen, and they say “Okay, yes,” at the time, but sometimes they've got to find out the hard way and see how things are. That's pretty much it as far as, you know, you raise them, you want them to be better than you, you know, you want them to do well in life, and you always want to be there for them. My kids, I'd do anything for my kids.

In addition to encouraging children's individual growth and development, Max also highlighted how part of the good father role is to adjust fathering behaviors to individual and family needs. He described how fathers need to be attentive to the needs of the family and to be adaptive in their fathering:

The father's primary responsibility is to promote and to advance the goals of the family, whatever they may be in whatever disposition, dispensation that family is in at that time. To do that without complaining, without letting everybody know that's what you're doing, fathers that are sincere just do that.

As military fathers transition in and out of physical presence with their families, an added component to their fatherhood roles may be a focused effort to stay connected to their children and to maintain and updated understanding of the family goals and needs.

Family background and experiences have also shaped how fathers choose to enact their fatherhood role and responsibilities with their own children. Some of the fathers described how lack of an involved or supportive father growing up had fueled their drive to always be there for their children. While lack of a father's presence while growing up may inspire similar beliefs or actions in other dads, Army fathers emphasized the importance of being present in their children's lives as well as maintaining a connected relationship. Tyrell described this:

When I grew up, my father really wasn't here. ... It was something that was put into my mind like what type of father I know that I'm going to be, and what type of father that I know I don't want to be. I know I want to, regardless of any situation, I know I'm going to be there for my kids. Anything like that, I'm going to make sure I provide for them and do what I've got to do. Blood, sweat and tears, I'm going to do anything that I've got to do for my kids.

For an Army father who may have mandatory, extended periods of absence as a job requirement, being there "regardless of any situation" may be a difficult task. These Army fathers were committed to staying connected to their children and maintaining a strong relationship. They felt a deep responsibility to care for their children and maintain a sense of presence, despite physical

absence. Specific strategies and resources these fathers used to try to fulfill these aspects of their father role will be discussed in upcoming chapters.

The struggle to maintain a balance between military obligations and roles and family roles and responsibilities is a challenge that the majority of these fathers noted. This was something that shaped how men enacted both family and military roles. Drew underscored the struggle of finding a balance between family and military roles. In describing what it means to be a father, he replied:

The first thing that comes to my mind is the responsibility. I have to keep them safe at the same time as providing for, that ties into keeping them safe, I have to provide for them setting that example, try to maintain a balance (laughs). Especially with the military because it is so demanding and we're expected to put the military first. Finding a balance between work and home is actually, it's challenging but it's key in maintaining both.

When fathers were able to find some sort of balance, or were working towards this, part of fatherhood identity and roles included being an Army dad and the demands and requirements dictated by this. This was an influential component of their identity as a father. As fathers integrated a military component into their identity, they included different strategies targeted at meeting the demands of both work and family roles. This identity also created and provided some additional supports and strategies, as well as challenges, for how to enact fatherhood roles.

### **Army Core Values and Fathering**

The Army has formalized their beliefs about essential characteristics for good soldiers and good leaders. These are described as the Army Values. These include loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (see Appendix E). Army members are charged to live these values to the fullest both in their professional and personal lives. Many fathers explained that these values reflected personal values that they deemed important and were qualities that they tried to embody in their personal and professional lives.

One father, Jared, hypothesized that through the course of the study that one of the things that would be noticeable would be that Army fathers strive to live these Army core values. He posited that despite the diverse backgrounds, experiences, educational levels, and deployment experiences, there would be consistency in Army fathers striving to live these values. Many of these Army fathers utilized these values to discuss how they fulfilled father roles and actions they had taken in military roles.

They also discussed how they felt that living these values had influenced their families for the better. Joshua described how at times he felt like he was a soldier both at work and home. When asked what this meant, this was how he replied:

Probably Army values. Just the discipline and everything that goes along with being a soldier. You carry that on your personal life too, and I think the kids pickup on that. ...It's the moral courage. I think it's very important for kids to have morals, so I try and teach that to them. The selfless service, which is always... never putting yourself in front, always being there for whoever you are with. Integrity, always doing what's right. ... I think that's just stuff you try to teach your kids, and if they see you doing it, then I think, you lead by example.

The explicit statement of Army values gave fathers another tool for teaching children and supporting families as they did the work of raising healthy children and strengthening family bonds.

Marcus also agreed that the Army values were important values to embody in how he fulfilled his father roles. He added that he had “an obligation... a responsibility as a father to our children, to our families” and that these seven values were all a part of how a father fulfilled this. James felt that membership in the Army had helped him to be a better father because he was more disciplined. He also described how fatherhood had truly taught him about selfless service. He stated that, “the two worlds intertwine collectively has made me be a better individual on

both sides of the track.” Fatherhood and Army values had shaped who he was as a soldier and a father in positive, strengthening ways.

The Army values provided an explicit description of a number of values that fathers described as being essential parts of who they were as Army fathers, leaders, and men. These values were something that had influenced father’s identities and would continue to influence their lives. Jared shared how integral the Army values were to his daily life and identity:

With our Army values, you're going to have a strong work ethic. You're going to have a warrior ethos. You're never going to quit. I'm not going to compromise my principles or my integrity. It's human to make a mistake. Everybody makes a mistake. I screw up one way or another everyday somehow, but it's not illegal, immoral or unethical. If I make a mistake, it's a mistake of the heart. You learn from your mistakes. ...That's what I try to instill in them [my kids]. I'm just saying those skills and those values that you bring in, like I referenced the warrior ethos and never quitting, always complete the mission. I'll never leave a comrade. Same thing. I'm always going to take care of my family. ...In the military it's very structured. It's the same thing that mom and dad taught you, but it's just really reinforced and reinforced.

For these fathers, the Army values were not simply something that they lived while fulfilling work obligations and responsibilities. The Army values were something that was an integral part of their work and father roles. These seven attributes were something that they worked integrate into their identity and embody in their daily actions. While only the individual father was a member of the military, Army membership also had an influence on family identity

**Army dad, Army pride, Army family.** During the interviews, many of the fathers commented about how they had not previously verbalized what it meant to be an Army father. While they may not have thought of their fatherhood and military service in these terms, most were able to quickly provide detailed descriptions of attributes, advantages, and challenges to this Army dad identity. Fathers were able to identify a number of different elements and components of what this identity and role encompassed. A number of fathers described how their

motivation for joining the military shaped how they viewed their roles as a member of the Army. This role and identity often included the importance of protecting and serving U.S. citizens, preserving our way of life... This military identity was included how they defined themselves as an Army father and expanded as these men contemplated how their fatherhood influenced their Army identity and roles. While none of the spouses or partners of these fathers were currently in the military, fathers discussed how their membership in the Army created an Army family identity as well. Patriotism or Army pride also influenced how these men viewed their different roles, responsibilities, and identities.

Each father had a story of how they decided to join the military or the factors that influenced their “joining up.” While each story had unique elements, there were a number of similar themes or motivating factors for military enlistment. Some men joined the military before marriage and fatherhood, while others joined the military, in part, because of fatherhood. Many fathers discussed how their connection to the Army influenced how they viewed their personal identity as well as their family identity. These identities often echoed the reasons that fathers described for joining the Army. Fathers discussed a variety of reasons for joining the military but many of them highlighted a deep sense of duty or always knowing that they wanted to give more to their country. Michael explained:

It was more of a calling. I have a deep faith and it was just God saying, “Hey, this is what you’ve got to go do.” I was in college and I had to quit for a semester because I ran out of money and back in some youth groups at church, one of the youth pastors who apparently was pretty well-to-do, came from a well-to-do family and said, “Hey, you’ve got to go back to school.” I went back to school and he was paying for what student loans wouldn’t pay for and all those kinds of things. Just during that time, I had no real financial obligations to school. I just got my calling. I wasn’t able to sleep at night, staring at the ceiling for hours at a time and I said, “Okay, I need to go do something”, so I went and started talking to the recruiter there in town.

A sense of duty or a calling to serve their country was a common reason listed for joining the military. Michael received this calling at a time when he had assistance that relieved financial pressures and strain. Some fathers expressed a similar sense of calling but also wanted a career path that could support a family and had room for advancement. Max described how the system of meritocracy in the military appealed to him. One of the motivating reasons he joined the Army was because he felt that effort and hard work were rewarded more so than in the business world or other employment contexts. Evan discussed how he didn't initially want to join the Army, despite a family tradition of military service. He said that one day, though, he felt as though it was time for him to "pay his dues" and joined the Army shortly after this.

Other fathers discussed how they felt they were in jobs that weren't really going anywhere and they wanted to advance more for themselves or, if they had children, for the benefit of their kids and family. Drew described his process of deciding to join the Army:

I was driving trucks for Dr. Pepper. It just wasn't going anywhere. My cousin was in the Army. He's an officer. I ran into him in a family function. He sold me on the Army aspect and job security and the education, growth. In the back of my mind I've always wanted to serve in some way. When they offered me a job in photography, which has been my hobby since junior high, everything just came together and it made sense.

Charles also discussed how one day he just decided joining the Army was the way he could do more with his life. He explained it this way:

I turned 30. I just walked in the Army recruiter office because the job I had... I didn't really have benefits or anything, I was thinking about my kids. I don't know why. I turned thirty and just like that [snaps], just like "I have no benefits or nothing for my kids. You got to do something with your life."

Fathers described a number of reasons that compelled them to join the military. Some fathers joined the military before they had children while other joined after they were fathers. Common reasons that fathers discussed for joining the Army included a sense of duty, patriotism, feeling a sense of calling, and wanting to do more to provide for children. These components of service,

sacrifice, and providing are all integrated into the identities these men have created as Army fathers.

A military lifestyle had a marked impact on what these men described as their Army father identities. Discipline, hard work, and organization were all commonly integrated elements of Army dad identity. Tyrell discussed:

The first thing I think about when somebody says like an Army dad is you know the kind of strictness and rules and what's the word I'm looking for ...discipline, discipline is the main thing. ...Not discipline, just punishing them, this and that, but just making sure they have the discipline, you install that discipline in your kids so you'll have good outcomes as far as when they get older. Just the whole thing of doing the right things-- separate the right things and the wrong things. Instilling that and having that conscience and let you know pretty much it's giving you more energy to it as far as like certain things that you should do and shouldn't do. Just the way to live life. Live life the right way.

Joshua also described how a sense of discipline was an integral part of his identity as an Army father. This sense of discipline shaped how he fulfilled his role as a military father both at home and at work. He explained, "I think it makes me more disciplined, to where, I go to work, but I'm also a soldier at home too. It makes me feel good, something that's important in life a lot more."

Many fathers discussed how their Army roles and family roles were interdependent and influenced each other. Experiences and skills learned in one context could often be applied to the other. Discipline, scheduling, and structure were often attributes that Army dads described as being a part of who they were as a soldier and as a father.

Some fathers joined the military thinking that they would only spend a very limited time in the service and then would get out. Jared, a father who was currently in the Army Reserve but who had also served as active duty Army and in the Army National Guard, explained:

I just the joined the Army. I wanted to do one enlistment and then get out. That was my plan, but I drank the Kool-Aid. When I went in the... apple pie and love of flag and love of country. I believe in it. I believe in wholeheartedly. I'm totally 100% committed to the cause. There's a lot of pride in that. ...I guess just being an Army parent; it's a love/hate relationship. You love your country and you like doing what you do, at the same time you

hate it because it affects your family so much. It's very hard to separate that work, your family, and your child.

Many fathers described this sense of pride-- that military service was a noble profession. Part of their identity included the importance of sacrifice both for their children and family but also as serving and protecting as a member of the military. Some fathers also noted the sense of respectability or pride they found in being able to meet both the demands of fatherhood and military service. Evan described this sense of satisfaction from balancing the demands and requirements of fatherhood and Army life:

You already made that sacrifice for your family and for your country, now you're going to have to continue to make sacrifices. You're going to have to deal with the consequences of other people. It affects your children, the relationship with... the things you miss out on. The things that most people would never think about like, "Hey, I missed my kids first words, I missed their first, second, third birthday, I missed every Christmas." It's just something you have to I guess being an Army father, something you have to be able to accept as an Army father, but at the same time it makes you a stronger man. When you do get out, people are going to look at you like that is a good father.

Fathers discussed how being able to meet and balance the demands of fatherhood and military service was a desired attribute and something that they were actively working towards. Those attributes of discipline and strong morals and values play into how fathers balance paternal and occupational demands and requirements. This sense of pride or worth of the service given both as a parent and as a soldier, also are interwoven into how fathers create work and family identities and manage the different demands.

Many fathers noted that as a part of fulfilling work and family roles, they learned to appreciate the everyday and all of the moments that they were able to spend with their families. Nik summarized these elements of military fatherhood as he described what it means to be an Army dad:

I'd have to say being an Army dad takes a lot of work. You have to find a balance between being dad and being a soldier. You find ways to make it happen, but like I said,

it takes a lot of work. Obviously it's worth it in the end. If you work at it, you're going to have a better relationship with your kids, which is pretty much worth anything in the world. The kids are-- they're a part of you. They're your legacy; they're everything. ...Being in the Army as a father, it's a lot of work. But, if you work at it, it's not that hard to balance what you need to balance. Plus, it gives some really cute moments with your kids. My daughter, whenever she sees a US flag, she's like, that's daddy's flag. So, almost something to bond over sometimes. ...My oldest daughter, she used to have a pair of BDUs, ACUs [Battle Dress Uniform, Army Combat Uniform]. Taking her to different events with the military, stuff like that. Just being around the military. It can kind of help.

Being a father in the military not only shapes his identity as a dad but also that of his family. The sacrifices and contexts that that the family is surrounded by can lead to the formation of an Army family identity as well.

While one member of the family may be the only one connected to the military, the family all makes sacrifices and is a part of the service in terms of identities and ways that they function. Michael, an officer, described this process of family sacrifice and what it means to be an Army family:

It means sacrifice. I reenlisted a soldier probably about a month ago. We went up to Gettysburg and he brought his family. His wife is up there and typically when the spouses come in, we will give them a certificate of appreciation and one of the things I always say in those circumstances is, "You can't be a military family member without sacrifice. There is no way around that and both service member and family members-- they all have to sacrifice at some point in time." It's just the nature of the business that we are in. You can't expect to be in the military and never deploy. That's just how it goes. It is a sacrifice at times and sometimes you get a lot more time than other people that are outside of the military get with their families.

It is sacrifice for Army families to be separated from fathers and other family members. Fathers discussed one way that family members cope with this added pressure and demands is by integrating this sense of service and sacrifice into their family identity. Daniel described how he saw this sense of army family pride even more so when he deployed. He noted that his family felt a sense of pride because of his military service and the sacrifices that the whole family was making:

It [deployment] was hard but I think all of my kids on some level felt a sense of pride. Not necessarily in me but just in ... it's a rare thing. Again, a lot of families have given a lot more than I have certainly but like I said my wife had a much harder year than I did and you know kids make a sacrifice. ... I'm very proud of my children and they hold up well during that time.

Another father in the study discussed this similar concept of Army family pride. In thinking about where that sense of pride or service comes from Henry theorized:

I think the kids are faced with the reality that they could lose their father and maybe more so than a civilian. I mean a civilian, anyone could die in a car accident, but I think they need to understand and appreciate that possibility and then I think trying to instill in the wife and the children a sense that they're serving as well. I think that's important to help your wife feel that hey, it's not just the soldier who is being glorified or recognized, it's the family as well, so they're serving their country. You can help them realize they're a part of it too.

He highlighted how enhancing that sense of service and sacrifice can be used as a tool to help the family manage some of the stresses stemming from their Army family identity and roles. This sense of Army family pride can come out in everyday moments and could potentially be used as a tool to elicit community support and resources. Charles, a father of seven children, observed how his children expressed Army family pride:

...Because kids and they're always looking up to you and you got to be a role model for them. My kids, they like saying, "Hey. My daddy's in the Army" to their friends in school or when I come to their school and I'm in uniform and their little friends-- even at the football game, they have their IDs when they line up and little kid was like, "Where's your ID." That's because their daddy in the Army.

Charles described how his children want to be in the Army too because of his example and the positive ways that it has influenced his life.

This sense of Army family identity may come out in a number of ways for families: in the way they dressed, in their interactions with others, and in their management of different stressors and daily tasks or events. Henry described how his family interacts with other military families or in different settings based on their identity as an Army family:

I think having a family that's patriotic, that has sacrificed together and individually for the good of our country makes me as an Army dad ... I think that's something we will always have as a family, is to know that even though I'm in the guard and not sacrificing like I did [when he was Active Duty], but just that we always have that special, unique tie and the country that may be the ordinary civilian might not ... whenever my family sees the flag or whenever my family goes to Arlington or there's another Army family, we'll have that special tie. As an Army dad, I think I'll always want to make sure that's part of my family.

When work obligations come up military fathers draw on the support of spouses or partners and children. Having a developed identity as an Army family enabled the families to utilize strategies for managing unexpected absences or work demands of fathers. This idea of being in the Army “just as much” as the father, recognized the level of sacrifice and commitment of the family. Michael illustrated this:

Callie [his wife] knows the deal and she knows how to adjust based on the job that I'm in. She always knows that I'm going to have requirements from the Army at all crazy different times. She knows the phone is going to ring sometimes at two o'clock in the morning. She knows that I'm at a moments notice, “See you later. I'll be back tonight” or whatever. She just handles it. She understands the deal and she understands the constraints that we're all in, the different pressures and the different requirements. Again, that's why I'm so happy that I have her. All I've got to say is, “I have to go” and she's got it. Even if she has something planned, she understands that her role mainly, that she has to, just like mine, I may have to change plans because of the Army requirements. She may have to change her plans because of the Army requirements. She's in the Army just as much as I am.

Families structured their lives, identities, roles, and behaviors around the military context. For example, Jared described how his 3 daughters love to wear red, white, and blue or flag apparel to show their support for their Army dad. He added that they also continually write him notes thanking him for serving and protecting them and the United States. Incorporating elements of service, patriotism, and sacrifice as part of an Army family identity seemed to strengthen the family and the relationships that Army fathers had with their partners and children.

While having a family identity as an Army family may lead to strategies and coping mechanisms for work demands and absence, the stresses of those demands still exist. Both the family and the military have been described as “greedy institutions” (Segal, 1986) in terms of time and commitment to roles. One father, Gary, described how he felt while trying to balance both work role/identity and the requirements of family roles:

Have you ever seen those jugglers with the chainsaws? It’s almost like that. Because, you know, sometimes you can get the roles blurred a little bit, you know ...It’s like the chainsaw jugglers, and they’re on, too! It’s always like sometimes if you go at a situation with the wrong approach, you’re just like oh, yeah, I’m dumb, okay. You didn’t need the disciplinarian there, you needed the chaplain there, or something else. But it’s never too bad, but it’s definitely like juggling. ...Of trying to find the right approach for the right role for the right situation, you know, trying to keep everyone working and happy.

Many of the Army fathers interviewed noted that they were trying their best to manage the demands of their Army and family roles and responsibilities. They stated that this was always a battle- to give enough time to family and to work- but that it was something that they utilized a number of different strategies and techniques to try to manage.

### **Techniques and Strategies for Managing Roles Across Contexts**

As fathers navigate military and family contexts they utilize a number of different strategies in order to fulfill roles and balance work and family life. These strategies that fathers discussed include time management and organization, prioritizing both roles and tasks, compartmentalizing different components of their identity, and finding ways to decompress and manage stress.

**Time management and organization.** Many fathers discussed the importance of time management and organizing the different aspects of their work and family roles as an important tool for managing responsibilities these two contexts. To meet the demands of both family and work, many fathers reported creating a schedule and organizing necessary tasks into lists in order

to prioritize all the necessary elements. Isaiah explained that, “ managing your time and know what you have to do and what you have to get done, keeping the schedule trying to stick to your schedule, but also know that things get rearranged.” This acknowledgement was useful to him in balancing work and family roles. Drew explained how essential he saw time management and routines to his success as a father and in his military life:

It's just you can't-- if you try to do everything spontaneously, it's going to backfire on you. You have to plan things out and make schedules and make routines. I said that to one person, one time and they were like that makes for a dull life but it doesn't because things are always going to come up, things are always going to come up that surprise you. You have to have some routine to fall back on. I make a lot of lists.

Fathers utilized lists, schedules and general organization as means to balance work and family. These organizational skills allowed fathers to try to balance work and family life and navigate these two contexts, with the goal of attending to and managing both roles.

Some fathers utilized similar strategies they had for organizing time and tasks at work within their families as well. Henry discussed how organization was useful as he managed work and his Army National Guard obligations but also explained how similar organization strategies strengthened his family:

We calendar, me and my wife. We communicate on what each, what is going on in our lives. Like my work requirements or hers, might be what the kids are doing. I think that communication allows us-- there's no guessing game on-- hey, I needed you to do this or I needed your support here, so that helps me balance my work and my family life by just communicating with my wife and now my children about what's going on in their lives. Trying to take the guessing game out of it. When we don't communicate our schedule together then it seems like we go different directions instead of supporting each other. ... We've noticed over the last year that the girls are more curious about, “Well what are we doing this week?” They seem to be more of wanting to know so we're instituting, and so far doing a good job, having a family counsel.

When asked what advice he would give to a new Army father, Henry also added that he recommend not only organize and schedule mandatory family and work tasks but also those things that strengthen family relationships and connections. He offered this:

Make sure you've planned. You have to plan for family fun and recreation or it won't happen, so I think planning is important. I think I would offer that as counsel to a new father. Don't just hope that it's going to happen.

Planning and organizing schedules and maintaining lists of necessary tasks may be skills that many families utilize to address multiple demands on time and energy. The level and extent to which Army fathers utilize organization strategies to manage work and family roles may also be a reflection of their military training and their familiarity of how these skills can assist complex entities.

The approach of these military fathers to use scheduling, organization, and structure to address father and military roles seemed to reflect military training or common practices within the Army environment for managing obligations. Marcus utilized an organizational system to manage family and work roles. He described how these strategies were successfully utilized both in the workplace and with his family:

I think making a list of certain things that I have to do. A check-list of things, "These are the things that I need to be doing", so that I can prioritize in regard to what needs to happen. Also, my commander. His assistance in certain things helps manage it. And the soldiers. Like said, prioritize those things that need to be done. ...At home, my wife. To be honest with you, of all of the things that help me out at my home, it's my wife. That helps me get the majority of things done. I'm not going to lie. She's more of an organized type of person. She plans; she is detailed, "This is what we're going to do today, tomorrow. These are things that you need to be doing." When I get home from work, I'm tired. I don't want to do anything. Sometimes if we have a four-day, I'm thinking, "I'm going to just kind of relax." My wife is like, "We have these things here that need to be done throughout that time."

Marcus highlighted one way that he uses similar organizational and time management skills in both his professional life and personal relationships. He mentioned that prioritizing was an additional tool for how to organize and meet the demands of work and family. Other fathers discussed this process of prioritization and how they utilized it to meet the demands of fatherhood roles and occupational requirements.

While planning and organization were useful tools in managing work and family roles, there were times that these skills could not prevent conflict and struggles with balancing work and family. Isaiah described an example of how work and fatherhood roles could conflict despite planning and coordination. He gave an example of a time when he was meeting the mother of his son to pick him up for the weekend. He was delayed at work and unable to contact his son's mother. She had to wait for an extended period of time for him at their designated pick up location- the mall- so that he could pick up his son. He described how she was upset because of the delay in her schedule but explained that sometime his work obligations were unpredictable. He noted that if this type of situation occurred too frequently that it created strain in the relationships with the mothers of his two children.

**Prioritize.** A strategy that was often discussed along with organization was the ability to prioritize. This skill was described as an essential companion to organization as a means to balance father and military roles. While there are many different ways to fulfill work and family roles, fathers reported the need to utilize this and adjust schedules and obligations accordingly. Being able to prioritize in a way that produced satisfactory results was something that was difficult for some fathers. James, who had two sons who were 12 years apart in age, explained how he has been able to develop his ability to prioritize in an effective way:

I think, fortunately, for me they [different family and work roles] kind of came in stages over time. Since I didn't have to deal with them all simultaneously, you just adjust as each additional thing kind of came on. Depending on the situation, you allocate the amount of time that's needed. Oftentimes, it's just situational. Granted there's some times where the demand for something that you're doing in the military may dictate the necessity for more of your time than maybe something that you're doing socially or something that you're kind of faced with somewhere else. I think in the end, as long as your able to keep a relatively good balance, clearly you can't avoid or neglect any of the aspects for too long without them suffering.

Jared believed that because he was a member of the military, he was able to learn how to more efficiently prioritize. He felt that he was able to develop his ability to prioritize because of the different demands and opportunities he had as an Army officer:

The great thing about the military is it teaches you to prioritize. The military also teaches you to sacrifice. You sacrifice a lot of things, but it's really not a sacrifice. For example, I don't play cards but my wife will say, "Why don't you go see your friends or go to a poker night or Monday night football or something?" It's like I work my tail off at work and when I come home I just want to be with my family.

Marcus was an enlisted soldier who also discussed how he balanced and prioritized work and family roles. He was an enlisted soldier at the E-8 rank level, subsequently acting in a Non-commissioned officer (NCO) role. He explained this recent interaction with another soldier:

I had a soldier ask me about balancing roles, and I was like... "As a First Sergeant, how do you balance your day-to-day activities and prioritize?" That's kind of difficult. I think that you have things that you have to do at work as a soldier. You have to find priority in those things, just like as a father at home you have to find those priorities. I think to balance fatherhood ...Some things just come natural, and you just react. Some things I just "do". From what I've seen and experienced, I just do out of habit in some areas.

This process of finding the ability to prioritize was something that Marcus had developed both in his professional life as well as within his fatherhood roles.

Another father, Ben explained how it was important to prioritize in order to find balance between work and family life. He described how as he advanced through the enlisted ranks and then became an officer it became more difficult to prioritize and balance work and family roles, especially as work demands and responsibilities increased. He was currently separated from his wife. He described their relationship as being more like that of roommates instead of being a married couple. While acknowledging that many factors had contributed to the demise of his marriage, Ben believed that he could have prioritized and handled work demands differently, possibly leading to alternate outcomes for this relationship. While the separation was difficult,

especially since he was separated from his daughter, he was glad that he and his wife had an excellent co-parenting relationship and were pretty good friends. Ben highlighted that he still tried to prioritize the relationship with his daughter in order to maintain a strong connection:

You definitely have to prioritize. Don't waste the day. Do what you have to do today, try and knock out some of the stuff from tomorrow, but if it can wait until tomorrow, make it wait and take your ass home.

Civilian fathers may also try to construct boundaries between work and family life and prioritize family relationships. Both civilian and military fathers could use work as an escape from difficult situations in home life. How Army fathers use prioritization of family time sets military fathers apart from civilian fathers, though, because of the sense of limited or unpredictable time with family due to the looming possibility of deployment, threats to safety, or unpredictable work demands and travel. Ben's sense of prioritization not only influenced his daily activities but his long term career plans with the Army as well. While there are multiple pathways of advancement and retirement within the military, Ben planned to retire from the Army in about 6 years. While this was not an unusual decision because of how the length of his military service, it was also a conscious decision. He reported that his retirement plans were shaped by his desire to be more available to his daughter as she entered her teenage years. While the military had offered some type of flexibility in being able to fulfill fathering roles, Ben did not want the threat of deployment or other time demands to impact his availability to his teenage daughter.

This sense of prioritization of family relationships influenced other soldiers' long-term plans for being in the military as well. As some of the fathers aged and approached choices in their military careers regarding advancement or retirement, they were opting to end or reduce their military service obligations. Henry retired from being an officer in Special Forces but still

maintained military connections and ties by serving in the National Guard. Jared also discussed his retirement plans from the Army Reserves:

I love the Army. I don't define myself by being a soldier. I'll be the most proud retiree. I'll support veteran's causes and veteran's organizations, Active Duty troops. There is a big burden of deploying. There's physical, because you're breaking down. Your little injuries are catching up to you. Okay, that happens. There's also an emotional toll too. Earlier we talked about priorities. I'm ready to pass the reins over to the next guys because that's really where the priority has to be for me.

Fathers discussed how the physical demands of the military shaped their retirement plans but some of the major motivating factors cited were the need to ensure that they could be there for their children. Deployments, trainings, and being available at any time to fulfill military duties pulled fathers out of family time and being physically present for fathering. Prioritizing roles served as a means for balancing family and work roles for a time and some fathers recognized the need to end or reduce their military obligations in order to prioritize family availability and time.

While the majority of these fathers discussed different ways they balanced family life with work requirements, some of the above results highlighted the struggles between desired family life interactions and relationships and the demands of military work life. While many fathers explained a number of different compartmentalization and organizational strategies for managing these demands, others planned for separation from military life and a release from military service. It is difficult to completely understand the different influences on fathers that shaped this decision to end military service. Some of this may have to do with age of the father, length of military service completed, and the ages and needs of children. There may be other resources or elements, such as military unit or family support, or the sense of military community that influence whether fathers continue in military service and for how long.

Additional exploration of these more nuanced reasons for separation from or continuation with the Army may provide valuable insight in how to support fathers and families on an individual level and through institutional policies or changes.

**Compartmentalization.** An additional reflection of this prioritizing was the ability to focus, or compartmentalize, certain behaviors and roles when enacting them. Fathers described how being able to compartmentalize allowed them to fulfill growing role demands with limited time. They needed to separate work from home life as a means to focus their attention and complete their job safely and to a satisfactory level. Marcus discussed this process:

One of the biggest things is trying to distinguish Army versus family. As a drill sergeant that was one of the biggest things that I had to try to do because of that type of job. I didn't want to take work home with me. ...A drill sergeant is that individual where when a soldier first comes into the military they are there to try to teach them; instill discipline; be that force. You can sometimes get wrapped up in the job as far as what you're supposed to be doing at work, and what you're supposed to be doing at home. Because that same attitude that you have at work may not be the attitude that you need to bring home. I think that was something that I had to learn-- was how to turn that off. Even here being a First Sergeant. I have to turn off the First Sergeant when I go home, and be a father.

Marcus described this process of being able to turn off certain behaviors based on the role that he was playing at that time. Other fathers discussed this similar phenomenon of trying to switch between different mindsets and behaviors as a means to manage different roles and identities. They stressed the importance of leaving work at the office so that when they were home they were able to engage with their children and partner. This process allowed them to separate and switch between different roles as a means for managing them all in a satisfactory manner. Marcus discussed how this process of compartmentalizing work and father roles allowed him to be an effective leader and soldier while still connecting with family:

When I'm at home, I have to be a human. You have to be a human everywhere. Even at work, you have to take that into consideration. When it comes to work, work has to be something that you do, you make sure you get it done; but when I leave here I know that

I'm still in the military, but I know that I now have to be a father. Now I have to let down that shield. It's more personal. I'm very passionate and personal. When it comes to work -- whatever I'm doing -- I'm very passionate. But there's a difference when I'm here versus when I'm at home. I think that I'm more open. I allow myself to be more vulnerable for my family.

Being emotionally vulnerable or available to family members was something that helped Marcus create a close bond or connected relationship with his children.

Another father, Jason, who had a 3 year old daughter, emphasized that he juggled many different work and family roles as a single father. One analogy he used for describing how he utilized compartmentalizing to manage role demands was a puzzle:

When I'm here at work I'm a soldier, the whole time. Anytime I'm in the office and I'm in this uniform or in another uniform that they make me wear, I am Jones. I am Specialist Jones- it's who I am. When I go home I am Daddy. When I talk to my girlfriend and stuff I'm Jason or honey or whatever. When I talk to my mom or my dad I'm a son. When I talk to my friends and stuff I'm Jason. It's actually almost reminds me of people with split personalities and stuff, because you've got to-- you're this person, this person, this person but really I'm that one person. They're all pieces of me. It's like a puzzle. They're each pieces of a whole. It's really easy for me to jump around because they're all part of me.

Some fathers had an easier time with being able to switch between different roles and compartmentalizing. Jon described it as being able to flip a switch between different roles that he played. While he was at work he could focus on work and while at home he could focus on being a husband and father.

I try to be as cognizant as I can of leaving work at work and home at home. I have an on/off switch. I'm kind of unique like that. I can typically do that. Typically I don't [bring work home]. I've been doing it for the last couple of weeks because of something that I want to do personally so I've been bringing some stuff home from work as far as the packet I need to fill out. But that's going to benefit me and my family, not work. But I don't typically bring work home so that I can work on it at home because that's my family time. Then on the converse I don't take stuff to work-- you know like we need to get the kids passports so I'm not going to fill out passport type stuff at work because that's the Army's time. ...I don't worry about home when I'm at work. And I don't worry about work when I'm at home.

Jon seemed satisfied with his ability to “flip the switch” between work and father roles. He added that his ability to do this was greatly supported by the support of his wife. Many fathers that were in leadership roles (both officers and NCOs) described feelings of competence in switching between different roles and compartmentalizing components of their lives and roles. Additional exploration of the nature of the ability to compartmentalize and its ramifications could prove both interesting and beneficial to others. Is the ability to compartmentalize an inherent character trait which has assisted in rank advancement or is it a skill that can be acquired and developed?

While some fathers reported being able to compartmentalize in a satisfactory manner, others struggled with how to do this, especially in a way that made them emotionally available to fulfill fathering roles. Evan, a single father to a three year old son, recognized the importance of allowing himself to be more emotionally available, even vulnerable, as a means for building a connected relationship with his son. He described his struggles with this as he tried to compartmentalize his different Army roles, and the demands required for his duties, and being an emotionally available father:

I find it hard sometimes to go from here to be the person I am now to going home and being, trying to be that caring person. I'm still a very, I'm a hard-hearted, tough person. I'm one of the guys here that everybody looks up to like hey, because I've done a lot. It's hard to get out that role of having to be this tough person and go on home and having to let that go and being more of a caring and kind-hearted person, more sensitive. I've been doing this for so long. I've been doing it for almost four years but I haven't had him so I've just been consistently... I get out of work and I'm still that same person. Just trying to find that ... It's hard to separate.

Some of these difficulties with compartmentalizing were exacerbated when he was deployed, due to the nature of his assignments and MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) related work. He explained that when he is deployed he became “like a ghost”—his ability to communicate

with family was unpredictable and he needed a necessary focus to complete assigned duties and to focus on safely completing his missions.

The nature of military assignments or MOS responsibilities may also have influenced the ability of fathers to switch between military and father roles and identities. Henry explained how when he changed assignments from being an infantry officer to Special Forces, he was able to have more time for his family because he and other members of his unit were able to focus at the work at hand:

It's just the difference between the conventional forces infantry versus Special Forces. Like in the infantry, sometimes there was not a lot of rhyme or reason to why we were staying late at work. It was because that's just what you do, so that was quite frustrating. But in the Special Forces if everything was done and it was 2 in the afternoon, then go home. You don't just hang around. That helped with my family life, as well, because when you're home, you're home. When you're at work, you're at work. We call it the 'big boy rules.' Nobody is going to be telling you what you need to get done. You're a man. You're a professional. Get your job done and then go home. Whereas in the infantry there's more micro-management, more because you have young privates, young lieutenants and you have to be right on top of them, whereas in the Special Forces not so. I'm more mature and then the guys had to be selected and be qualified, and they want to be there, and they know that they're just a stone's throw from getting tossed.

Henry suggested that because he had developed his abilities to focus on roles as they were happening, and compartmentalize tasks and responsibilities, he was more capable of maximizing both work and fathering time. His fellow soldiers within his unit also had similar focus and goals and they were better able to compartmentalize work from individual and family time. He knew that he could rely on his fellow soldiers to focus and work hard so that they all could focus on personal time and family responsibilities when essential Army tasks were completed.

In reflecting how balancing work and family life, Nik described how he has applied lessons learned from his first marriage (which ended in divorce) now help him as he struggles to meet the demands of family life and military life:

I learned in my first marriage, when you're at work, you're at work. If you had a bad day at work, you don't want to bring that home, because then you're just going to have a bad night at home. You kind of learn to separate the two, basically, more on an emotional level than anything else. With my wife now, when I get home, we'll talk for a little bit, see how her day is going with the baby, and how my day is going at work and everything. ... I just, kind of keep things separate, at least on an emotional level. I'll get tired just some of the phone calls and whatnot, but those are just part of the job.

The struggle to separate work from family life may also be exacerbated as communication technology has improved and advanced. The ability to communicate rapidly and be reached at all times may make it difficult to disconnect from work and keep work life separate. Many fathers listed the importance of managing communication with the Army, via email, phone calls, Blackberrys, etc., in order to have family focused time when you are at home. Tyrell expressed the importance of placing as much importance on family roles as work roles in order to have high quality interactions at home and to strengthen paternal and spousal ties. He explained:

If you have a bad day at work you might come home a little upset, a little bit more agitated sometimes. But you've got to know how to separate. You really don't want to come home and get angry and just be upset at every little thing your kids might do or your spouse might do. You've got to balance it out. You've got to know the difference like work is work. The way I look at it is it was something like they say like home, being home is work, and work is life. It's kind of crazy if you really think about it like home is work because of the way I look at it is you're working all the time, you've got your family, it's always a test with your kids or your spouse. And making them happy and getting the things in line and doing everything you need to do.

Being able to separate work from family life in order to meet the demands of each of these identities is something that men focused on as a strategy for balancing roles. Because of the Army and family's high demands for time and focus, some Army dads struggled with the balancing these roles. Curtis stressed the importance of utilizing prioritization with compartmentalization:

Whenever you're in that role, whatever you're in, that's number one priority at that point. If I'm in the husband role, that's my priority 100 percent. If I'm in the military role, that's my priority 100 percent. Like I said, you've got to say no to everybody sometimes.

*Decompressing as a part of compartmentalization.* Some fathers utilized additional behaviors and actions as a means to facilitate compartmentalization. These "decompression" activities were physical actions or behaviors that facilitated the process of compartmentalizing work and family roles. As a part of utilizing compartmentalization as a technique for balancing work and fatherhood roles, some fathers described how they "decompressed" or took physical actions to switch from work to family roles. Andres struggled with finding positive and healthy ways to decompress. After some problems with drinking and through professional intervention, he found healthy, positive ways to manage some of the stresses of Army responsibilities and family life. He emphasized the importance for soldiers to find their own way to disconnect and balance family and work responsibilities. In his search for finding healthy ways to decompress he received this advice:

A high ranking sergeant major told me a while back ... one of his venues to leave work at work is by taking off his uniform and changing in his office and he'd just leave it there. For some reason, I've been doing that and it has been working. The gym is on my way home anyway so, okay, I just leave it hanging there and it's working.

The key decompression activity for Andres was to exercise at the gym prior to going home. He felt that:

The gym is not negotiable. That's my time to decompress. ...It's difficult to disconnect yourself off from the military and go home especially when you have a busy day dealing with the soldiers and everybody got different problems and then you go home, and your job is like, "I've got these ..." You've just got done leaving work and now you're here at the house again. It's really, really hard to disconnect yourself from that, but sometimes I have to. My main way to do that is to ... on my way home, I do go to the gym because that's my therapy time. That's my time. When I get that negative energy out of me, then I go home and now I'm like decompressed from everything. That works for me.

Andres emphasized that physical exercise and changing out of his uniform were two behaviors that were essential to decompress and to manage stressors. Other fathers discussed similar behaviors as a means to transition between work and family life. In addition to clothing changes, some Army fathers described the importance of finding some relaxing behaviors to help decompress before going home. Ben said he was speaking from the experience of what not to do but emphasized the need to find something that helped you to “leave work at work.” He added that his drive home from work or taking a brief break before arriving home helped to ease stress. Curtis suggested different decompression tactics he had used as well:

Making sure your mind’s right before you go. Just prepare yourself. If you need to sit in the car for 20 minutes or take the long way home, do that. You’ve got to have a compromise with your wife or your significant other when you come home, you say, look when I come home just give me one hour. Just give me one hour to go watch the news or watch sports center or play video game or surf the net, just one hour that’s uninterrupted, by yourself just relaxing.

Many fathers noted the importance of engaging in whatever role they were enacting—really working at work or being there for their kids and partner. Work demands and stresses often made it difficult to separate work from family life. Decompression time and activities were a physical manifestation of these men’s efforts to compartmentalize and more fully engage in their work and family roles.

### **The Give and Take of Army Fathering: “Army is a Family Too”**

When describing different family roles and obligations, fathers also noted how the close relationships and connections with co-workers made the Army like a family too. Charles felt like he was part of a bigger Army family and was closer to them in some ways. Tyrell described it this way:

You’ve got two different families, actually. Being in the military, in the Army or any military branch, it’s like a family here, too. Especially since it’s broken down to sections

or platoons or this and that, it's like your family here and you've got your family at home. So it's pretty much two different families. It's just two different worlds. You go home and you've got your family family, and you try to make them happy and make them as comfortable as possible as you can. You come here and you've got your family here, you try to do everything you can just to-- it's a tight-knit group and you want them to depend on you and you want to depend on them.

This sense of "Army family" was a component of some men's Army identity. This close connection or bond between members in Army units may stem from relying on each other not only to complete workplace tasks and assignments but also for personal safety and protection. Those employed in similar occupations that place their life at risk to complete their work duties, such as police officers or other emergency responders, may also have this strong sense of family among their co-workers. The process of deployment to combat and living with co-workers while away from home may heighten this sense of connection because of the length of time, the elevated level of risk, and the need to continuously protect each other. Nik explained that members of the Army may have closer connections than coworkers in the civilian sector because of the ability to understand and support each other. He said, "You're always going to have someone that you can talk to or lean on."

The skills necessary to be a good team member in an Army unit, to be a protector, and the dedication to a greater cause are all elements of Army identity that could strengthen and enhance father role and identity. Components and characteristics of being an involved, connected father are also beneficial to workplace roles and identity as well. Leadership, loyalty, being a role model, and working well as a team are all traits that would enhance Army identity and roles. A number of fathers expressed that who they were as a father influenced who they were as a soldier and at the same time their identity as an Army member influenced their identity as a father.

Michael stated:

The thing about being an Army dad is that a lot of the same skills transcend from the Army to the family and from the family to the Army. They both support each other, making you a better dad and a better leader.

This concept of the bidirectional influence of military and fatherhood is not a new concept. Fathers spoke of how these two different identities, father and soldier, influenced each other. One father even used examples from popular media to make the point. Jared described a scene from the movie *We Were Soldiers* (Schmidt, Davey, Zapotoczny, Bandy, & Wallace, 2002):

In the movie there is a scene with the battalion commander, Colonel Hal Moore, and he's with a young lieutenant who's in the hospital and he just had a baby girl. The young lieutenant's asks the senior officer—he says, “Sir, what's it like to be a soldier and a father?” He gives a great quote. He says, “I hope that being good at one makes me better at the other.” I hope that being a good military officer helps me be a better father. I hope that by seeing all the issues and things as a commander, all your experiences in the Army that you can transfer to the home, but also that you love your soldiers the same, you treat your soldiers like they're your family. ... You can't half-ass being a father and you can't half-ass being a soldier. Do you know what I'm saying? If you're not committed, then don't do it because the results are going to be catastrophic if you don't.

Members of the military may feel that they are a part of a bigger Army family. Army leadership may feel an additional burden as they take on roles of being a leader, a guide, and responsible for those that serve under them. These added responsibilities may feel similar to the responsibilities of fatherhood. Aspects of leadership, military service, and fatherhood are a part of both Army identity and roles and father identity and roles. At times during the interview, fathers who had additional leadership responsibilities, whether NCOs or commissioned officers, referred to soldiers under their leadership as “kids”. This terminology reflected a sense of responsibility for those under their command leadership that was similar to how they felt in their father roles.

**“Those kids”.** A number of fathers, specifically those with command leadership responsibilities referred to younger service members as “kids”. When asked what this meant, these fathers often discussed how they were able to draw on elements from their fathering skill

sets when interacting with soldiers in ways that were similar to what they did as fathers. Michael explained this further:

As old as I am now and I've got kids that were born... I keep calling them kids and I don't mean that pejoratively but I've got guys in my unit there were born the year I graduated high school and later and it blows my mind. So, yes, I very much feel like a dad sometimes. I get frustrated like a dad sometimes too.

The lines between fatherhood identity and Army identity seemed to be blurred at times as these men utilized skills set or behaviors that they access when acting in father roles. Drew explained that as a leader he is often in a unique position. He noted that as a part of military leadership “we have to be very involved in our soldiers’ personal lives. Sometimes I can feel like I’m a parent back at home and at work.” Army leadership assisted younger soldiers in developing life skills or getting access to necessary resources to complete adult tasks, like getting a checking account or maintaining healthy living conditions. Army dads especially felt the synthesis of Army roles and father roles as they helped soldiers take care of basic needs and assisted them in transitioning to more adult roles and personal responsibility. Ben explained this process:

I call them the kids because I’m 36 now and most of them are 22 or 24. Also as a senior, or as an officer, you are almost like a parent in a way, because a lot of them are coming in without checking accounts, or no driver’s license, or have never registered for school, or have to get, it used to be had to get their GED. You’re dealing on a daily basis with their family problems. Everything within a soldier’s life somehow gets touched by their leadership if they have any issues. We’re supposed to go to their house and check and make sure everything is going good, they’re not living in squalor, are the kids being taken care of, do you have enough food, anything like that. The last storm, we’re calling them to say, “Are you ok, how’s your family, do you have enough stuff?” We’re essentially becoming parental figures, so I call them the kids.

Being in a leadership role required some Army dads to employ skills and attributes they typically used in fathering situations, integrating components of both Army identity and father identity.

Fatherhood helped some Army dads develop attributes and skills that were useful as they advanced in rank and gained additional leadership responsibility. Nik described how being a father had prepared him for additional leadership responsibilities:

Once you have your kids, you learn so much from them. For me, it's actually helped learn how to deal with soldiers as well. ... You're in charge of them. Obviously not changing their butts or anything, but you're in charge of them, you have to learn how to deal with them. And I mean, obviously your kids are going to have their own little personalities, so you learn how to deal with them. And it can kind of go both ways there. ... With kids, you have to learn to pick your battles. Kids are stubborn, and same with soldiers. You have to know what issues that you need to push on and make sure get fixed, or if it's something minor, you may let it slide, just talk to them.

Fatherhood had shaped Nik's interactions with the soldiers under his leadership. He integrated experiences that he had as a father as used these skills in determining how to interact with soldiers.

All of these leaders clarified that while they felt like a father at times when interacting with other soldiers, they tried to do this in a very respectful and caring manner. Marcus described how being a father had deepened his level of care for his soldiers because of the understanding that these men and women were somebody's son or daughter. He said:

One of the things I try to think of, me being a father, how would I want someone treating my son or daughter? That was one of the things as a drill sergeant, how would I want someone-- I've now said, "Hey, I'm allowing you to take care of my child". To abuse them or anything like that? I know I would be upset. I would be highly upset if I found out somebody was abusing my child, so I try to take that into consideration, the whole father portion of it. Yes, we have an Army job that we have to do, but we still have a job as a father to do. You can't just turn those feelings off.

As a leader, Marcus was able to help prepare soldiers under his command for combat and other military roles, but chose to do it in a way that did not conflict his identity as a father. Jake described how as a military leader he could play the role of mentor, counselor or teacher or just

being “an ear” for younger soldiers. The sense of an Army family facilitated the ability of leaders to utilize fathering traits to manage Army roles.

**“Your kids are not your soldiers.”** Some fathers described how they felt as if they were acting in a fatherly capacity when working with younger soldiers under their command leadership. While skills and elements of their father identity assisted in workplace interactions with co-workers, some Army dads also highlighted the need to switch modes when working with their own children. Fathers described a number of reasons why they needed to switch from Army identity and skill set to father identity and skill set when interacting with their children. Evan gave this example:

As a leader in the military I know the ultimatum works very well. You try to do all the steps and you just give someone that ultimatum. “Hey, either you do this, or I’m doing this.” It’s cut and dry. You can’t do that with your family, you can’t do that with your kids because it’s not going to work.

When struggling with switching from Army mode to dad mode, Andres appreciated the reminders to switch behaviors he received from his wife. She would remind him that he was not interacting with a soldier in his unit, but his daughter. She would tell him, "You need to understand. They're not your guys and they're not all guys in your platoon. I mean, you talk to them in a certain way. You can't do that with her." Andres admitted that it was hard to switch from Army mode to dad mode sometimes but that treating his daughter like one of his soldiers was not beneficial to their relationship.

Curtis also expressed similar difficulties in transitioning to his fathering role from his Army leadership role. He also stated that this process has gotten easier as he has advanced in rank. He explained:

Your kids are not your soldiers. They’re not in the military. It’s really, really hard, especially being a lower enlisted, like specialist and below, which are E4 and below. I’m

a non-commissioned officer, which it's still pretty hard, but I've been doing it a while, so it's a little easier for me. You come home, you're stressed, you're so used to getting yelled at, that's the only way you know how to get the job done, you start yelling at your kids that way. As soon as they ask you a question you're jumping down their throat because that's not what we do here. It's real hard to find the line but, in order to be a good military dad you need to find the balance, you can walk that line but it's a slippery line.

Curtis emphasized that in order to be a good Army dad he needed to find a balance between how to provide guidance to his child but to do that in a way that is different from the way he may experience that in the Army. A father needed to learn how to use a different approach than giving commands and expecting immediate, unquestioned following.

Following commands without questioning is an adaptive skill, especially when in combat settings but is less beneficial for child development, fathering, and creating connected father-child relationships. Jake discussed how the thought processes and skills he has learned in the Army can assist him as a father but that he has to implement them in a non-military fashion:

The structure that I have received in the military has helped me develop certain processes in my thought process on how to do certain things. When I go home to family and deal with the kids and everything else, I do have to realize that they are children and that they are not grownups. That I cannot be the sergeant type mentality that "Get it done or I will go out and make you do pushups until you can't do them anymore."

He noted that it was important to interact with children in both a developmentally appropriate fashion (since they are children, not adults) and well as a role appropriate fashion (family vs. military). Fathers may draw from traits and characteristics they have developed as Army members but they must be creative in how they implement them while fathering so that they are appropriate to parent-child relationships.

These men integrated a number of elements into their identities and roles as both members of the Army and as fathers. Many men felt that who they were as a father was of prime importance. Their Army identity often reflected the importance of caring for and protecting their

families. Army membership not only influenced men's identities but also that of their families. Fathers described the challenges of balancing both work and fathering responsibilities and provided a number of different strategies and behaviors they used to manage these. This included time management, organization, utilizing compartmentalization of different roles, including Army obligations and father responsibilities.

These Army fathers discussed how the line between Army roles and father roles can become blurred as they influence each other. Many of these fathers described their Army units as a family too and those in Army leadership roles felt as if the soldiers under their command were like their kids in some ways. The fathering skills and experiences these men had with their children influenced how they interacted with soldiers in the workplace. At the same time, fathers emphasized the importance of separating out Army roles from fathering roles because "your kids are not your soldiers."

## **Conclusion**

While some skills and strategies used to manage both Army roles and fathering roles were similar, there were also striking differences between the two that fathers needed to attend to in order to build strong, healthy relationships with their children. The Army values embodied a number of attributes that fathers cultivated and wanted their behaviors and relationships to reflect. All of these components helped to frame these men's identities as Army members and fathers. Membership in these two groups in turn shaped how these men accessed different resources and employed strategies to fulfill fathering responsibilities. The strategies these men employed to create close, resilient relationships with their children reflected the Army and father components of their identities and addressed the need to manage periods of living with and apart from their children.

## Chapter 6

### **Strategies and Resources to Support Fathering**

A military lifestyle includes the dynamics of changes of duty, reassignment, and deployment to combat. For fathers and families, this creates cycles of separation and reunification. For many of the Army fathers interviewed, their fathering role and identity was one of the most salient components of who they were. Because of occupational demands, many fathers described how they strategically utilized available resources to maintain connected relationships with children when living apart from them. When living at home, fathers actively cultivated a strong father-child bond by utilizing available resources. This chapter uses interview data collected from 23 Army fathers to address this question:

What strategies and resources do fathers utilize to support positive fathering when living with and apart from their families?

This chapter explores a number of different strategies fathers employed as well as resources they accessed as they worked to strengthen father-child bond and relationships prior to deployment and while living apart from their children. The themes included in response to this question were codes and themes that reflected concepts of fathering that these Army fathers reported utilizing. This question explored dynamics of both space and context (see Appendix E) as fathers interacted with children in different physical locations- at home or when living away from their children- and across work and family contexts. Some of these strategies were discussed during Army trainings or dictated by command leadership. These trainings may have included classes specifically dedicated to informing military fathers about dynamics of creating strong, close family relationships during the reintegration period following deployment. Some leaders also described how as deployments approached, they would send soldiers home as soon

as possible during the workday so that they could spend any available time with their families. Throughout this chapter the influence of command leadership on available resources and father's strategic behaviors is noted.

Fathers developed strategies for connected fathering in response to their desire to fulfill the role of a "good father". This question explores both the resources available to fathers but also how they strategically utilized these resources. This chapter will illuminate types of resources available to fathers to strengthen father-child bond and to foster connected relationships by examining the strategies and methods that fathers employed in accessing these resources.

### **Communication Lifeline**

One predominant strategy that all of the fathers discussed to engage and connect with their children and families was communication. They stressed the importance of using communication to connect with their children and to forge a strong relationship when living at home. Fathers discussed the need for them to initiate communication with their children and that it was their responsibility as a father to do so. They also described ways that they used communication to engage their children both when they were living at home and while deployed. Both of these contexts presented different dynamics, opportunities for support, and challenges.

**Communication during deployment.** Fathers described a number of different methods and resources they used to communicate with family. Some of the most popular forms of communication reported included Skype, email, Facebook messaging, and telephone. Fathers who had been deployed since about 2005 seemed to have improved access to internet based forms of communication (e.g. Skype, webcam usage, and Facebook) both in terms of availability and the quality of internet connections. This may have been due to the process of military installations becoming more established and capable of securing more consistent communication

relays. One father, Samuel, described how he was able to buy in to a personal satellite relay for internet at his living quarters with his fellow officer roommates. Michael noted that in his first deployment, internet quality and availability was unpredictable. During his second deployment, internet availability and quality had improved but Skype wasn't really available. Michael predominately contacted his wife and daughter using email and phone. He also described how something similar to webcam/ Skype communication was available. Video conferencing (VTC) was used to create video messages to send home to families, although this usage was limited in terms of frequency. Michael described how this was similar to webcam interactions because he could see the person as they were talking in the video message but that Skype had improved on this form of communication because of the ability to communicate in "real time". Many of the fathers who had deployed within the last couple of years described Skype as a predominant form of communication. If the internet connection was too slow to support a good webcam feed, they would often use the Skype telephone services.

Use of the telephone and email were also reported as some of the most common forms of communication-- being used during both earlier deployments as well as more recent ones. While letter writing and mailing postcards were less common in deployments occurring more recently (likely due to improved and more consistent internet and phone service), some fathers did use the mail service to communicate and to create visual images for their children of where they were at by mailing these home.

While deployed, the resources and choices related to connection were very limited for fathers. They were physically removed from their families and children and faced additional challenges related to time zone differences, limited or low quality phone and internet connections, and the added expense of phone or internet access. Despite these challenges, one

father, Jared, reminded that communication is essential to connecting with your child when he described, “Phone and email’s the lifeline.” Tyrell, a 26 year-old, enlisted specialist described how he used communication resources while deployed to stay connected to his children:

It definitely shifts because I mean you’re not, your presence is really not there, so... because your say so and you putting your hands on things or doing things-- it’s not there. So you kind of got to communicate, communication I would say would be probably like the best thing you could do as far as being deployed as far as trying to keep things in order and keep things going on track.

Tyrell tried to make up for his physical absence by maintaining a constant level of communication, when possible. He felt that this was the best thing that he could do to maintain a connection with his children. Another father, Andres, who had deployed seven different times, described the importance of using communication to connect with your children and spouse for relationship maintenance while deployed:

Just stay in communication with them, as much as possible, whether ... maybe sometimes the technology with Skype and all of that stuff, but mainly to let them know that you're making an effort to stay in that communication with them. Even when I e-mail Emma and her mom, sometimes I put a smiley face or a wink or whatever just to let them know that I'm still connecting with them. You don't necessarily have to say something but I'm still there.

Andres recognized that his communication with his daughters and wife while he was deployed was different from communicating with them at home. He noted that one of the most difficult challenges to family communication was that the non-verbal cues of communication were lost in the distance. He struggled with not being able send and read non-verbal cues and signals that he utilized at home to as a means to connect and strengthen relationships while communicating. When he described adding a smiley face or a wink to emails, this was his attempt to capture these non-verbal behaviors.

A number of fathers discussed the importance of setting up a “communication routine” while they were deployed. Some fathers utilized consistent communication routines as a strategy

for maintain a connection with their children. They also highlighted the importance of notifying the family, when possible, when they needed to make a change to this routine in order to prevent worry. Marcus, explained:

If you get into a routine when you're deployed of contacting them often, and then you don't, there are so many things that go through their minds: "Is he all right? What's going on?" So if I knew I was going to be gone for a week or two, I would say, "Hey, I may be gone for a period of time so you may not hear anything from me for a while."

While having a communication routine cut down on some unnecessary worry by the families, there were times communication technology could also become a barrier to connection and heighten the level of anxiety. Drew explained one example of this type of scenario:

There is a thing that they do or at least on FOBs [forward operating base] when somebody on that FOB gets killed, they shut down the phones and internet until the family has been notified. That can take a couple of hours, it can take three days. That's without notice. It's like, "I can't see you, I won't be able to talk to you because somebody was killed." If they don't hear from me for a couple of days when they're used to hearing from me every day it can cause a little stress at home.

The intention of this "communication routine" strategy was to maintain a connected relationship with children and partners but at times circumstances beyond father's control increased family's anxieties when routines were interrupted.

Another father, Curtis, described some of the challenges with maintaining a communication routine and sharing limited resources with fellow service members. Coordinating both access to communication resources and a family's schedule with time changes between Afghanistan and the United States were additional factors that Curtis considered in setting up a communication routine.

You have to establish a routine for your communication. You can't over communicate because that's just going to make you feel homesick. You have to have limits on how much you do things. You don't want to keep going because if you get lost in the sauce you won't be paying attention to what you need to paying attention to. I really stuck with it as far as, what'd I say, phone calls, some email, Skyping a lot toward the end but while

I was out on my forward operating base I hardly ever Skyped because everybody wants to jump on it. I remember waking up, setting my alarm for 2:30 – 3:00 in the morning just so I could go use the Skype.

Fathers discussed how it was important to communicate with your children and family on a regular basis but that over-communication could be detrimental to job performance, and ultimately safety. Fathers highlighted how they wanted to check in and connect with their families, but, because they were deployed, they were also removed and unable to do more than discuss, converse, and check-in with the family. A number of these men reported that being more removed or distant allowed them to remain focused on their work and ultimately keeping themselves, and fellow service members, safer by doing their job to the best of their ability.

Charles, a father of seven children, who has been deployed twice, also described some of these barriers to communication. He noted:

The time difference [can be a barrier]. A lot of times, I can talk to my kids but they'll be in this... or like if I'm in Afghanistan, there's an eight hour time difference so it's hard to get a hold of them or it's time for you to go to sleep, like to talk to my sons, sometimes I have to stay up till three o'clock in the morning. Then like call them on Skype and stuff, just so I can talk to them when they were in the house. Especially because they were going to camp and they were doing their little after school activities and stuff, so I had to stay up just to talk to them. I had to stay up like three o'clock in the morning.

Drew also recalled some communication challenges, particularly experiences with a limited amount of resources for many service members. But he also added that some barriers to communication were related to personal attributes or factors. He highlighted the importance of communicating with children and spouses despite these difficulties:

You have to make that time. It doesn't matter how tired you are. You need to make that time to call. At that deployment, I didn't have internet so I was at the mercy of the MWR [Morale, Welfare, and Recreation] phones. I had to go stand in line, get on the phone for 10 minutes, check in, see how she was doing and then go. That deployment, that was a lot more difficult in the communication aspect of it.

Army communication policies, time zone differences, personal challenges, and conflicting schedules all presented barriers to communicating with children and families,. Andres added to this description of potential communication barriers when he discussed how the nature of long distance communication can make it difficult to connect with children when communicating. He explained:

I think I hate it more on the mental side because being back here [at home] is more physical. You see the expressions and everything. On the e-mail or the phone call you don't see ... maybe on phone call you can sense the emotions, just the way you talk, louder, calm or whatever, but I think that, like I said, on the deployment it's more mental. You try to get your idea out there, not as much ... as soon as possible but you want to get it the right way. Unlike over here, you might say something or the same thing but it's not the same effect. ... I might send a text but you might want to explain it because some people they have a different mental state that they might get the wrong idea. That's not the case. Sometimes, I prefer ... when I have the time, I prefer to call instead of sending an e-mail. I e-mail them more mostly because I have something else going on, let me send this real quick and then in a couple of days I'll call.

Andres, and other fathers, described the importance of having a strong relationship with your children prior to deployment. This enabled them to draw on that connection, previously forged, in order to maintain the relationship using limited communication and resources for connection.

Fathers who were also officers or non-commissioned officers (NCOs) described how they routinely checked in with the soldiers under their command about communication with family back home. These men reported that as a part of their leaderships role they were attentive to whether or not their soldiers were communicating with their families and children. They felt an additional responsibility to support fathers and help them strengthen family and paternal relationships. These leaders recognized how strong and stable relationships with children, partners, and family members at home encouraged better work performance.

A few fathers discussed how a family friendly command leadership relieved some of the stress between family and work demands and was also supportive to being a connected, involved

father. At the same time, some fathers discussed how having command leadership that was not supportive of family time and fatherhood shaped men's fathering by demonstrating how they did not want to be as a father. Michael described how the example of command leadership influenced both fathering and military leadership:

In your military career, not every leader that you have is going to be the perfect leader. Actually some are going to be downright pretty bad. But what you do is you are always learning, just like those kids that are watching parents. You are always learning, you are always watching and you are taking notes and you know exactly—OK, I have a bad leader, he just did this. I am never, ever doing that. As a future leader, I'm never, ever going to do that. You learn by your examples what you don't want to do and what you do want to do, things like that.

Michael also discussed how some leaders are more supportive of family needs and dynamics than others. He spoke of how his experiences with leadership commands that were supportive of family obligations and how this facilitated his ability to engage in positive fathering. When describing supports to fathering he explained:

It doesn't help having a boss that doesn't really care about family or is single. It's beautiful having a boss that has family concerns and issues of his or her own and understands the sacrifice of family makes to begin with. That really helps managing those things. ...Knowing that, I also have the support from my chain of command is very helpful.

Drew described how having a commanding officer that was concerned about and supportive of his family relationships facilitated his communication with his family:

My old Platoon Sergeant was being... He's very big on family. He was very much about making sure we-- he would check in with us while we were deployed and make sure we were communicating with our family. He was very big about that. He's like, "When was the last time you talked to your wife?" Especially on my first deployment, my first deployment was very hectic and I was outside of the wire more often than I was inside the wire. Whenever I'd come back from mission if I was out for two days or I was out for a week or whatever, I'd come back and do my post production stuff, get my photos together and get them turned in. ... When I got back from the mission, once I was complete with everything I had to do, I called my NCO. One of the first things he would do, he would say would be, "Okay, call your wife, go take ..." It would be the same

thing, “Call your wife, go take a shower, get some sleep, get something to eat whatever.” It was always, “Call your wife.”

Drew added that he would often want to just focus on himself- completing work, eating, and sleeping- because of how draining his work was. The reminder of his NCO to contact his family helped him to get out of “me mode” despite physical and temporal challenges. For some fathers being apart from families during deployment led to disengagement, especially when additional barriers to communication were present.

Many fathers utilized available communication resources to maximize connection with their children and families. When James, a father in the Army Reserve, had a CONUS (Continental United States) mobilization it enabled him to create a more “real-time” communication connection with his younger son. He described:

It [was] an hour difference. I had access to communication full time, and it was at my own availability, so, I could always call him. He could always call me. There were times that we always weren’t able to talk during the day, but if he felt like, especially in the beginning, the first couple of months, if he really felt like he was really missing me, he could send me a text at any time during the course of the day. I would have the ability ... I wouldn’t always be able to call him right back, but I could text him back when I got a few seconds or a minute or two. He never felt like he was totally disconnected.

James had access to a variety of forms of communication because of the nature of his mobilization. He was able to match the type and level of communication to the needs of his son. This responsiveness to his son’s needs was a way for him to connect and maintain his close relationship with his younger son, despite being geographically distant. His son was having a difficult time with James being gone and so they adjusted their communication routine:

I think the real wakeup call was after, I guess, a few weeks, he started saying, “I really miss you. I haven’t seen you in a long time.” I think what really kind of did it for me was, to come up with a better solution, when he says, “You know, I haven’t seen in such a long time. I don’t remember how you look.” To a young child, you kind of go, “Well, it’s the same as when I left.” He was like, “Well, it was such a long time ago.” It awoke something in me to say that, you know, for your own kids not to remember how you look, that’s ... again, with the advent of

technology, I began to set up a schedule where we would Skype. I think the text thing gave ... I think it was a better solution. Because even though the capacity to write a message was much more condensed, it was that instantaneous feeling, almost like conversation, as opposed to the email stream.

Because of the access to and availability of communication technology, James and his younger son also developed a bedtime communication routine. He used this as a time to connect with his son but also to monitor and assist his son with improving his academic development. James described how this communication routine added a sense of consistency to his son's life because they developed a routine similar to the bedtime routine that James and his son used when he was living at home:

I tried to keep as much continuity as possible. Because all the time that I was home, we had a set bedtime for him, and during that time, we blocked out a half an hour. For that half an hour, we would read each other a story. He would read one page, and I would read one page, and he would read one, and I would read one. For me, it was a dual purpose. It was a good time management tool. It gave us an opportunity to kind of some quiet, wind down time, and gave him a chance to practice his reading.

James was able to maintain elements of his non-deployed fathering routine by utilizing communication resources. While also responding to his child's requests regarding level of communication and his needs, he was also able to remotely connect with his son and maintain relationship closeness despite physical distance. Because the communication routines that James developed while he was away were very similar to those he that he and his son used when at home, he could maintain these as he transitioned back to life at home.

**Internet creativity to connect.** Fathers were also strategically creative in using internet access to connect and communicate with their children. One father played Xbox games online with his teen and preteen children, talking with them as they all played a video game together. Many fathers described how internet shopping, through retailers such as Amazon, allowed them to celebrate important dates, birthdays, and holidays with children and family members. This

gave fathers the opportunity to send physical reminders to families that even though they were physically distant, they still held their children and fathering roles at the forefront minds and hearts.

While fathers faced challenges to communication during deployment, many also developed different techniques or games for connecting using communication and technology available while deployed. These fathers were creative in how they used communication technology to strengthen and maintain their relationships with their children. Some fathers developed games they could play with their children when using Skype or the phone. Jason, a single-father with one daughter, described how he used existing communication resources to connect and play age-appropriate games with his child:

When I was deployed I was actually one of the lucky guys because where I was deployed we had free internet access. ... When I was deployed they had a MWR with about a dozen or so computers and stuff that you can get on and they had a place where you can sign out a camera and a little headset so I could Skype with her and her and my mom sent me stuff while I was deployed. I got pictures and stuff of her all the time. She'd always play hide and go seek with me and it's like "Okay, where are you?" and my mom would take the camera and turn it around and I'm like "There you are. I see you" and she's like "Nuh-uh, nuh-uh (negative)" and I'm like "Yes, I see your foot." She pulls her foot back and I'm still like "I still see you" and she looks out and like say "I see you" and she's like "Oooo." We'd always play hide and seek and stuff when I was Skyping and stuff. That was fun.

Jason also described how, that despite his daughter's young age, he was able to regularly connect with her in an age appropriate way and maintain his relationship with her via Skype. Having regular Skype webcam sessions also helped her to be able to recognize him when he came home and aided in the reunification process. As a single father, Jason appreciated the advice he received from a leader who was also a single father. This leader helped him prepare for his first deployment by describing different forms of communication that could be available and how Jason could use these to maintain a close father-child connection.

Daniel discussed how he played games and assisted with schoolwork as means to interact and connect with his children at home. He used a similar strategy to connect with his children while he was deployed by creating a new game they could play over the Skype. Daniel explained the game:

There's a book called Moshi Moshi Kuwaini and it's this ridiculous Chinese thing where they have all these little characters that aren't brilliantly drawn or anything but it's like these huge pictures that will have like 1000 characters in it. I got one for them and then I got one for myself and brought it back to Egypt and we would kind of play the game, like hey, if you go to page 34 can you find the bunny Moshi Moshi and it helped that I would read the book to them in the voice of one of our Korean born Sergeants so they thought it was the funniest thing in the world! That kind of helped us stay connected.

Daniel described how when he was living at home he tailored his fathering to include his children's interests and he tried to be involved in activities that his children enjoyed doing. He applied this same fathering technique to how he connected with his children when they were physically separated due to deployment. This father and others found creative ways to apply the same type of fathering practices they used for connecting with their children when physically present at home.

Fathers also reported accessing other online resources, such as internet retailers like Amazon.com to send gifts and to demonstrate to children and partners that they remembered important days even though they were distanced. Tyrell described:

I know I was mailing my kids toys a lot. I would get, I think it was Amazon I'd go over there, go on Amazon and pick out some toys or whatever and get them mailed to the house for my kids. So that, and I'd get pictures received of them opening their gifts and seeing it, just the smile on their face, excited about getting toys, and I talked to them on the phone. Hey Dad, I'm happy you got me this toy and this and that.

Some fathers utilized online shopping as a means to send care packages and gifts back to their children. They described how they were able to remind children and spouses that they were

thinking about them on special days, such as birthdays and anniversaries, even though they were physically missing for the day or event. Tyrell's description of how he valued seeing the pictures of his children opening their presents reflected the importance he placed on having an influence on his children despite being physically separated. Part of Tyrell's identity as a father included availability to his children-- that he would be available and have a positive influence in his children's lives, no matter what. His experiences with an absent father during his childhood strengthened his resolve to remain connected to his children in spite of barriers, such as physical separation due to deployment.

Some fathers used postcards and photographs to help children visualize the physical environment of where they were deployed to. Daniel described how they would use the webcam to show his children what his office looked like and how he had their pictures that they had sent hanging up. By using communication resources to convey information about their daily routines to their children, these fathers were trying to connect with their children by sharing elements of their current living situation and daily habits and practices. Another father, Drew, described how he and his older son used matching blankets to connect over Skype:

This last deployment Gavin gave me one his blankets to take with me. We got him this Phineas and Ferb fleece blanket. He asked me to take it with me when I went. Little things like when I was talking to him on the phone I pointed out, "Hey, that blanket was on my bed every day during deployment." It was letting him know that I am using his blanket.

Drew described how they would consistently discuss the blanket and how he described how he used the blanket to his son. He felt that this gave him and his son a sense of being close to each other despite the expansive physical distance separating them.

Fathers described a number of creative means for connecting with their children and for including children in their daily lives while deployed. These strategies reflected the creativity

and consistency these fathers had in wanting to connect with their children and maintain close relationships.

**Communication routines at home.** All of the fathers emphasized the importance of facilitating positive communication at home. They discussed the need to use communication as a means to connect with children and create a strong, positive relationship. Curtis, a father to two sons, explained how he utilized communication to connect with his boys:

I always make it a point to say hello and good bye and how are you doing. I ask them the questions. I don't expect them to come to me. I go to them. They didn't choose for me to join the Army-- I chose to join the Army. I chose to stay in the Army while being a dad. I need to make that effort to go to them and ask them questions and strike up the conversation with them. If they're not feeling it then, I got to walk away. I can't sit there and hound them and make them spend time with me because I don't want them to resent me.

Curtis emphasized the importance of following his children's lead on how much they wanted to communicate in the present moment. But at the same time he also stressed that he tried his best to make himself available to interact with them. He felt that it strengthened their relationship to allow his boys to have control and influence over how and when they communicated.

Another father, Tyrell, described how important it is to have daily contact and communication with your children. His beliefs about fathering were influenced by his own father. He described how he did not want to be like his father since he wasn't really there or in contact with him as he was growing up. Tyrell discussed how being a good father included communicating with your children. In response to a question about what a good father does, he stated:

Yeah, joking with them. Just doing a lot of different things with them, and communication is a big thing with kids. Because you know you hear a lot of stories like I said a little earlier about how they say "Yeah, my father was there but he never did this, he never did this, he was this type of person, this and that." You don't really want to be like that, because that carries along with... they have, I know, they have a big effect on kids, or you know when you're raising children, you just want to be involved in their life

a lot. You just want to communicate, the communication is the key, and just interacting with them on a lot of things they want to do. And ask them what they want to do, what they want to be and ask them questions. Don't just pretty much just give orders all the time and, you know ...'

Tyrell stressed the importance of the give and take of communication. He continued to describe the need for reciprocal communication between fathers and children in order to establish a strong relationship and sense of connection.. Tyrell's Army career dictated periods of separation and absence from his children. Even though he was required to be physically apart from his children, he worked to find ways to prevent them from feeling like he was absent from their lives. Involved fathering and a consistent, positive communication routine when living at home assisted Tyrell in creating a resilient close relationship with his children. He utilized communication when living at home and when deployed as means to provide a consistent, positive presence in the lives of his children.

Communication, both at home and while deployed, was the means for many of these fathers to establish a close, connected relationship with their children. While the frequency and form of communication may shift and change when fathers are physically present versus when deployed, the need for and importance of communication was highlighted throughout these father's stories and experiences.

### **“Really Be There”- The Emotional Bank Account**

Most of the fathers interviewed described the importance of “quality time” for connecting with their children. When asked about attributes of a good father, many servicemen discussed the importance of participating in activities with their children, engaging with their children, and being emotionally present as well as physically present. This engaged presence seemed to be what these men were trying to capture when they used the phrase “quality time”. One father,

Henry, described an analogy that captured this concept of quality time and how it related to being an Army dad. In response to being asked about what it means to be an Army dad he said:

I want to say it brings more pride but that's not it. I guess it brings more emphasis on being a father because you know that when you are home, you've got to make it count. I've heard it described- this came into my mind- you've got to put deposits in the bank while you are home so that when you are gone, your family will be able to withdraw and not go into a deficit. Time counts. Make it count..."

He further explained this analogy throughout the interview as he described different interactions and strategies he used for fathering. He discussed how he relied on that emotional bank account to sustain his relationships with his children and wife when he was apart from them. He was very aware of how his interactions with his two daughters may be building and strengthening the emotional relationships that they could all draw upon during separation. Because fathers anticipated periods of time that they would not be able to put as much into this emotional bank account due to deployments and work related separations, they strategically focused on ways to build up the account balance when they were at home and available to do the work of building a strong father-child bond.

Another father, Tyrell, described this same experience of building a strong relationship through interactions. He explained how he did not meet his biological father until he was a young adult, despite his father's close geographical proximity. He stressed the importance of fathers to be not only physically present but to really engage and connect with their children.

When asked what it meant to be a father he explained:

You can be a father, you could just be there, or you can actually BE there. And the reason, the two different things is being there is just like okay, you're just around and you're not really getting interactive with your kids and doing little things with them and teaching and talking with them. You're not really doing that, you're just there. Being there is actually, you know, doing all of the other things, taking them out and teaching them things of life and actually raising them, raising your kids.

Other fathers described similar feelings of the importance to not only be around for your children but to make the quality of time productive for strengthening the paternal relationship and forging strong connections with their children.

**Quality time since quantity of time may impacted by work.** Many fathers described the importance of making time with their children “really count” because of the uncertainty of when they may be deployed or apart from their children. These men seemed to define quality time as time spent with children that was enabled positive fathering and enhanced the connection or father-child bond that they felt. These types of interactions would sustain the relationship in periods of absence when direct contact and face to face interaction would not be possible. It is likely that these descriptions of the need to spend as much time as you can but also to make interactions “high quality time” arose from the nature of these fathers’ work environment. Fathers were regularly, and unpredictably, apart from their children not only due to deployment, but also trainings and other job obligations that took them away from their families. Because these fathers were unsure of when they might be gone or what important events and interactions they might miss, they desired and worked to make all interactions with their children “quality” level interactions.

Jared, the father of three girls who is in the Army National Guard, described how he had done some research in order to strengthen his fathering abilities. Using his knowledge of the different love languages, he described the importance of the quality of time spent with his daughters:

You're familiar with the five love languages [to the interviewer]. My biggest struggle is quality time. You can do the acts of kindness, acts of services, do their laundry and run their baths and all that kind of good stuff. You have the physical touch. You have words of affirmation, you look pretty today or don't you look cute. The other one, acts of kindness. Making them dinner and so forth. The quality time is the one that I struggle with because both my professions are very demanding.

Jared continued to describe how he worked to connect with each of his daughters on a very personalized and individualized level so that he could maximize the quality of the time he did have to spend with each of his children.

Other fathers described how they had to actively decide to make quality time a goal and a daily task. Some fathers described how they kept work obligations and dynamics from overtaking opportunities for quality time. James described some of the decisions he made in order to promote quality time with one of his sons:

...he and I [meaning his younger son] had also vowed that work wouldn't interfere with my not being able to make it home at least in time to see him before he went to bed. Every night he knew that I was home and we had a little time to catch up on his day's events, even if it was only half an hour, we had that time during the week blocked out that we would have the quality time.

James described how the process of planning for quality time interactions with your child and how scheduling this time enabled him to fit in quality moments for connecting. He recalled the first time he missed a school performance he son in which his son had a minor part. James underestimated the importance of this program to his son and stayed at work to attend a meeting that was not especially critical or pressing. After witnessing how upset his son was that he had not attended the school performance to see him be a tree, James vowed to attend and support his son as often as physically possible, whether the event seemed major or minor. In reflecting back on whether the work tasks he attended to that day were critical to his job performance, he highlighted that he could have delayed taking care of the tasks and that he now tried to take advantage of flexible work scheduling when he was not deployed or mobilized so that he could be physically present for a greater number of events in his son's life.

Another father, Nik, discussed how attitudes or expectations about family time can also help to manage being away due to work obligations:

Being a father in the military means you're going to miss more time with your kids, because you have to go to the field, or go to this school, or work late or what have you. So you do tend to miss more time with your kids. It just means that you have to appreciate the time that you do have with them when you do. You have to appreciate that more.

Managing expectations and knowing what to expect from future job obligations and deployments helped another father to be able to maximize the time he had with his family and children. Joshua explained:

Just spend the most amount of time and the best time you can with them while you are actually here. I'm supposed to be leaving again in March. I'm here for six months or a little over, but spend as much time with them. And now they kind understand a little more of what I'm doing. I think it makes it easier for them, knowing what I'm doing, not just wondering what I'm doing.

Having expectations about cycles of deployment, work expectations and requirements, and how family interactions are impacted seemed to help some fathers. They discussed how they had to be very proactive in planning quality interactions with their children. At the same time they also described how they valued the added appreciation they had for spending time with their children since they may be required to be away from their children.

Another element of military fathers' jobs that may enhance the need for quality time and interactions is the potential that fathers may not return from service or could be killed in the line of duty. Some fathers recounted how the nature of their job forced them to face their own mortality. These fathers described the heightened need to build strong relationships with their children and to spend as much quality time as possible because they did not know if it would be the last opportunity to "be there" for their child. Many fathers experienced this process of realizing that they have limited time to spend with their children. This may have lead to a desire to maximize interactions so that they are higher quality. One of the older fathers, Daniel, described this process this way:

I think you reach a certain age that you look at the actuarial tables and you realize you only have 29 years left on the planet and I think the deployment speeds that up and everything's got to be maximized. You live a little more intensely because of the absence and you want to make up for that.

Other fathers described how deployment had influenced how they viewed quality time with their children and families. Many fathers felt an increased desire to create happy memories during quality family time because they may not have the opportunity to make more memories if they were killed in action. Interactions that fathers had in the line of duty and while deployed increased this desire to have as much positive family time as possible. Drew explained how deployment had impacted his expectations for interacting with his two boys and wife:

Just from experiences downrange where I've seen families be torn apart and stuff like that. I've experienced that or witnessed that pain that you see in them, it makes me... not that I won't deploy again. It makes me want to be there for them and love every minute that you're with them, because it's so easy to lose it. You can lose it so quickly. ... I've seen the pain on a father that lost his whole family. I've seen the pain in children that lost their father. That's something that I never want my kids to ever experience. ... the expectations I put on myself have changed. Give them something to remember if it does happen. Spend that time with them so they have those memories. If, God forbid, you do pass away or whatever, that they have something to draw back on, that they have some memory to draw back on. You leave something with them.

Tyrell also described how having an increased focus on quality time and making good memories with his kids was something that command leadership discussed with him. It was encouraged and supported by his leadership. He recalled:

When I was deployed, I know my first sergeant at the time was just saying... they really put that out that right before you go, of course you need to spend time with your family. Spend time with your kids, spend time with your family. You want to give them that last little memorable image, or whatever, in their mind before you leave. Because you know you when you deploy, God forbid, that you might not make it back, so you want them to have that in their mind, the last little happy thoughts before you left. ...So you try to just make it as happy or as calm or anything before you leave. Have everything settled and the memorable, the memories, you want the memories to actually be there before you go.

Another soldier from this same unit, Curtis, who was also a NCO, spoke of a similar occurrence.

He described how he had additional paperwork and preparations for his most recent deployment

because of his NCO responsibilities but he did state that no matter how busy he was, when command leadership gave time off to spend with family, he took that family time. He recalled:

When the command gives you time to go hang out with your family, you do it. You could have a thousand things going on and if you're given that opportunity to go help out and you're able to, you're able to put that on the back burner, go do it. Always take the opportunity to spend time with your family, never give one up. ...Being in the Army and you're deployed you don't want to be sitting over there and, as bad as it sounds, on your last breath thinking about everything you could have been doing. Do everything you can to be that dad, to be that husband.

These Army fathers recognized that their jobs placed them at an elevated level of mortal risk as compared to a civilian father. They placed additional emphasis on making memories with their children and spending time with family engaging in positive, connecting activities as a way to ensure positive family experiences, strong connected relationships, and fewer regrets in life-threatening situations.

**Following your child's lead: Embracing interests and developmentally appropriate fathering.** Some fathers discussed the importance of following your child's lead in terms of how to connect and interact with them. These fathers would follow their child's lead as a means of creating a strong connected relationship—they worked to form father-child relationships not solely on their terms but by accommodating the needs of their child. Jason, a single father with one daughter illuminated this process of connecting:

The biggest thing I can think of is spending quality time with them. Doing things, not necessarily things that you like to do, especially depending on how old they are, but things that they like to do. If you show interest in things they like to do it builds, I think it builds a special bond with each other. My daughter likes playing with My Little Ponies; they're her big thing now. Drives me nuts. I know every single My Little Pony. You could put a My Little Pony in front of me and I could give it its name. I know its name by heart. Drives me crazy, but I don't really like to play it and I don't really like to watch the shows or anything like that but she loves them.

Jared, another father who has three daughters, described a similar phenomenon of interacting with his children around their interests and at their level:

I'm a guy's guy. I love the NFL. I love wrestling. I love shooting. I'm a police officer. Driving fast. Not driving fast anymore. You know what I'm saying? "Guy stuff?" I can name you every Disney princess. I can name every fairy. You know what I'm saying? ...I have three daughters, but that's like the coolest thing I do. I was at Disneyworld last year and I'm naming off the princesses and this lady says, "Wow you're good." I was like, "Look at these three. What do you think?" It's just adjusting to them.

This process of adjusting fathering and relationship building activities was not something just noted between fathers and daughters. Daniel, who has two daughters and a son, also described how he adjusted his fathering to accommodate the interests and abilities of all of his children. He explained in response to a question about how fathers create close relationships:

I guess just mostly listening and trying to pick up on their interest instead of forcing your own on them. I gave up a long time ago but every once in a while I'll show my son something military related. He's like "Daddy you're always talking about the Army." I'm like, "Alright, alright." And so we drop that. I guess you just see where their talents are and watch and listen to what direction they are going in. ... Just giving them credit for being people with their own interests and their own likes. Be a follower sometimes and not just a leader.

Fathers used the strategy of being a follower to their child's needs and interests as a means to foster close, connected relationships. While most fathers identified the need to teach children and to be a role model, they also identified the need to have give and take in father-child relationships in order to deepen them and create strong connections.

Many of these Army fathers engaged in behaviors to, not only "be there" for their children and spend time with them, but to ensure that the time spent was high quality. These types of "high quality time" interactions could be characterized by fathers and children both being emotionally present and connecting and interacting in positive, relationship strengthening ways. These types of interactions would leave children with a heightened understanding of the love and care that their fathers felt for them. It was the hope of many of these fathers that these positive memories and experiences would carry the father-child relationship through periods of absence and help preserve a strong sense of connection or father-child bond despite periods of

separation. These fathers emphasized the importance of emotionally engaging and connecting with their children when they were with them. Fathers especially noted the importance of making “deposits” into the “emotional bank account” when they were preparing to deploy or be apart from their family for an extended period of time. The nature of an Army father’s work influenced his motivations for connecting and expectations of this as well. At the same time, the workplace atmosphere, influenced by command leadership recognizing the importance of family time, allowed fathers to have additional leave time to create those quality time experiences with family.

### **Remotely Share the Load**

Multiple fathers discussed challenges to connecting with their children and spouses while deployed. They described the difficulty of wanting to be able to help out with challenges at home and in fathering their children but having physical barriers to this due to deployment. These men’s fathering had to change when deployed since fathers were not physically present and had limited time to interact with their children via phone, Skype, or other forms of communication.

Fathers discussed ways that they tried to share the load of parenting or assist their wives or mothers of their children with daily tasks or burdens. Some fathers discussed ways that they would engage in modified fathering and identified areas that they could help the family. James explained how he discussed with his wife and his son living at home ways that he could help to support them in daily tasks and responsibilities from afar. He explained:

I began to reroute all the bills. To say, so that’s something that you don’t have to concern yourself with. Because I can pay them remotely online. I’ll just have the addresses changed, so, instead of the bills going there. Maybe it’s only an hour a week, but that’s an hour that potentially you could go and say now you can do a family event or you could do something for yourself.

James also described how birthdays and anniversaries were some of the most celebrated days all year in his family. He tried to provide additional support and care in ways that he could, remotely. He provided this example of how he might try to give additional support to his son and wife while mobilized:

You almost overcompensate for the fact that you're physically not there. Now you kind of realign some of the things. You begin to splurge a little bit and realize that you know what, spending more money on something for one of those events, than normal, in an effort to try and say, "Well, I really appreciate all of the things that ... all the sacrifices that you're making. You know what- here are bigger diamond earrings than what you normally would've gotten." ... Well because I'm not there, you're feeling a little guilty about now mom really kind of being burdened with so much more of your responsibility. You try, in a tangible sense, to be a little more considerate than if you were there kind of doing some of the ... sharing some of the load. It really forces you to be more creative in your entire thought process. It's to say, "Well, how can I make a contribution in something big remotely?"

Beyond important days and events, James also maintained a conversation with his wife and son about ways that he could remotely be involved with helping the family. He told them "Nothing's off the table" and they even explored options that they wouldn't normally use when he was living at home, such as having a housekeeper come in to clean occasionally. He tried to have a continuous dialogue about creative ways that he could provide support from afar.

Other fathers described making arrangements prior to deployment for household tasks and duties that they took care of when they were living at home. The intent of this was to help their wife or mother of their child(ren) so that she did not have additional concerns or burdens while he was away. Drew described:

This last deployment my neighbor does landscaping and I'm trying to arrange for the house, the exterior of the house to get taken care of. Try to take care of things so she doesn't have to worry about them. Try to limit her responsibilities while I'm gone.

Fathers often relied on neighbors, family members, or close friends to provide support or help to their family while they were away. Members of this support network could provide help with daily household tasks but also supporting spouses and children at activities and events as well.

Fathers also discussed feelings of frustration from being unable to help from afar when family members described problems or concerns via phone or Skype during deployment.

Marcus, explained how he tried to manage emotions related to these types of situations and how he set up some guidelines with his wife to help prevent frustration on both ends:

One of the things that I tried to do was with my family... One of these guys he told me “When you’re deployed your family has things that are going on at home. Like if your child is acting up. The wife or the husband is getting stressed out because they’re back here with the kids. You try to... When you’re talking to them, you try to set some guidelines and boundaries. Like, ‘Hey, when we talk, I know you have a lot going on, so I want to listen to what you have to say.’”

Setting up boundaries and guidelines for ways that Marcus could help and ways that were beyond his means created a dialogue about how he could provide support and what was beyond his capabilities during deployment. This way fathers were able to maintain certain fathering behaviors and provide empathy and support to the mothers of their children but were also able to identify limitations in a way that was less frustrating and distracting.

### **Maximize Pre-Deployment Time and Strategic Leave**

Another strategy used to maintain fathering when living apart from children was to maximize pre-deployment time. Similar to the concept having quality time and interactions discussed above, fathers often used leave and time given prior to deployment to do more family activities. Fathers discussed using time off that is given to spend time with family and “store up memories” since they would not be physically present in their families lives for a time. Tyrell described it this way:

Of course you want to take care of all of your business and get it out of the way, but certain things that you know can probably chew up a little bit of time and this and that, you kind of want to “at ease” on certain things, because you’re trying to put a lot of that time that you would do on certain things into your family or to your kids or to your spouse or whatever. You want to put that time in for them. You want to give them as much time as you can, knowing that you’re going to be away for awhile. So you want to give them that time. That extra, that extra oomph.

Preparing for deployment can be a very busy time for soldiers, and Army dads tried to balance being “at ease” with some things but also recognizing that they are in a “crunch time” for others.

Marcus explained this experience:

When you’re about to deploy you have to insure that all those things that you need to do - it’s like crunch time. At crunch time, especially with the work portion of it, you have to make sure A-to-Z is locked in tight. With your family you’re trying to be with them as much as you possibly can. You know there’s that gap that you’re going to be gone, and you know you’ll never be able to get that back. That’s one of the hardest things about being deployed, too, is that you know that that time that you were gone, you can’t get that back. You try to make-up for it before you leave.

Some fathers were able to take block leave prior to deployment. Eligibility and availability of block leave prior to deployment may vary by unit, job responsibilities, or at the discretion of command leadership. Fathers who were able to qualify for block leave could use this to spend additional time with children, spouses, and family before deploying. One father, Isaiah, who had a son and daughter with two different women, was able to use block leave to spend a week with his son and then another week with his daughter prior to deploying. Using this leave allowed him to spend time with both children separately and to spend some time all together, while accommodating the demands of two different household’s schedules.

In addition to trying to make up for lost time prior to deployment, fathers also discussed with their families and made plans for times that they could visit or be in contact during deployments or mobilizations. During deployments that are longer than 12 months, Army members are eligible for Rest and Recuperation (R & R) Leave. Many fathers spoke about how

they were strategic in the timing of this leave in order to maximize the ability to reconnect with children, wives, and family during this time. If fathers are deployed for a 12 month period, they are eligible for 15 days of leave and if they are deployed for a period longer than 12 months, they may be eligible for 20 days of leave. One father Jon noted that built into those days of leave are additional travel time concessions and that depending on where families were located or where they met up for R & R, fathers could even have an extra day or two to spend with family members. Many fathers discussed utilizing this time to visit their family in a strategically planned ways. Some fathers timed this leave to occur during important dates, such as anniversaries, holidays, and birthdays. At the time of his interview Frank, the father of three daughters, outlined how he was already planning to coordinate leave time during his next separation from his family so that he could attend one of these milestone events for his daughter. His daughter would be eligible to participate in a religious ceremony for their church that was dependent on the child's age and the family was able to delay this event until Frank would be able to take leave time and attend. Some fathers also tried to maximize family connection time by participating in fun, positive, memory making activities. Isaiah was able to request his R & R leave around his son's birthday and was glad that he did not have to miss another important milestone for his child.

Michael described how he felt that the Army's generous leave program and recognized holidays and days off from work allowed him more time to spend with his family that other civilian fathers may get:

Sometimes you get a lot more time than other people that are outside of the military get with their families. We have a liberal leave program. We probably get more leave per year than most folks do. You know that mean? We are able to take those and we get a lot of four-day weekend and things like that that help offset off tempo so at certain times, we are very much very far removed from our families but then at other times, we have opportunities to be with our families that other folks not in the military may not have.

By utilizing the Army's leave and holiday programs to maximize family time and opportunities to connect and strengthen father-child relationships, Michael could strategically buffer against those times when the tempo of deployment cycles separated him from his children and family.

Maximizing family time prior to deployment and planning R & R around important events were common strategies that fathers used to prepare children for separations due to deployment and to strengthen father-child relationships. The timing of R & R was also used to reconnect during the extended separation of deployment.

### **Foster Independence in Children**

Fathers described the need to prepare their children and familial relationships for the possibility of deployment. They discussed the focused effort to prepare children by helping them develop independence and skills that would help them take care of themselves and the family when they were not there to help with daily family tasks and goals. Andres described how he would talk with his daughter about the different things she could do for herself, such as monitoring and completing schoolwork, attending her Tae Kwon Do lessons, and completing household responsibilities. They also discussed how she would be able to continue doing those things while he was deployed. Michael stated that in his family they had goals around being independent and teaching their children to help themselves and others. He felt that his job as a father included teaching his children self reliance and abilities to care for their own needs. He highlighted the role of parents to:

To teach them ways of the world and to teach them to be wise and to teach them how to manage their finances and how to not rely on anybody ...to learn some independence. It's okay to be dependent when appropriate. I'm dependent on my wife, you know, but for other things. External things I'm not dependent on anybody and I don't want them to be dependent on folks for their livelihood or whatever.

This trait of independence and the ability of children to take care of some of their own needs was also an asset when fathers were deployed so that they did not worry as much about their children and families.

Some fathers, including Curtis, tried to create a sense of independence from their family prior to deployment while they were still living at home as a means to prepare for the deployment.

I tried to pull back to get them used to me not being there. Like I said, it might not have been a good move. Like I was saying earlier, you just don't know. To me it felt like it would be the right thing to do, is to kind of get used to them going to their mom constantly for everything, which they pretty much do anyway. To let them know I'm not going to be there, this is when I'm leaving.

Fathers who utilized these strategies also highlighted the importance of following their family's lead and their own sense of what felt right in pulling back from the family to prepare for deployment.

Another father described how the process of increasing independence in his children was positive and good for the family but also hard to experience as a father. Henry explained how he wanted his children to be independent and be able to take of themselves when he was gone, to ease the burden on their mother. At the same time he wanted his children to need him and to rely on him as a father as well. This struggle between independence and interdependence was something Army fathers had to organize their fathering strategies around. This struggle between being needed and independence of children and families was even more salient as fathers and families worked through the reunification and reintegration process.

James stressed the point that fostering too much independence from the family could create difficulty during reintegration. He discussed the importance to promote independence but also maintain connection so not completely out of the family picture:

You find yourself now separated from your normal routine and from your family. It's a little bit of a disconnect in that regard. Because out of necessity, everyone,

kind of, has to go on to take care of the things that they need to do. You don't want them to go on so much or so long without you, and you in turn don't want to become so independently removed away from them that you can't kind of co-join back together as well.

Some Army dads fostered independence in their children as a means to prepare them for deployment and to help strengthen the family's ability to manage additional stressors related to deployment. At the same time, these fathers worried that the family would no longer need to rely on them to fulfill fathering roles and contribute to the family to the same degree as when they were at home. These men tried to walk the fine line of maintaining connection and strong relationships with their children and families while strengthening and preparing children for their potential absence.

### **Access Faith and Religious Networks**

Another support to positive fathering that some men discussed was organized religion or religious values. Some fathers described how their faith, church congregations, or religious values were a resource to them as a father and a member of the military. Drew described how he attended church services while deployed and how this supported him as a father:

If you have problems going on at home- a lot of people go through divorce while they're downrange for one reason or another- [if you] need to talk to somebody. The Church [referring to the LDS church] was involved, the big branch of the Church, I went there when I was deployed this last time. That was helpful, that was very helpful. Gave me the, somewhere to be on Sunday with a bunch of other people that think a lot in the same way that I do and to bounce ideas off of them.

Drew further discussed how being able to meet and brainstorm ideas with others with similar religious views and beliefs was supportive to him as a husband and father. He was able to discuss challenges that he was facing as a father far away from his children and hear how other parents handled similar situations.

While many of the fathers who spoke about religion and religious values as a support to their fathering were actively involved with a faith community, Ben described how his situation was slightly different from this. He described himself as not a really religious person and stated that he didn't attend a church. At that same time he felt strongly that it was important for his daughter to have religious values and morals in her life and that these were an asset to him as a father. He explained:

It's making sure that, instilling those values and ideals that, to be honest, a lot of people get away from nowadays. Sir and ma'am to respecting your elders, things like that. I'm not religious, but I do believe in the Bible and things like that, but I'm not practicing. I still think it's very important that she gets at least that education because we were raised up in a Christian family. Just knowing the Bible and being able to empathize with other people that come from different beliefs. You have to have some knowledge base for that and you get that when you're younger, because as you get older, it's something you slip away from sometimes. The fact that her grandmother is taking her church is awesome. Whether she decides to continue practicing, going every Saturday or Sunday or whenever she wants to go, that's probably it, but I do think it's important she gets some Christian values.

At the time of the interview, Ben was living apart from his daughter but he appreciated the efforts of her grandmother to teach her religious values and to take her to her church. He felt that this was a support to him as a father and helped him to be a good dad.

Jared described throughout his interview how his religious beliefs shaped who he was as a father. He discussed how his religious beliefs motivated him to be the best father that he could be and how they empowered him to make changes and engage in positive relationship behaviors. In describing things that supported him as a father, he stated this:

Personal Christian faith. Faith is a big one. Along with that faith, there's values. What you're taught from your mom and dad. My professional values reflect my personal values too. In the Army you take an oath. You get married you take an oath. There're all sacred. They're all followed by so help me God. I'd say that-- just basic values, value system.

Jared's personal beliefs also corresponded to the values affirmed in the Army's statement of their Core Values (see Appendix E). He further discussed how these values empowered him to sacrifice for his family and put his relationship with his wife and his girls at the forefront.

Many fathers discussed the struggles they had with managing all of the different roles and responsibilities in their lives, including being a connected, involved father. One father in a leadership position described how his religious beliefs helped him to prioritize in order to take care of all of these necessary roles and responsibilities. Michael explained:

I used to be much more organized than I am now and I just got to the point where I don't have the time to be as organized as I would like. I put forth a lot of prayer and ask Him to take care of me and He does. There's no real good answer for that. I don't know. I wake up every day and I prioritize what I need to get done and then what I don't get done, I work on the next day.

Michael described how he relied on his religious beliefs that if he tried his best and used prayer as a resource, that he would be able to manage all of his different responsibilities. Jon and his wife Megan described how their church community provided support them and their family in ways that they found even more useful than what was available to them through their Family Readiness Group (FRG).

Another father, Henry, described how his religious beliefs and involvement with a church community added to some the demands on his time but also strengthened him as a father. He noted that because he was actively involved in serving within his church community, this took some time away from family interactions. He spoke about how his family was also actively involved in their church community as well and so they were able to do some related activities together. Despite taking time away from the family, Henry felt that his religious beliefs and church community strengthened him as a family and were a support to him and to his family. These religious beliefs and community gave his family something in common to believe in that

promoted hope and courage in the face of challenges, particularly those related to military service, or the threat of death. For some Army fathers, religious beliefs and values enabled them to improve and maintain positive fathering beliefs and behaviors. These beliefs provided support in challenging situations and also helped to make additional connections and supportive relationships. These fathers used religious values, beliefs, and communities as a support to their interactions and family roles.

### **Support and Influence of Mothers**

Many fathers discussed the importance of having a strong co-parenting relationship with the mothers of their children and using this as a strategy and resource for maintaining a strong father-child bond. Having the mothers of their children assist in maintaining father-child relationships was a resource that was commonly accessed by many fathers.

Samuel described how he often relied on his wife's knowledge of child development to help him adjust his fathering practices so that they were age-appropriate for his children. This strategy of seeking her assistance in adjusting his fathering practices was especially effective after he had been away from his sons for an extended period of time due to deployment.

Jon described how he appreciated the ability of his wife, Megan, to take care of the children and support him in light of the unpredictable, time intensive requirements of his job:

I've been blessed. I've got Megan who is awesome and who allows me to do those things. And she's a strong independent person that is able to take care of the kids. I don't have to ever worry the kids. I don't really have to worry about being a dad because I've got someone there who is taking care of their needs. Obviously not their father needs...But you know every family situation is different.

Father often relied on the mothers of their children to pick up care and relationship responsibilities for them when they were called away from the family. They also utilized

mothers' knowledge and willingness to share this with them as a means to track child development and adjust fathering behaviors. Nik explained that since he is living apart from two of his daughters, because he and their mother are divorced, he often relied on information that she gave him after his brief discussions on the phone with his girls. She would fill him in with additional details about how they were doing and recent events in their lives. He relied on this similar strategy of gathering information about them from their mother when deployed. This allowed him to adjust his conversations and means for connecting to reflect their needs, to show awareness of and interest in their lives, and tried to communicate with them in developmentally appropriate ways.

Fathers also described how they needed the help of the mothers of their children in order to gain access and be able to communicate with children while deployed. Fathers often had to coordinate communication with children, especially those that were younger, through mothers. They also relied on mothers to provide reminders to children about them when they were away through displaying pictures and reminding children that those were pictures of their daddy, or by playing video recordings that fathers had prepared prior to deployment.

One father, Evan, described how his ex-wife helped him to be a better father but not because of positive and supportive actions on her part. This couple had divorced following her infidelity and subsequent pregnancy while Evan was deployed. He felt a strong desire to create a stable and healthy environment for his son to grow up in. He felt added pressure to be a good father so his son could look up to him and thank him for providing some sense of consistency and stability in his life.

Another father, Ben, who was separated from his wife, reported that he and still wife still had a supportive co-parenting relationship despite their legal separation. He appreciated the

efforts of his wife to facilitate the relationship between him and his daughter despite whatever difficulties they had in their relationship. He strongly felt that mothers were very influential in supporting relationships between military fathers and their children:

The biggest part I think out of all it is the mom. Because I'm gone. They're the ones who are reinforcing the relationship back there. They're the ones who have your child 24/7. They're the ones who can either make or break your... Phone call-- "No, she's not available." That happens quite a bit for some people, or not putting the kid in front of the computer. Not giving them the things that you send them. So it all hinges on them. They're the ones who can reinforce your relationship. Is the photo above the bed? Are they talking about you? [using two different voice tones] "Your Daddy's on the phone," or, "Here, your Dad's on the phone." They can pick up on tone of voice. Regardless of everything, she was great about making sure our relationship, and she knows it's very important to have that relationship. How big it is for a daughter and father. I have to thank her for that because she's definitely been the one who's kept me and Savannah connected.

Many fathers described how essential the support of the mothers of their children was for gaining access to them, especially when deployed. Fathers relied on mothers to support their fathering and assist them as they tried to engage and connect with children in developmentally appropriate ways.

## **Conclusion**

These Army fathers employed a number of different strategies for creating strong relationships with their children and families. Continuous communication, in its variety of forms, was at the forefront as an important strategy to create strong relationships with children. The availability and improvement of communication resources allowed fathers to remain connected with their children and families to a greater degree, despite physical absence. Some men were creative in their fathering strategies as barriers related to physical and temporal constraints existed. Fathers also described the importance of "quality time" interactions and engaging with their children when they were physically present. They also discussed the necessity of building

relationships and preparing children for when they would be gone by making “deposits” into the emotional bank account and helping children to build their sense of independence. In order to create a close, strong connection with their children, fathers also tried to follow their child’s lead both in terms of development and interests for activities and time spent together. Other supports to positive fathering that these Army dads reported utilizing included religion, religious values, and faith communities, as well relying on the mothers of their children to provide support to and access for continued fathering when deployed and when living at home.

## Chapter 7

### Shaping Fathering Over Time: Consequences of Deployment

*Deployment* is a characteristic of military service. When joining the military, deployment schedules and requirements are not explicitly spelled out or provided. This would not be a realistic expectation because of the nature of military service or work. The Army's charge to serve and protect requires soldiers to be prepared and willing to deploy with very little notice. A portion of the Army Soldier's Creed states, "I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy the enemies of the United States of America in close combat. I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life" (U.S. Army, 2013b). The process of preparing for deployment, deploying, and reintegrating back to life at home following deployment has implications not only for individual soldiers but also for extended families, spouses, partners, and children. This chapter explores these father's experiences with deployment and fathering. This chapter focuses on the research question:

How does the process of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification shape men's fathering over time?

There are a number of different scenarios where Army dads may be separated from their children for an extended period of time. Because of rank, unit obligations, or Military Operational Specialty (MOS) responsibilities fathers may be away for weeks or even months at a time to complete training. Beyond training, military units may be required to deploy because of the needs of the Army and the skill sets of the unit. The term *activation* refers to Army National Guard members who are called to active duty. *Mobilization* is the process of Army Reserve members being called to active duty. Once Guard and Reserve members have been activated or

mobilized they may be deployed to combat as if they were a member of the active duty component of the Army.

As a member of the active duty component of the Army, there are different assignments that take fathers away from families. These include deployment to combat; a *permanent change of station* (PCS), and a PCS that is considered a hardship assignment. A permanent change of station requires a military member to move from one duty station to another. Families may accompany the military member as they are PCS-ed. The tempo for PCS assignments varies based on the MOS skill set of the soldier and the needs of the military. Some specialties may have more predictable PCS schedules. Soldiers may also experience a PCS when they make career changes, apply for different assignments, or change their MOS. Hardship assignments are those during which the service member is PCS-ed to a location that the command leadership doesn't deem appropriate (for safety and other reasons) for the family to accompany the service member.

This chapter focuses on the experiences of Army fathers when they were deployed to combat, were mobilized, accepted hardship assignments, or when men completed extended assignments unaccompanied by their families. These results reflect elements of both space and time proposed in the research questions (see Appendix E). These results addressed elements of space as fathers described their relationships with their children and their fathering across physical spaces and physical separations through the cycle of deployment. Time is also discussed in these results as fathers responded to questions exploring how their views and beliefs on fathering and subsequent role development and behaviors had changed.

## **We Do It for Them: Putting on a “Tough Guy” Face**

For many fathers, joining the military or being an Army dad meant more financial stability and the ability to provide for their children and spouses. Being a provider was an active part of these men’s identities as fathers. While Army employment offered a level of financial security and a “stable paycheck,” including health care benefits for dependents, there were implications for mental health and relationships related to the risky nature of deployment and military service. Fathers discussed the importance of “being strong” or exemplifying confidence in their safety and future in the face of mortal threat. Curtis described how he tried to protect his family from this threat of job-related death or injury:

It’s hard but I have to put on a strong face for my family. I can’t tell them that this is really hard for me. You basically have to put on the tough guy face and say, “It’ll be all right, I’ll be there.” You’ve got to put on that hard exterior and tell them, “It’ll be all right, don’t worry about it, I’ll be back.” It hurts because it could have been a lie, you don’t want to promise them you’ll be back but if you don’t then they’re going to worry about you, so you’re between a rock and a hard place whether you’re going to lie to them or prove to be their hero.

Curtis struggled with the possibility that in reassuring his wife and his boys that he would be lying to them if he were injured or killed in combat. This and other deployment-related concerns may have influenced Curtis’s decision to retire from the Army in the near future. Joshua, who had deployed once, found strength, especially while away, in remembering “what we do is for them.” He said, “We have a hard job and it makes you not think about how hard it is when you know you’re doing it for a reason.” It was difficult for him to be separated from his two young children and wife but identifying this purpose behind his military service eased the burden of being apart.

Even though fathers could find good reasons for their Army service and work, they still had difficulty with the conditions and requirements of service. Evan described how he felt being

an Army dad was a “love/hate relationship”. He explained how he liked his job and he did it because of his love for this country but he hated how his job affected his family in such extensive ways. He found it hard to separate work from family but could reconcile all of the difficulties of Army service by recognizing that he was sacrificing for the benefit of his family and other U.S. families. He tried to focus on his motivations for military service- to protect and provide for his son and other families- in order to maintain a strong persona and focus on duties during deployment.

Jason also described how this recognition of meaning to his military service eased some of the difficulties:

The hardest thing for you to do is going to be to leave, but you’ve got to think- you’re doing this for her. ... You’re going over there to fight for her freedom to fight for her, to keep her protected. That’s a big motivator for me.

Prior to joining the Army, Jason did not have a strong desire to join the military. He eventually chose to join the Army because of the opportunities for job and personal growth. He also viewed the financial supports and benefits as a satisfactory way to support his daughter. While some components of the nature of military service were less than ideal for him, Jason planned to continue in military service, especially because of the stability and benefits he was able to provide for his daughter. He strategically chose a unit with job responsibilities in line with his skills and interests but that also had shorter deployments (4 to 6 months versus 9 month to 1 year) so that he could minimize the potential time he would spend away from his daughter.

Inherent components of military service are providing service and protection. Army dads felt that they were not only serving and protecting the US populace and providing increased safety in the present day but also protecting future liberties and safety for their children. Daniel had a number of friends who were military parents or who had served in the military. He

described how they often discussed how their military service not only benefited their children now but could for years to come:

I have friends who have said, “I’d rather go and do this now and spend a year away from my kids than have my son have to do this 25 years from now.” ...Moms and dads- I think people in the military think more long range in terms of their kids and what’s going to happen instead of just getting through week to week. It’s kind of brutal. It’s kind of like I need to go over and kill those people because we now have seen they will come here and kill you.

Daniel tried to protect his children from the more graphic details of what military service entailed but wanted them to understand the implications of the sacrifices that they all made because of his military service. This long-term view of the benefits of his military service helped Daniel to keep perspective of the sacrifices he made while serving in the National Guard and balancing other work and family obligations.

Jared described a similar experience with focusing on how his military service protected his loved ones. He felt that by focusing on how deployment and military service helped to keep his family safe, it validated him and enabled him to serve to the best of his ability. He explained that the Army uses the phrase “Let’s keep it an away game” to convey to soldiers how their military service impacted the environments that their families existed in. He acknowledged that being apart from your family due to deployment was a very difficult experience both personally and for his family. He was empowered to portray a strong, positive demeanor by focusing on how deployment was keeping threats out of “our backyard” and protecting his family.

The threat of physical harm or death is something that is always looming when a soldier is deployed. Isaiah earned a Purple Heart because of injuries he sustained during his deployment. He described how he tried to protect his children from worrying about this in light of his injuries while deployed. He tried to keep them in a “calm state” by regulating how he communicated with them and the level of information that he shared.

Many fathers described how they were able to present a strong, confident exterior to their children, spouses, and families in light of the dangers they faced during deployment and due to their Army service. Putting on this “strong face” may come at a price, though. Jared commented about this while reflecting his own experiences and those he had heard from other soldiers:

All these programs and everything, they are underfunded. They are under-resourced or mis-resourced. ...Even though I'm near the end of my career in uniform, I'm always going to support the Army and support the soldiers. Like I said, I can go talk to a World War II veteran or a Korean War veteran or a Vietnam veteran or whatever and it doesn't matter the generation. The same strains and the same issues.

He described these strains as a “black cloud” that would impact military families as long as we are a “nation at war” with extensive military obligations. Fathers tried to protect their families from this strain by putting on a strong face and regulating the amount and nature of communication with family, particularly while deployed. Focusing on the meaning and purpose of service helped some Army dads meet the demands of deployment.

### **Different Dads**

Home life and deployment present both different contexts and physical spaces in which men engage in fathering. The process of deployment and experiences with pre-deployment, deployment, and reintegration impacted how men viewed themselves as fathers and their roles as fathers. Some fathers felt like they were two different dads, while others felt that they had the same beliefs and goals for fathering but had to adapt based on abilities and restrictions. Elements of Army identity were interwoven with father identity- many Army dads viewed themselves as similar in some ways to civilian fathers but also distinct in others.

**Civilian vs. military dads.** There were a number of characteristics that Army dads felt set them apart from civilian fathers. Some of these came from the challenges that a military lifestyle entailed. Others were strengths or advantages that Army fathers gained through their military service. James felt that his military service in the Army Reserve had taught him a level

of discipline and gave him opportunities for selfless service. Because of his opportunity to serve, he felt he had developed other positive characteristics:

It gives you a level of self-confidence that maybe you may not experience clearly in the civilian sector. You come into an environment where you're tasked and challenged to do a multitude of different things that, in most civilian sectors, you more times than not are never going to be faced with, especially early on in your life. For me, personally, I think that every young person in some capacity should selectively go into some branch of the military, and it doesn't need to be a long period of time, because you learn a multitude of the things about yourself.

The confidence James developed through his military service also helped him as a father. He felt that his broad experiences, especially as a NCO, gave him a unique perspective as a father of two sons. He appreciated the experiences that he had with fellow soldiers from a variety of geographical locations and with different life experiences. He drew on these experiences as he faced challenges and opportunities in raising his boys.

Another characteristic that set Army fathers apart from civilian fathers was their ability to dialogue about and plan for the possibility of injury or death. Marcus discussed how as a military father he has had many growth experiences. He has learned and practice skills at work that help him at home as a father. But he also saw the how the unique stressors of the "Army lifestyle," such as deployment, the threat of injury or death, or dealing with psychological issues post deployment, impacted Army dads and their families as well. Drew believed that he was not really different from a civilian father. He felt that he was a lot like his own father, who was not in the military. What did set him apart as an Army dad was the "looming possibility" of deployment or that he would not be there for his kids as they grew up. He reported that he tried not to think a lot about this.

Henry agreed that the real threat of death or injury set him apart as an Army dad. This influenced how he prepared his children for the future. He explained:

I think the kids are faced with the reality that they could lose their father and maybe more so than a civilian. I mean a civilian, anyone could die in a car accident, but I think they need to understand and appreciate that possibility. And then I think trying to instill in your wife and your children a sense that they're serving as well. I think that's important to help your wife feel that hey, it's not just the soldier who is being glorified or recognized, it's the family as well, so they're serving their country. You can help them realize they're a part of it too.

Henry relied on his religious beliefs about life and death as a tool for discussing the risks of military service with his children. He didn't want to scare them but wanted them to be prepared and to be able to see the "larger picture" of what military service meant, including its risks.

Fathers were able to grow and learn a number of valuable skills through military service. These skills included discipline, consistency, self-sacrifice, ability to dialogue about difficult topics, and a commitment to always support your child. Curtis felt that he would trade places with a civilian father any day so that he could be there every day and night for his sons. He said:

You take a father away from his kids and you're ripping him in half. That was one of the hardest things I ever had to do- was to possibly say goodbye to my kids for the last time, not knowing if I was going to be back on that plane. It's a kinetic environment. You never know what's going to happen. You can't guarantee that you'll come back because you just don't know. You could be a cook and something could come in through the roof and that's it. You're done. Doing that was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do. Military dads definitely have in ten-fold harder than any civilian dad out there.

Because of the risk of loss or death and requirements of being apart during trainings, assignments, and deployments, Army dads faced many challenges. At the same time, they had developed a number of different attributes that helped them to meet the challenges of fathering.

**Down range dad vs. at-home dad.** In recent years, due to increasing military involvement and world-wide obligations, deployment to combat has become a more integral component of military service. Fathers described how deployment impacted their fathering. While some of these experiences and attributes set them apart from civilians, fathers also described how they felt like two different fathers. They felt like one father when they were

home-- able to engage in fathering in person-- and another father when they were deployed. The distance during deployment shaped the way that fathers could connect with their children, engage in disciplinary behaviors, and provide support to the mothers of their children. Michael said that he didn't feel like deployment changed his "dreams, desires, or agenda" related to who he was as a father. When deployed, he deferred to his wife in matters of enforcing discipline and providing support for daily activities. When interacting with his children via Skype or phone, he emphasized his support for his wife in her parenting actions and the need for the children to listen to her and follow. His role shifted to a more supportive, less "hands-on" approach to fathering and co-parenting when deployed.

A few fathers described how they felt like they were a "fake dad" during deployments. This stemmed from the realization that they had to take a "hands off" approach to fathering and do their best to engage with children with the means available. Henry explained it this way:

I think while you're deployed you're not there in a day to day so it's easy to be- I don't want to say a fake father, but you don't appreciate the daily struggles they might be having. So you're a father but you're not a connected father. Whereas when you're home, you have the pulse of what's going on. ...When you're Skyping, you might not sense that they just had a terrible day and mom is upset with this daughter. But during the Skype everybody is happy for dad. Then you go back to reality. It's a false reality.

It was difficult at times to connect via Skype because fathers, partners, and children wanted to use the limited time for positive interactions. Some fathers discussed how it seemed that everyone put on their best face for the time that they spoke on the phone or Skype.

There was this understanding that daily problems and concerns existed but that the family wanted to have positive interactions during the time they had to communicate. Drew also highlighted that when at home he was more involved with daily tasks and discipline. When he was deployed and communicating via Skype it was more of a "treat" for his kids to talk with him. Their conversations focused more the positive and embodied the excitement of being able

to connect while separated. When he was at home, Drew worked harder at balancing having fun interactions with his boys and needing to be involved in outlining and enforcing rules.

Andres expressed similar struggles because of his inability to use facial expressions or body language to add meaning to his words and conversations. It was difficult for him to engage as a father with his daughters in the same way that he would at home. It felt that there was more room for misinterpretation of communication because of the lack of physical presence. Joshua focused on trying to be the same dad when he was deployed but acknowledged the difficulties of doing this when he could only talk with them.

While some fathers felt like two different fathers because of the difficulties of connecting via phone or Skype, others used these technologies to maintain consistency in their fathering. Isaiah felt that when he could talk with his kids and when they could hear the tone of his voice he was able to maintain similar fathering behaviors as when he was home. He didn't feel like he was a different father during deployment but rather that he faced added challenges to being able to coach and guide his children. He appreciated the access and abilities that Skype gave him as he continued to connect with his children via these communication resources.

In short, the dynamics of deployment and differences of military life from civilian life influenced fathers' identities and fathering. Some felt that these contexts and circumstances shaped who they were as a father- even leaving them feeling like two different fathers. Others felt that who they were as a father, and the beliefs they held about fathering, were consistent. At the same time these fathers acknowledged that they faced physical barriers and challenges to connecting with their children in accordance with desired fathering practices when deployed and physically distant.

## **Deep Appreciation For What I Have: “I Need to Get my Patience Back”**

Fathers described how deployment had impacted their fathering and ideas about their role as a father in a number of different ways. Some men felt an intensified appreciation for the opportunities and resources they had at home to be a father. They had a renewed appreciation for engaging in activities with children and family that may have seemed more menial prior to deployment. At the same time they also reported the need to demonstrate patience as they reintegrated into families, and if children were acting in ways that were perceived to lack appreciation and respect for their circumstances.

**Deployment heightens appreciation.** A few fathers described how deployment did not change their views on what a father does, how they identified themselves as a father, or how they defined the role of good father. Deployment did increase the desire to be there and value time together. Marcus summarized this experience of maintaining his same views and role of fathering through deployment when he said, “I don’t think it really influenced it. It made me just want to be there more often.” Michael emphasized that deployment didn’t really change his identity as a father or beliefs about his fatherhood role:

I think it's just a way of life. Deployments come, and deployments go and I don't want all those external influences on the way I father my kids. We get these additional barriers and obstacles but we just figure a way to go around them or go over them or whatever. We still have a set of ideals and expectations about how we're going to be parents and nothing is going to really take away from that or add to it. ... We have to stay flexible and we take it in stride. [My wife and I] we bathe it in prayer and try to do the best you can.

Michael relied on creativity and resources, such as prayer, the support of his wife, or the ability to communicate, to maintain the relationship with his children while he was deployed. He added that witnessing the challenges to families in war torn countries heightened his appreciation for the liberties and conditions that he was able to interact and engage with his children in- being the kind of father he would like to be- when he is at home.

Following deployment, many fathers increasingly appreciated the daily opportunities to be involved with their children's tasks, activities, and needs. Deployment intensified feelings of wanting to participate in the little daily tasks of rearing children. Joshua explained:

I think it makes me appreciate them a lot more, just because I was gone, and it makes me want to be there for everything. Sometimes really didn't want to go to Girl Scouts, but now I don't mind doing it, doing stuff. It makes me appreciate being a father a lot more.

Deployment shaped many fathers desire to be engaged in fathering in whatever ways, small or big, that they could be. Daniel described how while he was deployed, his son began struggling at school. He felt that the instigating event for his son's challenges was his deployment. He described how he and his son had a very close relationship and he felt that the difficulty of maintaining this closeness while he was gone contributed to his son's school concerns. He summarized how this fathering experience while deployed deepened his appreciation for being at home with his children:

I think being deployed made it [being a father] a lot more intense feeling. We had a situation where my son was having trouble in school and as I got deployed they were telling us that he was going to have to repeat another year before he goes to first grade. ...The big thing on this deployment, because nobody shot at me, was mainly just trying to do all that long distance and figure things out and being kind of helpless to do much.

Daniel tried to assist his wife and son by staying up to date with school meetings, assessments, and educational testing. He tried to advocate for his son from afar while deployed but felt helpless to do all that he could if he were living at home. This experience deepened his appreciation for the ability to be a more involved and connected father when at home.

Henry also felt that his deployments helped him to "value more" his time with his children when he was at home. He shared this story to illustrate how his interactions with children and what he witnessed in Afghanistan deepened his sense of appreciation for his role as a father:

It was my birthday and we were doing-- it wasn't a strike. It was a community kind of gathering in an Afghan village and there was a father that brought his young daughter up to me and I was kind of having a down day. It was my birthday and I had a young baby at home. Then he brought this little baby up to me. Maybe she was one or two, the age of Isabel and he wanted me to take her. Take her out of here. Take her back to America. Take her with us, and she clung on to me and which was odd for that time because we were wearing all of our gear and our guns and a lot of kids are easily afraid of that. So I held her for a little while. He followed me around but it was kind of a small miracle-- kind of a tender mercy that I was having a hard day but then this little girl... I think that experience helped me appreciate my children even more, so when I was home I would appreciate the time I had with them. When you're at home, you're at home. Make it count.

Henry noted that his interactions with families, fathers, and children while deployed caused him to reflect on his relationships with his wife and two daughters. As a part of Special Forces, Henry was involved with both service-oriented and combat oriented activities where children and fathers were present. He strongly felt that these interactions while deployed had influenced who he was as a father. While Henry was able to integrate a number of positive elements related to his deployment into his identity as a father and subsequent role enactment, he ultimately retired from Special Forces. He felt that the tempo of deployment and demands of the Special Forces limited his ability to be as involved and connected with his daughters. Following his retirement from Special Forces, Henry joined the National Guard and was satisfied with his ability to serve in the military but with a greatly reduced level of military commitment and involvement.

Experiences that fathers had with children and families during deployment influenced how they viewed their own relationships with their children. Drew also explained how observing the relationships of families and other fathers and children while deployed heightened his appreciation for his family relationships:

Just from experiences downrange where I've seen families be torn apart and stuff like that. I've experienced that or witnessed that pain that you see in them, it makes me-- not that I won't deploy again. It makes me want to be there for them and love every minute that you're with them, because it's so easy to lose it. You can lose it so quickly. That's not just being in the military, that's everybody. You can get into a car accident the next

day or-- I've seen the pain on a father that lost his whole family. I've seen the pain in children that lost their father. It's, that's something that I never want my kids to ever experience. I don't think I can handle it if I lost my kids. It's one of those things you can't, you have to-- the expectations I put on myself have changed.

Deployment changed Drew's expectations for himself as a father. He had a heightened sense of the value in any time or interactions that he had with his children because of the uncertain possibility of loss or death. His military status may have contributed to this because of the possibility of death or injury at any time, especially during deployment.

The threat of injury or death, due to the process of deployment and other military service obligations, shaped Curtis's long term goals and plans for his military career. When interviewed he was exploring employment opportunities outside of the military and considering different retirement plans and options. He explained how deployment had shaped his long-term plans for getting out of the Army:

It's changed me to make me want to get out of the Army and go be a dad. To realize what I have and I don't want to ever give that up. I don't want to risk having to go back and maybe this time I won't come back. I personally don't want to deal with that, I don't want to put my kids through that. I just want to go home and be a normal person. That's how deployment has changed me. Just be with my family, even if I have to work all day and half the night at least I'm in the same house as them, and I don't have to come to them and say, "By the way, in six months I'm going to Afghanistan."

The experience of deployment had impacted Curtis's long-term plans for his military career. One of the initial reasons he had joined the Army was because of the opportunities for growth and steady employment. Deployment increased his appreciation for his ability to be a father to his two sons. The conflict between being able to be there for his them, the job requirements, and the risk of death eventually outweighed the benefits of an Army career. A number of fathers expressed a desire to retire from the military as both they and their kids got older. A common reason expressed was to reduce worked related demands, developing health concerns through

aging and the physical demands of work, and to be more available interact with children. Though not explicitly discussed, some fathers may use cycles of deployment and military commitments as a way to maintain some distance from difficult family dynamics and relationships. Additional exploration of this is warranted.

**Finding patience again.** During deployment split second decisions, unquestioned following of leaders, and quick reactions to commands are all essential for protecting life and limb. Jake described how when he was deployed he expected the guys in his unit under his command to act quickly, follow commands, and to not question why they are doing certain things. He emphasized that when downrange, questioning decisions and slow reactions can get you killed. Jake also highlighted how expecting such quick reactions to his requests from his children often left him frustrated. Focusing on restoring patience with children was a means to reduce some of this frustration as he transitioned back to a new tempo for life following deployment. Most of the fathers in this study listed patience as important for the reunification period. These fathers recognized the need to focus on practicing patience as they transitioned from being deployed to back at home with children and partners. These fathers received advice from leaders, fellow service members, and immediate and extended family members about the need to have patience through the reunification process.

Some components of Army reintegration training focused on how to ease back into family roles and emphasized the importance of being patient with children, spouses, and family members through this process. Jason explained how it took some time for him to return to a similar level of fathering with patience that he had before he deployed:

I think when I came back-- I don't think I was nearly as patient as when I left and I think I was maybe a little bit more hot tempered, as in like snapping and being like, don't do that, you go sit in time out. A little bit quicker to get a little upset and stuff. But being back here and taking my leave after I got back here during my daughter's birthday, I

think that completely mellowed me out. I'm not as quick to jump on her-- now it's one, two, three strikes and you go to timeout. You're not listening to me or something and I explain ... I'm back to explaining why she's in timeout, what she did wrong. She can't do that because of this, this and this.

Jason felt that the most useful thing in helping him gain back his patience was being able to take some time with his daughter to relax and decompress. He explained how if a soldier had been deployed for one year or longer, then they were eligible for one week of free leave. He noted that even if you had been deployed for an extended period of time (e.g. 6 or 9 months) one of the most useful things for finding patience would be to have leave and to interact and reintegrate into family life. While many commanders may grant this leave, it may not be guaranteed through Army policy.

While there are some resources available to returning soldiers regarding reintegration and reconnecting with children, Gary reported that he felt he had to figure a lot of this process out on his own. He described some of the things he had tried while reintegrating to family life:

I wasn't given the literature, so I'm still trying to figure it out myself, but I guess just a whole lot of patience and just the willingness to meet everyone's needs and put what I'm doing down to go help out where I'm needed. And have more than one tool in my toolbox, you know. Because when the only tool you have is a hammer, the whole world starts looking like nails. It doesn't really work. You can't hammer everything. And getting a bigger hammer won't always work either.

He described the importance of having patience with his children and with himself as they worked together through the reintegration phase to reconnect and re-establish roles and responsibilities. Gary found that his metaphor of trying to find the appropriate "tool" for the situation helped him to find appropriate and useful means to balance work and family roles.

When deployed, the focus of Army dads shifted from balancing work and family life to primarily focusing on work. Tyrell explained how making the transition back to fathering and resuming roles played at home required patience but can be difficult:

Being gone for so long you kind of, like, scramble. You're trying to get yourself in order the best way you can. ...And it can be a challenge sometimes because you know the whole time you were away it was work, work, and stressful situations and you might not be as patient. You've got to get your patience, as far as for kids- your patience has definitely got to be there for kids. So you've got to really work on that coming back. Patience is definitely the key. You've got to just sit back and just remember that I was a kid at one time, and this and that and I know kids do silly things and stuff like that. You've just got to always think to yourself, like okay, sit back and take a deep breath. You think about the silly things that you done when you was a kid, so you look at your kid and you see the little silly things that they do, and you always, you think about those times. That helps me with the patience and you know being at ease with my kids.

Taking moments to reflect on what he was like as a child, normalizing his children's behavior, helped Tyrell to find patience following deployment. The shift from focusing on individual needs and desires and work roles to reconnecting with children and partners took some time. Fathers stressed the importance of allowing this process to happen naturally and not to force it.

Some fathers struggled more than others with re-establishing patience and fathering roles. Charles described how he gained an appreciation for what he and his family had in the U.S. following deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. It was upsetting to him to see his children complaining in light of his exposure to other situations during deployment. In describing how deployment had impacted his fathering he said:

My kids say I am a lot more grumpy. They say I yell more because, I'm sorry, after being deployed, yes. And you see another country and stuff. I'm sorry, I do yell more, I'm more angry. Because I hate to see them being ungrateful for stuff after I see the way people live over there. The way that they act here, it pisses me off. Even with my wife sometimes. If you see with those people living over there, you would not be complaining about anything you have here and you can't really explain it to them but it makes me angry enough to yell at them.

Charles explained how talking with his wife and kids had helped him to work through some of his concerns but that it was still a difficult transition. Many fathers reported the need for patience as they went through the reunification process following deployment. This component of the reintegration process may be at the forefront of their minds because of the trainings and popular advice given upon return to families. Because they had been deployed, some dads had increased appreciation for their time at home with their children and the circumstances in which they could enact their father role. “Finding their patience” again was at the forefront as they transitioned back into family and fathering roles. For some fathers, this was a more difficult process as they faced behavioral or mental health challenges related to deployment experiences.

### **Mental Health and “Getting Myself Right”**

In recent years, in light of many tragic events related to mental health, deployment and the military, there has been a more dialogue and focus on the support and mental health needs of returning soldiers and veterans. A number of fathers referred to the process of “getting myself right” following deployment as they worked through some of the behavioral and mental health concerns that stemmed from that time. Curtis explained some of his challenges with mental health and deployment this way:

Everybody’s different, everyone comes back different. Some people come back the same, some people don’t. Unfortunately I was one of the ones that didn’t come back the same. I was an asshole for quite a while, until my wife convinced me to go get help. I didn’t fulfill any roles, I fulfilled the “me” role 100 percent. Before, I put my family first, put my work first and then I’ll take care of me a little bit on the side. Then it was to hell with everything and everybody, I’m taking care of myself and that’s it. ... That wasn’t really the right way to go about it but you go through some of the situations you do when you’re deployed and you come back you almost re-rebel. You really just dive into everything that you don’t want to regret ever again. ... When you get back you do it because you know just how quick it could go, how quick you could not be here anymore.

Although it had taken Curtis about a year and half, he explained that he was finally feeling like he was “getting back to how it was” in terms of fulfilling different family and fathering roles to

the extent that he did prior to deployment. It was difficult for fathers to predict how they would react to experiences during deployment to combat and changes during the reintegration process. Spouses, partners and families were important allies in helping service members to seek appropriate help for mental health concerns.

Drew discussed how he felt it was important during the reintegration process to not only work with the soldiers but their spouses and families as well. In describing some of his struggles after returning from deployment, he explained what he thought might be useful for families and Army dads returning from deployment to combat:

Helping the wives understand some things that their husbands might be going through when they get back, little things like that. If you have a good understanding of what your husband is doing downrange as much as you can. If you know that they're in combat environment a lot and they're coming back, there's things like try to figure out what those triggers are because there are some guys who can't handle it and they, when you trigger them and they can go into these uncontrollable rages and it can be dangerous. I never had the uncontrollable rages but I had this irrational fear of dawn, the sun coming up because every time we were up, the sun came up, we were shot at. It was every morning. So PT was hard for me for a while. Little things like that.

He believed that extending the knowledge of mental and behavioral health challenges, needs, services to include partners, spouses, and family members could be very useful in getting soldiers support and help that they may need. Drew had deployed twice and following his first deployment had utilized Behavioral Health services. He said:

After my first deployment I came back with some anger issues and some stuff I was trying to work through. It's not, in the spirit of trying not to take that stuff home especially that stuff home is, Behavioral Health is a great resource. The doctor that I was seeing over there, she was amazing. Yes, use the programs that are available to you and don't be too proud not to. That's a lot of guy's mistake- they're too proud to admit that they have an issue.

He felt that it was important to talk about ways to get needed help and to continue to normalize receiving professional assistance to work through issues following deployment.

Many Army dads knew of some services available for mental health treatment and support following deployment, such as therapy or classes offered through Army Community Services and Army Behavioral Health services. Officers and NCOs were especially aware of services available because of their responsibility to monitor, inform, and assist soldiers under their command responsibility to utilize needed resources. Despite increased knowledge and access, some fathers still may not have recognized how they could have benefitted from these services. Jake described how he came to recognize his need to access Behavioral Health services:

I did the deployment and to be honest, I'm glad my kids were not here when I came back from deployment because--I mean some stuff that happens, you get put on a high alert. You put your body on high alert and it's best to say that everything... and constantly paying attention to everything all the time. When you come home, you're still on high alert and it's tough. That's why there are counselors and everything else. People end up going to them. I knew there were a few issues I had. Didn't know them too much until I escorted one of my soldiers that I took on deployment over to Behavioral Health, and I said, "We're both going." I went in there and I was like, "Oh, I don't really need this." I filled out the questionnaire and they said, "Come on in." I was like, "Aha! Okay I do have some..."

Jake utilized some of the Behavioral Health services available and worked through some of these deployment-related issues. His kids were living with their grandmother when he first returned from deployment. He was grateful that he could take care of these issues prior to the kids coming to live with him again because it was very hard on his wife during this time because of his need for alone time. His current wife was his children's stepmother and their mother had recently died when he returned from deployment. Jake felt it was helpful for his children to have some stability in living with their grandmother while he received treatment for his deployment related concerns. Jake felt that the kids were buffered from some of the stress of his treatment because they did not come to live with him until after he had processed and worked through these deployment-related issues. He felt he was able to be more emotionally present while helping them adjust to living in new family circumstances.

One father discussed how he felt that some programs that were designed to address mental health needs and to screen for more serious mental health concerns didn't seem that effective at meeting these goals. When Daniel's Army National Guard unit had returned, a scandal involving the leadership seemed to impact the whole unit. Daniel had returned earlier than the unit because of his role in exposing the scandal but wanted to reconnect with his fellow unit members. He attended the reintegration training that the unit had at a local hotel. Daniel felt that the battalion commander had a lot of influence on whether or not the reintegration training would be effective and meet its goals:

They just had, last Saturday, another day in a hotel where everybody comes down and signs in and hear these lectures for eight hours and everybody said it was worthless. ...Everyone else said it was a waste of time. It's so the Army can check the box and say I don't know why that guy committed suicide. "We did a day at the Hilton ... that should have prevented that." I think they fall apart on that. I think some of the stuff you can only do through policy and the big Army can say you will do this, this and this. If you have a battalion commander who has no integrity, at the end of the day everybody knows he got reprimanded and assaulted someone. It's on a human level. If he doesn't connect with people, that day at the Hilton was just a complete and utter waste of time.

Without having effective and trusted leaders, Daniel felt that outreach regarding mental health needs and reintegration fell short. This may have been amplified because of his membership in a National Guard unit. Because National Guard members may be spread out through communities, they may not have as much access to or familiarity with Behavioral Health services or other mental health programs designed to support soldiers and their families during reintegration.

Jared was another Army National Guard dad who had a different, more positive experience with Behavioral Health Services and reintegration. He knew of the family counseling services offered through Army Community Services and he had also utilized the Yellow Ribbon reintegration program offered to members of the Army Reserves and Army National Guard:

When you come back, you'll go to the conferences and they're educational with trained therapists. The chaplain will be there, but they'll also talk about VA benefits and

education benefits and all the resources that are available. Even though it's very structured, there's also free time allowed. ... There are levels that you have to do. There were overnights. One of them was three or four days that we did in San Antonio which was phenomenal because 1- my wife and I just got to go which was unique time for Holly and I and 2- All my Army guys that I deployed with and their families, we could get together and interact. Even if we were sharing stories with the guys in the green suits, the wives could sit there and follow and know the stories because we had told them. It completed the circle. The Yellow Ribbon Program is great. They should probably have something like that in pre-deployment training. Because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

This reportedly beneficial program was not formally referred to in any of the other interviews, likely because it is geared towards the Army Reserve and National Guard. It would be interesting to follow up with additional exploration into how Reserve and Guard Army fathers receive and gather information about reintegration processes and how different units become involved with different programs like the Yellow Ribbon reintegration program. It may also be useful to compare reintegration protocols across different military branches, including the Army National Guard, Army Reserves, and active duty Army to determine if there are better means or methods to meet the mental health and reintegration needs of Army families and fathers.

The types of adjustments and level of support for mental health needs during reintegration varied for fathers. This could be a result of varying assignments and responsibilities during deployment. Henry discussed how his interactions with children during deployment especially influenced the reintegration process he experienced with his two girls:

Some of my experiences in Afghanistan, having these combat operations where there were children involved, and Jennifer would probably attest to this, I struggled initially coming back, especially from Afghanistan. Isabel was a little baby-- she would have been just almost a year. I had a lot of exposure to kids crying and being very upset as we were doing a target or detaining people and so that would kind of get in my mind when I came back. If our kids were acting up or so forth and I would have to just step away for a little bit. It would get me up tight. That was an initial struggle for me.

The reintegration process that Henry experienced included adjustments to family interactions and relationships. Other Army dads may have had and may continue to have varied reintegration

mental health needs including managing concerns like PTSD, anger, or depression. It is important to consider not only the returning service member in the reintegration process but to also expand reintegration to include effective outreach to other adult family members. They may serve as valuable assets not only in easing the transition to being home but as advocates and supports for getting appropriate mental health support and services. Some of the mental health effects of deployment may not manifest themselves when soldiers first return home. Partners, spouses, and family members may be the first to notice behavioral health changes. By utilizing outreach educational approaches, family members could become more informed about potential needs following deployment, warning signs, and resources available.

### **Follow My Family's Lead**

Prior to returning home to their families following deployment, some fathers received advice for the reintegration period from a variety of sources. While this information may have been useful to gather multiple strategies and recommendations for reintegration, some fathers found it more effective to “follow their family’s lead” in determining how to facilitate this process. Ben used this analogy to explain how he followed his daughter’s lead following his deployment:

You just want to sit there and grab her and hold her. She’s not comfortable with that because you’re a little bit of stranger. It’s like going into the ocean and letting the fish come back around you because you’re not disrupting things. Just sit there next to her and talk to her.

This process of following their family’s lead was something that fathers used in conjunction with information regarding reintegration from other sources. Ben listed how he gathered information about how to manage reintegration back into fathering roles by drawing on his past deployment experience, by talking with his own father, and by talking to other Army buddies. While these fathers received advice from a variety of sources, the predominant message was to “ease back”

into family relationships. This processes of “easing back” into fatherhood and family roles also required patience. Fathers and families required time to re-establish role and routines.

Some fathers tried to ease their way back into their family’s daily life by taking a step back and trying to observe how family patterns and routines were presently being carried out. Joshua received this type of advice and he tried to stay back and work his way into the family routines. But his family had different plans:

I tried to stay back a little bit, at first just because they were so used to my wife doing everything. So I just tried to work my way back in slowly, but they wanted all right then, so I kind of just had to jump in right away, which that's what I wanted to do, I didn't want to sit back. It all worked out perfect. [Work your way back in,]That's what they tell us to do because they are so used to us being gone, and just relying on the spouse who is not deployed. Just ease your way back in ... it's hard to do, but my kids didn't want me to do that. They wanted me right then.

Joshua was surprised that his family wanted him to jump right back in to previous roles and responsibilities so quickly. He also had expected his children to be more standoffish and shy but they were the exact opposite. He described how his kids did not leave his side for weeks. One of the things that helped Joshua in re-establishing family routines and fathering roles was to follow his family’s lead over what the recommendations and advice had been about the reintegration process.

When Daniel came back from deployment, he and his wife discussed how they wanted to manage the process of reintegration. He explained how they thought it would be best for their family to continue on with everyday routines and behaviors:

We thought about taking time off but it just seemed to make more sense to just keep doing the same thing every day and taking them to school. I just jumped in with the morning routine and making lunches and that kind of thing and they were happy to have me back! I guess, mainly just doing homework and all the boring non glamorous things; just try to get back in to their routine.

Daniel focused on finding his new place in the family's routine by getting involved with their everyday activities. He and his wife determined ways for him to reconnect with the children by designating everyday tasks he could take the lead on.

Some fathers applied this skill of following their family's lead for managing family roles and fathering responsibilities to situations beyond the immediate reunification period. Michael and his wife decided to home school their children because of his work schedule, the time demands of military leadership, and deployment. Michael explained:

We said, maybe we should home school because it will give us the family time that we need and according to the Army schedule. I come home from a deployment on R and R and we don't have to put kids out of school. We just stop. We go do what we are going to do and then we come back, I leave and the kids get back in school.

Because he and his wife could dictate their children's school schedule, Michael's family could maximize time spent together by synchronizing schedules to meet the demands of training and deployment assignments.

One father discussed how he followed his family's lead and needs by adjusting the timing of career decisions, influencing when he was and was not deployed. Max, the father of three daughters, described how it was almost as if he made "little contracts" with his children and wife regarding patterns of deployment, moves, and what the family needed. He described how these informal contracts influenced different leadership assignments he accepted or turned down because of the implications for his family in terms of residence and interruptions to their routines and relationships. When Max's family expressed the desire to have more stability and to stay in one location in order to cultivate more stability in home life and schooling, he declined some very prestigious assignments and opportunities. These would have required the family to move outside of the U.S. or Max to have limited contact with his children for an extended period of

time. In lieu of taking these assignments, Max accepted additional deployments to combat. Even though it was difficult for him and his family, Max volunteered for these deployment assignments in order to provide more residential stability to his family. He followed his family's lead and tried to respond to their needs while simultaneously meeting demands and requirements of work roles and military leadership.

In recent years, this reintegration period has garnered additional attention. In light of the struggles of returning soldiers to reintegrate into families, often marked by violence, the Army has responded by providing guidelines for mandatory reintegration and debriefing following deployment. The Army implemented these changes to reintegration protocols following increases of violence, including a number of murder-suicides at Ft. Bragg in 2002 (CNN Washington Bureau, 2002) and in the face of elevated levels of deployment. Jon recalled how some of these changes went in to effect. Following a 2004 deployment, his unit had planned to "drop off their gear" and take their 30-day block leave when they returned home. Instead they followed new mandatory reintegration guidelines and met with many individuals for this process. These individuals included a chaplain and other Behavioral Health staff. These meetings and debriefings continued for 10 days after their return from combat. Following Jon's second deployment in 2008, he discussed how the Army had greatly improved the services and protocols for managing this reintegration period. While he appreciated the changes and improvements, he still felt that this reintegration period could be managed better. While the reintegration protocol seemed to help for assessing risk and providing some decompression time, Jon felt it was also difficult to follow his family's lead during this reintegration time period. He discussed how it created an odd rhythm to his days. His family wanted to spend time together to re-establish patterns of interaction but Jon's need to attend to work responsibilities and trainings for this

mandatory 10 day period interrupted this process in some ways. Jon suggested that components of the reintegration training were very useful but could potentially be conducted in a more effective and flexible manner. While there have been great improvements to this process, Jon thought there was additional room for improvement to this reintegration process, including a reflection and acknowledgement of individual family experiences and needs.

Some families used behavioral cues and preparations to begin the reintegration process even before their father/ spouse returned. Prior to his return from Afghanistan, Gary's family began to prepare by purchasing some of his favorite foods and beverages. This gave his children and wife a chance to dialogue about his return and what this meant for their family. When he did return home, Gary was able to observe and "feel out" where his family was in order to determine how to begin reconnecting. Gary tried to follow his family's lead in how to reconnect and the pace for doing so. Gary described this process as a "mutual compromise" with family:

It's sort of a mutual compromise, because you don't want to just jump in and smother them to suddenly make up for that period of time, but you also want to advance in rebuilding that at the same time too. ...So, you make little inroads, mutually, without being so overbearing.

This process of following and attending to the family's lead when returning from deployment allowed for fathers to embrace individual variation in how their family managed the reintegration process. While useful Army programs and policies geared towards easing the reintegration process exist, it could prove useful to continue to assess the effectiveness of these and begin a dialogue about how to embrace and facilitate adaptation to individual family needs. To use an earlier metaphor, it is important to have a variety of tools in the toolbox because not everything is a nail. By presenting general information regarding reintegration and building in room for personalization and exploration of family's unique needs, Army fathers would be able to more fully engage and demonstrate their responsiveness to their family's cues. Warm,

connected fathering relationships include not only being present but being responsive to child and family needs and requests. Responsiveness to individual needs strengthens connections and father-child relationships.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, the experience of deployment and the reunification process shaped how fathers approached their roles and fathering interactions. Many expressed a deep respect and appreciation for the time that they had to spend with their family. Deployment had heightened their sense of gratitude for the circumstances and opportunities that they had for their children and to employ in the process of fathering. Mental health concerns and the process of “getting themselves right” was at the forefront when returning from deployment. While fathers successfully accessed and utilized available behavioral health resources and information, including partners and families in identifying and addressing mental health needs could strengthen existing protocols for accessing mental health care following deployment to combat. Many fathers felt that they needed to put on a strong face for their families in order to protect them from some of the demands of deployment. These demands and threats to the safety and well-being of deployed soldiers set them apart from civilian fathers. Army dads also felt that military service cultivated habits and behaviors that were supportive of their fathering roles. The ability to recognize and follow their family’s needs was a valuable tool as fathers tried to address and mitigate deployment related implications for their families during reunification.

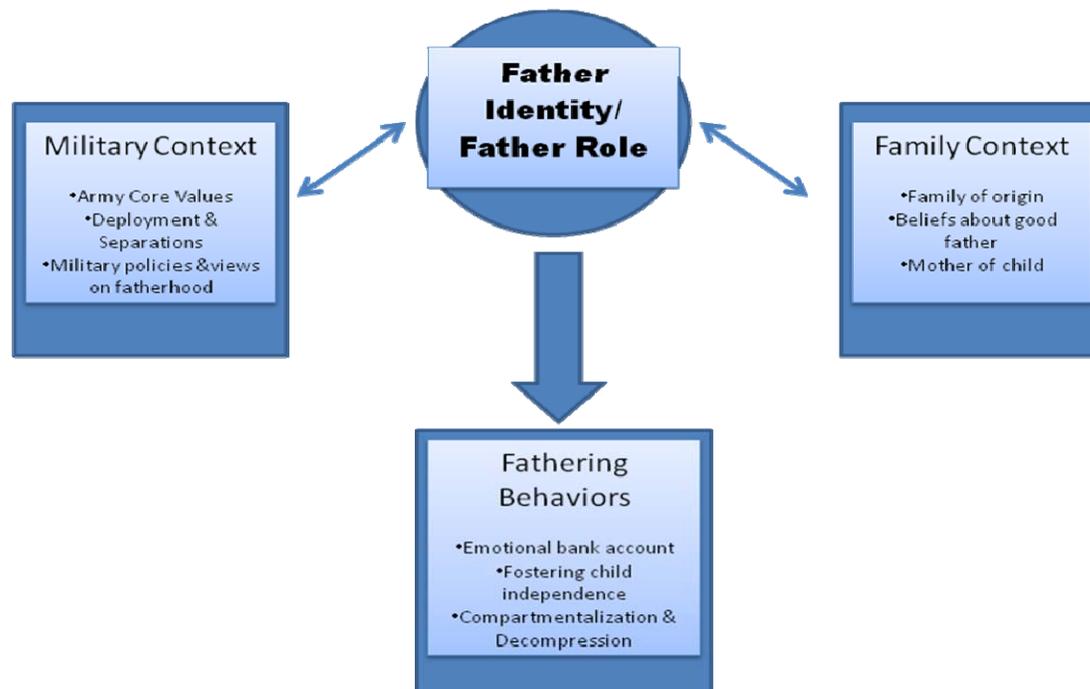
## **Chapter 8: Discussion**

This study highlights the complex nature of Army father's relationships with their children and families. The intention of this study was to explore how context, space, and time shape fathering for men in the military. It enhances the understanding of these by 1) exploring the relationship between work and family identity, roles, and fathering, 2) expanding the view of how Army fathers manage mental health needs through compartmentalization, decompression, and individual intervention resources as well as by being attentive to family needs, and 3) emphasizes how Army fathers may be doing more than simply "making up" for demands of and implications related to their deployment and military employment. Many fathers deliberately designed fathering to address the needs of their children through the deployment process and in response to occupational demands. Theoretical considerations for interpreting these results are examined and methodological contributions are described. The implications for this study and the limitations are then discussed. This chapter will conclude with a consideration of future research needs and the directions for further study.

### **Research Contributions**

While earlier studies examining military fatherhood (MacDermid et al., 2005; Willerton et al., 2011) have provided an important initial exploration of military father's experiences of father involvement, this study expands these to provide a more detailed and expansive look at how Army fathers create and develop father and military identities, how these identities translate into role enactment, how these men strategize about balancing work and family demands, and act in response to these values, beliefs, and expectations. More specifically, this study provides added insight into 1) the give and take between fathering and military roles, 2) mental health and adjustment needs following deployment and in response to the demands of work and family life,

and 3) deliberate strategies fathers utilize to create and preserve strong connections with children across different contexts related to work demands.



**The give and take of Army fathering.** Many studies exploring men's fathering observe, describe, and discuss actions related to father involvement and relationships with children. While some of these studies go beyond describing observable behaviors of fathers to explore emotional and cognitive components of father involvement (Willerton et al., 2011), few examine how military father's identity and views of roles across different contexts shape fathering. Willerton et al. (2011) noted that the connection between father involvement and father identity seemed evident because of descriptions of how father role identity shaped father involvement but that they could not fully explore this in their study. While there is still much to be done in understanding how men's fatherhood identity and military identity influence fathering behaviors,

this study begins this exploration of how men form identity across the contexts of military work and family and potential implications for family relationships.

Many fathers felt a strong sense of responsibility and duty to their children, as if fatherhood were like a “commission from God.” These fathers had a number of beliefs that shaped their views of what a good father was like. These included attributes of being a provider, a role model, a protector, and sacrificing for the good of the family. A number of these fatherhood attributes correlated to the seven core Army values, a code of living developed by the Army to reflect values taught in Basic Training and a standard for conduct for use in both military conduct and all other aspects of life. Almost all of the fathers described how these core values were a part of the daily lives and family relationships. Some fathers discussed how they held similar core beliefs prior to joining the Army and this work environment was a good fit with principles they felt were important in life. These men described how these core values shaped their identity as a father because these values made them good soldiers but also good fathers. This dynamic between Army values and father identity explores the relationship between father identity and the influence that military membership has on this identity. Army core values such as selfless service and duty underscored father’s actions to cultivate strong connected relationships with their children through attentive, continuous involvement in daily activities, despite challenges with time and physical space. These marked some of the ways that military membership embraced and supported father identity.

A majority of the fathers discussed how Army pride and an Army family identity provided meaning and gave strength to their families in the face of demanding schedules, separations, and sacrifices. This military family identity acknowledges the sacrifices of not only service members but of family members as well. Some fathers discussed how this sense of

sacrifice drew the family closer together in a united cause. These Army families used this sense of pride as a means for connection to a larger community and the supports and resources available within this group.

Another component of this give and take relationship between work and fatherhood was reflected in the concept of the “Army is a family too”. A number of fathers felt a closeness with their fellow unit members and other soldiers. Some even noted that at times they felt closer to their Army family than their extended family. Many fathers felt that skills they learned and attributes cultivated through Army work and experiences enhanced their abilities to be a connected, involved father. While not all of the influence of the Army was positive for family relationships and strong connections with children (e.g. deployment, physical separations, and intrusive demands for time during family time), many fathers felt that in response to demands placed and dictated by an Army career, they became stronger fathers with valuable skills and attributes. Discipline, scheduling and prioritizing were noted skills for managing work and family life but fathers also highlighted the value of these same skills in creating close, connected relationships with their children.

Almost all of the military leaders interviewed, both officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) felt that their father identity shaped who they were as a leader and that the reciprocal relationship was true as well—who they were as a leader influenced how they were as a father. These men felt that there was a give and take relationship between fatherhood and military leadership. They described how they drew on skills they employed during fathering when interacting with some younger soldiers and even referred to them as “kids” at times. This was not meant in a pejorative way but reflected some of the age differences, assistance, and guidance provided to soldiers under their command. One father highlighted the importance of

always showing respect and care for soldiers under your command because they are another parent's son or daughter.

While some skills cultivated by military membership were useful for fathering, these men also described the importance of “switching off” their military identity when interacting with children. One father reminded that “your kids are not your soldiers” and that valid techniques used in military settings, such as issuing ultimatums and expecting an immediate response to directives, could be detrimental to father-child relationships. This give and take relationship between work and fathering identity was a useful tool for fathers as they implemented work and family roles, as long as appropriate boundaries were in place.

An interesting contrast in elements of this “give and take” between the family and the Army is that most of the fathers in leadership roles that discussed how their fatherhood influenced their leadership and vice versa also discussed how they utilized compartmentalization to separate work life from family life as a means to balance these two contexts and roles. It is interesting to note that while these men worked to separate family and work, these two contexts still interacted and influenced men's behavior in both contexts.

Components of their father identity made them a better soldier and elements of their soldier identity made them a better father. Synthesis of military and fathering identities is an important task or goal for Army dads as they navigate relationships and enact roles in these two demanding contexts.

**Mental health and role balance.** A number of demanding professions require periods of non-residence with children and have noted similarities to fathers engaged in military service (Zvonkovic et al., 2005). At the same time, there may be added burdens or differences due to the implications for mental health and wellness as military fathers meet work demands in the face of

extreme risk, danger, and trauma. Army fathers in this study discussed the importance of “getting themselves right” in order to engage with children and fulfill the role of a connected father. Some fathers were able to note strategies for managing work stress and strain and could identify when they needed to seek professional help. For others, the process of seeking help from mental health services took longer and had implications for family role fulfillment. Following deployment some fathers went into “me mode” taking care of their own needs and wants as a means to cope with residual stresses and strains from deployment and work demands, sometimes at the detriment of their familial relationships.

A couple of fathers suggested the importance of incorporating other adult family members, spouses, and partners in identifying mental health needs. They felt that preparing both soldiers and family members for potential mental health implications post-deployment could provide both protective factors by adding additional support and awareness for more serious mental health issues and buffer relationships by educating family members about potential implications of deployment for behavior and state of mind.

While the process of deployment to combat and enacting work roles in war zones may potentially have negative impact on mental health, everyday stresses and demands for time, energy, and focus at work also impacted fathering and paternal–child relationships. The processes of compartmentalization and decompression were utilized by fathers as means to manage work and fathering roles. These Army dads described how they tried to “flip a switch” when changing from work roles to family roles. Compartmentalization, or the process of keeping work life and roles separate from fathering roles and home life, was a valuable tool for balancing the demands of work and family and managing the interface of these two contexts. Fathers also utilized decompression practices in order to transition between work and family contexts.

Decompression included things such as changing out of uniforms when leaving work, engaging in physical exercise prior to returning home, and taking some time alone to relax.

These techniques were utilized as means to improve mental health and to facilitate being physically present and more emotionally engaged with children when acting out fathering roles and behaviors. Many Army dads emphasized that they couldn't dedicate more time to work or family at the expense of the other. This could have serious implications for weakening family relationships, fulfillment of work responsibilities, and even personal safety. One father described this delicate balance as a "chainsaw juggling act" of meeting the demands and obligations of work, father, and family roles.

**Deliberate strategies.** Military fathers face a number of obstacles to connected fathering due to the nature of their work requirements, roles, and the military context. Despite challenges to involved fatherhood and "being there" for their children, these fathers were not merely acted upon by contextual factors. Many of these Army dads were proactive in creating connected relationships with their children and in fostering positive relational and individual attributes. Despite challenges to connecting with children, some fathers engaged in behaviors to "build up the emotional bank account" with their children.

One father described this process of creating a strong connected relationship with his children as making deposits into an "emotional bank account". He described how when he was physically present he worked to make deposits and cultivate a strong connected relationship with his children. When he was apart from his children he knew they would rely on this emotional bank account, making withdrawals on the relationship while he wasn't physically present to interact with them. Some of the literature examining military father involvement describes how these fathers rely on quality time and memory making experiences to create relationships with

their children. While this study also noted that all of these Army fathers stressed the importance of high quality interactions and valuing quality time with children when at home, this concept of the emotional bank account hints at underlying dynamics of fathering that move beyond simply making up for lost time through “quality time.” These fathers weren’t merely the victims of difficult, job-related circumstances that required physical separation from children and families. These Army dads employed conscious strategies to insulate father-child relationships from the strains of separation and deployment.

While all of these fathers emphasized the importance and value of being close and connected to children, a few explained the desire to cultivate independence in their children. On some level, cultivating independence and self-confidence in children was a tool for protecting them and the paternal-child relationship from the demands of physical separation during deployment. Some fathers worried about families and children becoming too independent so that they would no longer be needed, but many also actively cultivated independence in their children as a means to prepare them not only for future adulthood but as a means to manage demands of deployment and military family lifestyle. While fathers struggled with how to cultivate close, connected relationships with their children in light of job demands and requirements, they employed strategies for building relationships and preparing children for separation, while valuing the time they had with children. This demonstrates that some Army fathers do not merely respond to the implications of time apart from their children by trying to make up for separation through “quality time” but are strategic in building close relationships and relying on relational preparations to maintain connections through absences.

## **Theoretical Considerations**

The theoretical perspectives of situated fatherhood and symbolic interactionism were utilized as frameworks for interpreting the experiences of Army fathers. The results discussed are consistent with the components of these theoretical frameworks. The situated fatherhood framework is useful in exploring fathering experiences across work and family contexts. Symbolic interactionism is valuable in framing father's experiences with Army father identity development and resultant roles.

The situated fatherhood framework emphasizes the importance of considering physical and social spaces that fathers enact relationships within. Bronfenbrenner's microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem (Bretherton, 1993) are helpful in organizing the different relationships, contexts, and organizations that men enact fathering within and their impacts on children. Bronfenbrenner's focus on the interrelationships between these different levels of context are especially valuable in examining how larger cultural macrosystem forces, such as military messages about the meaning of fatherhood and the role of a military father, are conveyed to families and individuals. Bronfenbrenner hypothesized that when supportive links existed between these different settings they were able to function in a more harmonious manner (Bretherton, 1993). This was demonstrated as fathers described how the support of military leadership in strengthening family relationships through formal policies, such as block leave following deployment or Rest and Recuperation (R & R) leave, and more localized, informal mesosystem level support of military leaders as they encourage fathers to spend time additional time with children prior to deployment or allowed flexible scheduling to take care of family needs as they arose.

The situated fatherhood framework provides organization and clarity to the experiences of Army dads as they navigate different contexts. Physical conditions of fathering were at the heart of these fathers' strategies for connection. Many fathers prepared and strategized for how they would maintain close relationships with their children when deployed and how they could use daily routines and tasks as a means to connect when they were away. This required fathers to find new, creative ways to complete these daily tasks, such as reading stories, talking with children about how their day was, or providing moral guidance when they were limited by physical spaces and conditions.

Fathers considered *temporal dynamics* to their fathering when they explored how their fathering behaviors, roles, and identities had changed over time, as their children aged, and as they deployed and returned home. Father's behaviors reflect the *public/private property* of this framework as they enact fathering during deployment. Some of the fathers discussed how they were never really "off-duty" and they often communicated with children and partners in public settings such as shared communication resources at Moral, Welfare, and Recreation (MWR) centers or in shared off-duty living spaces, like apartments or even tents. This created a very public setting for connecting with children during deployment and fathering from afar. Some fathers described how being perceived as a successful military father is viewed as a great accomplishment. These fathers recognized that being an Army dad can be a very public process. Some felt as though people both inside and outside of the military were watching their fathering and evaluating what this meant for their competence both as a soldier and a father.

Army dads also described how dynamics of *personal power and control* influenced how they interacted with their children. Because the possibility and timing of deployment was unpredictable, fathers developed means to discuss this with children and organized fathering

behaviors around preparing for the possibility of absence. When families and fathers acknowledged that they could be called to work to handle issues or concerns at any time, and that this was out of their control, they could dialogue about how to protect family time or make up for unanticipated absences. Elements of this concept were reflected as fathers described how Army families and spouses sacrificed and that they were “just as much in the Army.” Fathers also described how they felt they sometimes needed to be defiant towards the Army’s demands of loyalty and time by choosing or prioritizing family needs, no matter the resulting implications and complications for the workplace. The Army’s demands to serve and protect and the Army core values also influenced *fatherhood discourses* that these fathers encountered. These Army dads described how they integrated these core values and a culture of service and protection into their identity and roles as a father.

Symbolic interactionism emphasizes the importance of interactions and beliefs in the construction of identity and roles (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). The exploration of construction of an Army dad identity reflects how fathers integrated experiences with their own fathers, families of origin, and beliefs about fathering, as well as the influence of the military, in how they constructed the meaning of Army fatherhood. Many of these fathers described how interactions in the military workplace, such as the Army core values or opportunities for leadership, were a part of their military father identity. At the same time, beliefs about what makes a good father and how a man interacts with his children, or desires to interact with them, were elements from family contexts utilized for Army father identity formation. Construction of the Army dad identity is the integration of father’s beliefs, requirements and needs of children and families, and the demands of military careers. Fathers continue to develop and modify this Army dad identity as they enact roles both in work and family contexts.

A salience hierarchy for work and father roles (White & Klein, 2007) allows father to determine when to enact fathering behaviors and Army work skills. The experiences of the Army dads in this study highlights a blending of Army and father roles as these men utilized some skill sets related to father identity to enact Army roles and vice versa. This interplay of Army and fathering roles leads to the construction of an Army dad identity. Army dads may utilize father role attributes in workplace settings and Army role attributes in family settings when contextual cues dictate this. This concept is demonstrated in father's discussions of feeling like a dad at work and attempting (often unsuccessfully) to interact with children at home by treating them like soldiers. Through continued interactions in work and family life, fathers created and expanded the meanings of both Army identity and father identity and fine-tuned how to enact these roles in appropriate ways based on situational cues.

Military leadership and policy may also have an influence on how men construct both military and fatherhood identities. The messages that military cultures sends about fatherhood and father roles can influence men's expectations and enactment of these roles in everyday social interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Some of these messages have been supportive of fathering and Army dad roles, such as the importance of communicating with family during deployment, prioritizing taking care of family relationships throughout military career so as to maintain them through retirement, and protecting of children and families as a motivation for military service. Other cultural messages such as "Army first," negative stigma associated with mental health treatment, or that families are a deterrent from being a good soldier could be detrimental to fathering identity and role enactment. The fathers in this study seemed to emphasize the importance of family and fathering roles and to not let military demands

overshadow these. Some even described how they had to act defiant in the larger military context in order to carry out family roles and responsibilities.

Role strain occurs when individuals lack resources to enact role or play a number of roles with conflicting expectations or overwhelming requirements (White & Klein, 2007). Many fathers had strategized about how to balance the (sometimes) conflicting demands of Army and family life. They employed techniques such as compartmentalization, organization, calendaring and prioritizing tasks as means to try and complete necessary tasks both at work and as fathers. The cost of deployment, in terms of mental health, increased this level of strain and often made this ability to balance different work and family roles too difficult. Some fathers described how they engaged in unhealthy behaviors (such as problem drinking) or disengaged from family relationships and focused on them self in response to role strain. It is important to understand both the positive and healthy ways that fathers balance work and father roles and risks and demands that may lead to the development of role strain. Utilizing a symbolic interactionism theoretical lens can assist in creating programs to support fathers, helping them to create healthy Army dad identities and to develop skills for balancing work and father roles.

The theoretical concept of boundary ambiguity was also observed in these father's descriptions of fathering across changing contexts and related to deployment. Boss initially described the concept of ambiguous loss following her research with families who had a member missing-in-action (MIA) following military service (Boss, 2006). The concept of ambiguous loss is described as "a loss that remains unclear" (pg. 105) and boundary ambiguity may develop as a response to ambiguous loss as families must determine membership and roles in the family (Boss, 2006).

As men negotiate roles and identity within family and military contexts they may experience ambiguous loss. This may be due to unclear expectations of how to manage changing roles as a military father prepares for deployment, is deployed, or is returning home. As men experience changes in *physical conditions* they may be unsure of how to enact elements of these roles and identities across changing locations and within the restrictions of these locations. *Temporal dynamics* may also add to this ambiguous loss when fathers must respond in their fathering to changes as children age, especially when these changes occur while they are apart. Constraints and privileges that fathers experience as a part of social norms in being a military service member and a father may also add to ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity as elements of *personal power and control* interface with family responsibilities. Ambiguity may also develop as fathers are unsure of how to balance the role demands of two “greedy institutions” (Segal, 1986)- the family and the military- and construct identities around what it means to be a father and a military servicemember.

Boundary ambiguity has been broken out further into the two nuanced concepts of ambiguous presence and ambiguous absence. Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, and Weiss (2008) applied these concepts of ambiguous presence and ambiguous absence to military families. *Ambiguous absence* is defined as the perception by family members that an individual is physically absent but psychologically present while *ambiguous presence* is the family’s experience of having an individual physically present but psychologically absent (Faber et al., 2008).

Some fathers described how they felt like a “fake dad” when deployed because of their inability to enact fathering roles in the same manner that they would when at home. Improved communication resources, such as Skype and webcams, allowed fathers to more easily talk to

and connect with children in “real time” but did not alter the reality that they were physically separated. Fathers struggled with wanting to do more engage children and support wives but were restricted by physical distance. This heightened the sense of *ambiguous absence* for some fathers as they were able to engage with children on some level, attempting to enact some fathering roles of providing guidance, support, or discipline, but lacking the physical means of following through with these behaviors. *Ambiguous presence* was noted, especially following deployment during the reunification period. Fathers described how they utilized patience and following their family’s lead in re-establishing family routines and the enactment of fathering roles. They were physically reunited with their children and families but psychologically absent to some degree as they worked to reintegrate into life at home. If mental health needs were not addressed or more serious mental issues manifested, this experience of ambiguous presence was heightened. Fathers described the importance of “getting themselves right” in order to be able to resume fathering roles and responsibilities in a satisfactory manner.

These theoretical concepts have expanded our understanding of how Army fathers construct identity and enact roles and have strengthened the interpretation of men’s fathering experiences and behaviors.

### **Methodological Contributions**

This study provides a number of important contributions to the understanding and study of fathering. One of the most unique contributions is that this study explores fathers’ perspectives of Army father identity formation and how this influences their fathering and roles. Limited numbers of studies have explored fathering and father involvement from fathers’ perspectives. By utilizing individual interviews to explore the dynamics of how these men form father and Army identities and roles, a detailed dialogue embracing heterogeneity of experiences

emerges. This heterogeneity of experiences is valuable in detecting both unique experiences of fathers but also in uncovering the details of the how these men strategize in forming close, connected relationships with their children versus simply reacting to contextual forces. While interviews allowed for fathers to share unique, detailed experiences, fathers also described a number of experiences that were seen across interviews. Individual interviews can provide a detailed picture of subtle dynamics of fatherhood and military identity over time. Retrospective interviews allowed fathers to discuss the development of Army dad identity over time and through transitions to fatherhood, the deployment cycle, and rank advancement or plans to separate from service.

This method also deepened the ability of fathers to explore how their roles and identities within families and the military had changed or been maintained over time. While there are some challenges to gaining access to military fathers and constraints may make individual interviewing more difficult, there is great value in collecting data through these interviews. It may be difficult to maintain contact with deploying dads and access to children and spouses is often more attainable. While the perspective of partners and children is useful, fathers' perspectives on fathering provide a more accurate picture of their experiences and help to complete a well-rounded view of how military families function, and thrive, in the face of challenges related to contextual changes and demands.

Qualitative research methods are uniquely capable of capturing dynamics of context, process, and meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Army fathers enact fathering across a variety of contexts, including contextual changes related to the deployment/ reunification cycle as well as "everyday" changes to context across work and family spheres. Doherty and associates (1998) asserted that fatherhood was uniquely sensitive to contextual forces and using qualitative means

to explore fathering across contexts is an important tool for capturing rich details of these experiences. Richly detailed views of fathering in military and family contexts enables researchers and professionals to move beyond naming actions or behaviors describing father involvement towards being able to describe meaning and strategies, as well as long term implications. Examining deployment-related contextual changes and fathering has garnered much attention because of the long-term impact this may have on child development and the potential for difficulties to be exacerbated by traumatic experiences inherent to the deployment to combat experience. While it is important to understand these deployment related processes, there is also value in examining everyday contextual transitions and challenges. There is great value in understanding how men's Army dad identity impacts children and families as they negotiate transitions from work contexts to family life every day. These daily actions and the pursuit of balancing roles may also impact long-term outcomes for children, marriage, and individual's health and well-being.

### **Implications for Policy and Intervention**

This study provides a unique perspective on the relationships and needs of military families. Many studies exploring the relationships of military families do so from the perspectives of children, spouses, other family members, or professionals that interact with military families. Including fathers' perspective in the assessment and exploration of military family dynamics creates a well-rounded view by accessing the experiences of all family members. Generating information about the experiences of all military family members will provide direction and guidance for policy and intervention that will impact the family in its entirety. Gaining understanding of fathers' experiences with fathering in a military context will

provide power and greater efficacy to support programs, resources, and interventions directed to fathers.

This study provides access to interesting perspectives of the current leave program in the Army. These fathers offered a unique look at how they utilized institutional programs such as Rest & Recuperation (R & R) and block leave. Fathers described how they strategically timed leave to maximize involvement with important family events and child needs. They also noted that if they were a day short of dictated guidelines and leave policies they would not have been eligible to utilize these resources. As deployment tempos are changing, including movement to shorter, more frequent, and more predictable cycles of deployment, it is important to examine the implications for families as they try to access and utilize leave before, during, and after deployment.

Fathers also described a number of means of gaining knowledge or advice pertaining to fathering, particularly during the process of deployment and reunification. Many fathers discussed informal means of gaining advice, such as seeking information from respected leaders or friends and unit members with children. Some fathers also seemed more connected to information sources or had a number of different members in support networks to turn to for fathering advice and recommendations. This underscores the importance of informal support networks for father's role and identity development and as a means to support families. It is important to match information dispersion to the methods that fathers use to collect information about supports and resources.

Fathers in leadership roles often described skills that they had developed to balance work and father roles. Some felt that this was related to leadership training that fostered development of skills for balancing work and family demands. Others were unsure of how they had cultivated

these habits. Exploration of this process and then how to convey this to younger military fathers (both officers and enlisted) could strengthen fathers and families. Many fathers described the processes of compartmentalization, decompression, and putting on a “tough guy face” for their families. These experiences were introduced during the interviews but the long-term effects and efficacy of these were not discussed by fathers in great detail. Professionals working with military fathers and families may need to explore and acknowledge ways that these techniques support connected fathering but how they may also come at a cost to mental health or paternal disengagement.

The need for adequate mental health intervention and behavioral health resources for soldiers and their families has come to the forefront in light of increased deployments to combat. Fathers explained how they were able to access behavioral health resources when mental health needs dictated this but also desired for ways to include family members in this process at all levels (e.g. prevention, identification of needs, intervention). Finding effective ways to improve family knowledge of mental health needs and inclusion in subsequent treatment and intervention is needed. The Army has started this process of recognizing the mental health needs of families and has expanded confidential resources, including access to Military and Family Life Consultants and other mental health providers. While these are steps in the right direction, there is a need for improvement in family education, continued reduction of stigma, and availability of mental health professionals trained to work with individuals, couples, and families.

Another important component of mental health services and support for connected fathering would be to explore and implement ways to allow for individual family needs and adjustments to provided reintegration training. This would need to be implemented in a way that could provide consistency in treatment delivery and still be feasible in terms of time and

resources. One initial way to improve services to fathers and families would be to link practice to research. Utilizing empirical findings of Army fathers' observed needs and fathering experiences to strengthen existing programs and support resources could improve efficacy and utilization of these programs and resources.

### **Limitations**

While the findings of this study provide detailed insight into fathering practices, goals, and beliefs of Army dads there are limitations to this study. First, the sample was limited in terms of branch of military and type of units. The study sample was limited to Army fathers, the majority of which were members of the active duty component of the Army. These fathers came from only two military installations in the Washington DC Metropolitan area. Three single fathers were interviewed and insights from these interviews indicate that additional study of unique stressors and experiences of single Army fathers is needed. Two of the fathers interviewed were members of the National Guard and three were members of the Army Reserves. Because members of the National Guard and Reserves may have unique support needs because of less contact with formal military supports and resources, additional study is needed to explore the findings of this study within the father populations in the National Guard and Reserves.

Second, these fathers were selected through purposeful sampling methods, such as snowball sampling, stratified purposeful sampling, and convenience sampling. While these techniques may be useful for recruiting participants with relevant and valuable experiences, these sampling techniques may restrict generalizability of the results. Many of the participating fathers had a military operational specialties (MOSs) that fell under the designation of signal corps. This MOS dictates access to communication resources as job responsibilities included maintaining,

preserving, and utilizing telecommunication equipment and ability to relay information. This access to communication resources may have influenced the dialogue about and access to communication during deployment. The process of self-selection for participation in the study may have resulted in having some fathers that are inherently more connected to their children because of the importance they placed on fathering. Because of this value, they may have chosen to participate in the study and share positive fathering practices they engage in. It was apparent that the fathers who were willing to participate in the study valued fathering and strong family relationships. As the researcher, I was also looking for examples of strong fathers and families and by looking for resiliency and strengths in fostering nurturant relationships, challenges and the level of stressors that Army fathers and families face may not have been fully explored. The experiences of these Army fathers may differ from Army fathers who are struggling in relationships with children or are disengaged from fathering. While this study may have limitations in terms of generalizability, the experiences of these fathers could provide insight into the experiences of Army fathers in similar contexts and circumstances.

Third, as the sole coder and interviewer, my personal biases may have influenced information collected and the interpretation of the results. In order to address some of these limitations, data triangulation was employed. Through extended engagement in the field, additional experiences of interacting with professionals providing support services to military fathers and families were utilized to expand understanding of military father's experiences. These additional experiences included attending morning formations with soldiers, interacting and discussing with professionals providing support services to Army personnel through Army Community Services (ACS), the Soldier and Family Assistance Center (SFAC), and programs for the Warriors in Transition Unit (WTU). Through the process of gaining interview access to

fathers, numerous meetings and discussions were conducted with military leadership based out of Ft. Meade, Maryland. While these additional interactions and sources of data do not negate the limitations of one coder and interviewer, they provide additional information and support for themes and findings noted.

### **Future Research Needs**

While this study and others have begun to examine men's experiences of military fatherhood and the processes related to creating and maintaining close, connected relationships with children, there are notable areas for further research exploration. Some of these areas are discussed below.

**Empirical validation of service delivery protocols.** Fathers engaged in or were offered a number of different reintegration programs or resources upon return from deployment. A variety of programs are also offered through ACS, including classes about family financial management, transitions to parenthood, and parenting courses. Fathers also reported receiving advice both from institutional sources, such as ACS and command leadership, as well as more informal sources, like friends and family members. While some of these programs may have been empirically tested to assess their efficacy in meeting stated goals, the need to assess whether current support services and reintegration programs are effective at meeting delineated goals and in supporting fathers and families remains. Many of reintegration programs and post deployment guidelines have developed in response to negative family outcomes, such as violent episodes like the Ft. Bragg killings (CNN Washington Bureau, 2002). Some fathers discussed how some of the information offered during post-deployment briefings and reintegration trainings did not fit their family needs. Other fathers reported more positive outcomes in following their family's lead at what could more effectively aid in post-deployment

reintegration. Some empirical evaluation of reintegration protocols has been conducted (Wilson, Wilkum, Chernichky, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Broniarczyk, 2011). In an evaluation of the effectiveness of the Passport Toward Success (PTS) post-deployment reintegration program child outcomes were observed using both child reports and parent reports of outcomes. This is an important start to exploring “best practices” for post-deployment support for deployed parents and children. Child perspectives are important to understand but it is also essential to assess the outcomes and needs of military fathers (and mothers) as they use similar reintegration programs and protocols as they re-establish family roles and resume parenting while living with their children. In light of this study’s results discussing how fathers seek to follow their family’s lead during reintegration, it is important to evaluate whether current protocols are effective and meeting fathers’ and families’ appropriate goals and needs.

**Generalizability across military branches/ commands.** This study examines the experiences of Army fathers, primarily from signal corps units. While many experiences are universal to all military fathers, there are some nuances and unique stressors for military fathers based on occupational responsibilities and requirements. While the information resulting from this study may be applicable to fathers in similar circumstances, these experiences related to Army father identity, roles, stressors, strengths, and resources may not be representative of all military fathers. It is important to assess the generalizability of recommendations stemming from this and future research studies focusing on the needs of military fathers. Not only could unique needs and experiences exist across the different branches- Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard, and Army- but also across National Guard and Reserve units and occupational specialties (e.g. Special Operations vs. Signal Corps).

**Current mental health needs and the process of “getting myself right.”** A number of fathers reported utilization of mental health services and assisting those under their command leadership in accessing these resources. This may indicate a reduction in stigma for seeking out mental health services and improved knowledge of available post-deployment resources. Recent reports regarding the mental health needs of veterans and soldiers who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have indicated that approximately 1 in 5 of these veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD and/or depression (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013). One study projected PTSD rates among Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans could be as high as 35 percent (Atkinson, Guetz, & Wein, 2009). The fathers in this study discussed the importance of “getting myself right” in order to resume fathering roles and to foster healthy, connected relationships with children. Some fathers reported knowledge of behavioral health services and some briefly discussed utilizing these resources. There have been noted changes to service delivery, such as increased availability of confidential individual, couple, and family therapy services through the Military and Family Life Consultant program coordinated by ACS. Further research is needed to explore behavioral health and mental health resource utilization and its effectiveness. Much of this research has focused on veterans but utilization by current military members and their families could prove informative in designing programs to strengthen fathers and families. As one father noted another valuable avenue for improving mental health services would be to include family members in both preventative and intervention measures.

### **Directions for Further Study**

**Following fathers through future deployments.** Tracking fathers through future deployments, career choices, and assignments could provide a more detailed picture of how fathering is shaped by family/ work interface over time. By monitoring how fathering and father

identity evolves, it would be possible to explore how changes to these influence fathers' decisions and fathering behaviors. A longitudinal study would also capture variation in fathering strategies and beliefs as fathers respond to child development. While retrospective interviews are valuable in capturing changes to beliefs about fathering and military dad identity and roles, collecting information from fathers about the relationships with their children prior to deployment, while deployed, and during the reintegration process could give added insight into how fathers strategize about how to maintain close, connected relationships, prepare children, and adjust fathering beliefs and practices. Following fathers through subsequent deployments to combat or assignments where they may be separated from families for extended periods of time would allow for tracking reintegration processes as well as how fathers adjust to future work and fathering demands in response to past experiences or utilized strategies.

**Types of military units and MOS responsibilities.** The majority of the fathers interviewed had MOS responsibilities within the signal corps. The nature of this work involves communication and maintenance of the transfer information. Fathers had experiences in other types of military units and MOSs including Intelligence, Special Forces, JAG, Chemical, and Military Police. Because a majority of these dads were in a unit that is part of the signal corps, their access to communication resources may have been different than other units. It would be important to extend this study to include fathers across a variety of type of military units and MOS designations. Examining dynamics of father's views of roles and identities across officers, non-commissioned officers (NCOs), and enlisted military members has given a richer view of how fathers form an Army dad identity and implement fathering behaviors and role fulfillment. Expansion of this study to explore officer vs. enlisted dynamics across all of the branches of the military might also provided insight into interesting nuances. One of the signal officers noted

that their deployments were moving to more regular patterns and one father in this unit noted that he chose his MOS based on a greater level of predictability for deployment (for both cycles and lengths of deployment) and work obligations. One father who had been a part of a Special Forces unit noted that his deployments were shorter but more frequent and variable in frequency. He added that it was important to understand how he interacted with children while deployed to combat and how this shaped his fathering with his own children. He hypothesized that other fathers may have been influenced by interactions with children and families in an official capacity while deployed. Expanding future samples to capture some of this variation could allow for further exploration of how these job characteristics influence fathering.

**Paired interviews with spouses, mothers of children.** A number of fathers highlighted how their wives or the mothers of their children had an integral part in their connection and relationship with their children. During two of the interviews conducted in father's homes, two mothers listened in on the interviews and seemed to want to supplement the interview with additional information or their viewpoint. In light of the integral role that mothers play in facilitating communication and the father-child relationship during deployment, additional insights into fathering and paternal-child relationships could arise from interviewing mothers of children and pairing these with father's interviews. Some fathers explicitly stated that their wives may know more about certain aspects of how their attempts at fostering strong relationships with children were received when they were apart from children. While it is important and essential to gain men's perspectives on their fathering, utilizing information from mothers and their views of fatherhood and military dynamics could add richness to these father's stories. The need to include mothers' perspectives is heightened when both fathers and mothers are members of the

military. There is a dearth of studies examining the experiences of both dual-career military parents and single-parent military fathers and mothers.

In conclusion, this study provides insight into how fathers create an Army father identity and enact fathering across work and family contexts. Many of these fathers felt a deep sense of importance with respect to their role as a father and highlighted it as one of the most salient roles they played in daily life. Some of these Army fathers responded to challenges to strong relationship formation with their children by not simply reacting to but strategically planning for periods of separation and prepared their children and their relationships for periods of separation or high work demands.

### Appendix A: Army Father Information Table

<b>ID #</b>	<b>Service Branch</b>	<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Rank</b>	<b>Officer/ Enlisted</b>	<b>Race/ Ethnicity</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b># of kids</b>	<b>Child Ages</b>	<b># of deployments</b>
01	Army Active Duty	Andres	40	SSG E-6	Enlisted	Latino	married	3	Gabrielle (18) Ashley (22) Emma (17)	7
02	Army Active Duty	Evan	22	SPC E-4	Enlisted	White	single	1	Samuel (3)	2
03	Army Active Duty	Joshua	33	SGT E-5	Enlisted	White	married	2	Samantha (5) Graydon (4)	1
04	Army Active Duty	Jason	26	SPC E-4	Enlisted	White	single	1	Eleanor (3)	1
05	Army National Guard	Daniel	46	MAJ O-4	Officer	White	married	3	Erin (8) Peter (6) Allison (4)	2
06	Army Reserve	James	52	SSG E-6	Enlisted	African American	married	2	Jackson (23) Sean (11)	2
07	Army National Guard	Jared	43	CPT O-3	Officer	White	married	3	Anna (7) Alissa (5) Addison (5)	4
08	Army Active Duty	Nik	35	SGT E-5	Enlisted	White	married	3	Lily (7) Grace (4) Ella (3 mos)	1
09	Army Active Duty	Charles	35	SPC E-4	Enlisted	African American	married	7	Jessica (19) Jordan (16) Jarek (14) Neveah (13) Kayla (11) Charles (10) Keenan (9)	2

10	Army Active Duty	Tyrell	26	SPC E-4	Enlisted	African American	married	4	Tia (7) Jada (5) Devon (3) Tyrell Jr (5 mos)	1
11	Army Active Duty	Isaiah	23	SPC E-4	Enlisted	African American	single	2	Darell (5) Nyeshia (4)	1
12	Army Active Duty	Marcus	35	1SG	Enlisted	African American	married	2	Dayton (15) Eloise (9)	2
13	Army Active Duty	Curtis	31	SGT E-5	Enlisted	White	married	2	Jeremy (13) Aidan (10)	1
14	Army Active Duty	Jake	43	SSG E-6	Enlisted	White	married	3	Tyler (15) Megan (13) Hope (9 mos)	1
15	Army Active Duty	Drew	32	SSG E-6	Enlisted	White	married	2	Gavin (6) Jack (2)	2
16	Army Active Duty	Michael	37	MAJ O-4	Officer	White	married	2	Alexis (7) Hunter (4)	2
17	Army Active Duty	Gary	42	SSG E-6	Enlisted	White	married	2	Audrey (7) Ava (4)	3
18	Army Active Duty	Ben	36	CPT O-3	Officer	White	separated	1	Savannah (6)	2
19	Army Active Duty	Frank	32	SSG E-6	Enlisted	White	married	3	Morgan (8) Riley (5) Lauren (2)	1
20	Army Active Duty	Jon	38	MAJ O-4	Officer	White	married	4	Stella (6) Aaron (4) Evelyn (2) Ashton (18 mos)	2

21	Army National Guard	Henry	38	MAJ O-4	Officer	White	married	2	Avery (11) Isabel (8)	3
22	Army Reserve	Samuel	36	CPT O-3	Officer	White	married	2	Ryan (12) Martin (9)	1
23	Army Active Duty	Max	50	LTC O-5	Officer	African American	married	3	Danielle (24) Suzanne (22) Dalia (17)	2

## Appendix B: Army Father Profiles

**Andres** is a 40-year-old father of one biological daughter, age 18, and two step daughters, ages 22 years and 17 years old. Andres has deployed seven different times. He described himself as being in the military and focusing on his work and career but at the same time working towards retirement in the near future, and the changes that will bring for himself and his family. He and his family have experienced family discord related to Andres drinking behaviors and the family has worked on strengthening their relationships following some damage due to Andres drinking and completion of rehabilitation. He and his wife have worked to improve their relationships with their daughters but he still reported some difficulties with his oldest stepdaughter. Andres strives to maintain a connected long distance relationship with his biological daughter since she lives out of state.

**Evan** is a 22-year-old single father with one son, age 3. He has deployed twice and anticipated another deployment in the near future because of his military operational specialty (MOS) responsibilities. Evan was formerly married and described some of the difficulties he experienced after he found out that his wife had an affair, and another child, while he was deployed. Evan discussed how being an Army father, if you can do it well, is very noble because of all the different requirements and demands.

**Joshua** is a 33-year-old father of two children- a daughter, age 5 and a son, age 4. Joshua has been deployed once. Joshua has been married for six years and decided to join the Army two years ago because he “wanted to do more.” He described how the Army offered him the ability to provide for his children and wife and, other than times of deployment, he was able to see his family more than his previous job in the restaurant business allowed him to. He described how being apart from his family was one of the hardest parts of military service for him. At the same time he felt the Army was very supportive of him and his family. He described how, because of flexibility in his schedule and the support of his command leadership, he was able to support and care for his children and wife in daily events or more atypical occurrences, like medical events.

**Jason** is a 26-year-old single father of one daughter, age 3. He has deployed one time and discussed how he strategically chose his MOS and unit because of deployment cycles and requirements so that he could have some sense of predictability in this for him and his daughter. Jason described how he tried work out a relationship with the mother of his daughter. Because of a number of factors, including some legal concerns that the mother of his child had, Jason split up with the mother of his child and retained full custody of his daughter. He described how he strives for close connected relationship with his daughter but also struggles with the difficulties of single fatherhood. Jason relies on the help of his parents and friends when he needs extra support as a single father. He also hopes that his current relationship will lead to marriage and a more stable family environment and relationships both for himself and his daughter.

**Daniel** is a 46-year-old father of three children- two daughters, ages 8 and 4, and a son, age 6. As a JAG officer, he has seen some of the struggles that other fathers face in their family relationships. Daniel described how he has witnessed how some fathers struggle with maintaining relationships with their children, including determining custody arrangements during deployment, and maintaining effective co-parenting relationships with the mothers of their

children. He described some of his efforts to help other fathers and provide legal assistance and guidance in family legal matters. Daniel discussed how he felt that his own father's example as a father who made his sons feel like they were what mattered most had influenced who he has wanted to be as a father. He discussed how his military service reflects his desire to make the world a safer, more peaceful place for his children and how this desire carries him through difficult periods of separation from his children.

**James** is a 52 year-old father of two sons, ages 23 and 11. He described how he felt he was in a unique position as a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in his Army Reserve unit because he had an older son and a younger son. His experiences as a father were an asset to him in his interactions with the younger soldiers in his unit. He felt having a young adult son gave him insight into some of the salient experiences of younger soldiers. At the same time his interactions with soldiers were useful tools as he worked to stay connected to his two sons and strengthen their relationships. James was able to utilize resources and strategic planning to find ways to connect and communicate with his younger son during his stateside mobilization.

**Jared** is a 43-year-old father of three daughters, one age 7 and 5-year-old twins. As a member of the Army National Guard, Jared discussed balancing work responsibilities and Army National Guard responsibilities with family roles and relationships. He has deployed four times and had thought about his long term military career plans because he did not want to be separated from his children for an extended period of time again due to deployment. Jared discussed how a good father has to focus on the needs, personalities, and traits of his children. He described himself as a having very stereotypical masculine interested and hobbies. At the same time, he discussed how he knew the names of all of the different dolls, princesses, and characters that his three daughters were interested in. He felt that some people might find this to be funny but he felt that it was important for him to follow his daughters' leads in interests and activities as a way for him to stay connected with his daughters and foster strong relationships.

**Nik** is a 35-year-old father of three daughters, ages 7, 4, and 3 months. Currently, he lives with his second wife and their 3-month-old daughter. His older two daughters live with their mother and they visit Nik during summers and holidays. He described how access to his two older daughters was influenced by the relationship between him and his ex-wife. He felt that his experiences as a soldier and leader influenced his fathering and that his experience as a father made him a better leader. He also felt that he learned a lot about separating the stress and negative emotions of his work life from his home life because of his first marriage. He tried to keep work stressors and challenges separate from his family life.

**Charles** is a 35-year-old father of seven children. He has 3 daughters, ages 19, 13, and 11, and 4 sons, ages 16, 14, 10, and 9. He joined the military because he wanted to provide more to his children and he felt that he needed to do something more with his life. He felt that his children were proud to be a military family. He described how they love to show others their military IDs and talk about their dad as a member of the Army. He discussed some of the difficult challenges he faced as a member of the Army and the possibility of changes of assignment and relocation and striving to maintain connections with his children from two previous relationships. He currently lived close to all of his children and saw them regularly but

he worried about the future and how to maintain strong relationships with them in light of possible upcoming changes to his duty assignment.

**Tyrell** is a 26-year-old father of 4 children- two sons, ages 3 and 5 months, and two daughters, ages 7 and 5. He has deployed to combat once. His biological father was also in the military but Tyrell's father did not really communicate or interact with him. He reported that he really did not meet up with his father until he was 19 years old. This shapes Tyrell's drive to be a father that is "really there" for his children- not only interacting with them but also making sure he is emotionally present. He also stressed that it is important to always be there for your children and to "blood, sweat, and tears, do anything to take care of your children."

**Isaiah** is a 23-year-old father of two. He has a son, age 5, and a daughter, age 4. He has deployed once. Isaiah discussed how he managed relationships with his two children and each of their mothers. He was currently single but shared custody for both of his children with their mothers. At times, his work has dictated last minute changes to his schedule and this has created an additional challenge to maintaining and fostering relationship with his children. Isaiah coordinates visitation schedules with his son's mother and his daughter's mother and it can be challenging to meet all the demands of family and work schedules. He strategically used military leave prior to deployment and when returning in order create some positive memories before leaving and to reconnect with his children when he returned from deployment.

**Marcus** is a 35-year-old father of two children. He has a son, age 15, and a daughter, age 9. His son is not his biological son but Marcus has raised him as a father since he and his wife met and married 12 years ago. Marcus described how he focused on maintaining a close relationship with his son and daughter despite the demands of his NCO responsibilities and two deployments. He also felt that in his Army role that he needed to approach his soldiers from the perspective that they are someone's son or daughter. Marcus felt that they should be treated with respect just as he would want someone to treat his own son or daughter.

**Curtis** is a 31-year-old father of a 13-year-old son and a 9-year-old son. He has deployed once. When he joined the Army he was doing it to better himself and because of a sense of duty to serve. Curtis had deployed once and felt that as his sons had gotten older, he did not want to miss any more time with them because of Army obligations or future deployments. He was in the process of finishing up his military service and preparing to transition to civilian life.

**Jake** is a 43-year-old father of three children. When Jake married his first wife, he stepped into a father role to her two children from a previous relationship. Jake felt a sense of responsibility and a need to provide and the Army offered a stable way to provide for his family. Jake and his first wife divorced and he later met and married his second wife while doing a hardship tour in Korea. Following his first wife's death, Jake's two older children came to live with him, his current wife, and their 9-month-old daughter. Jake has deployed once and he was grateful that he was able to take some time to "get himself right" following deployment but before his two older children came to live with him.

**Drew** is a 32-year-old father of two sons, ages 6 and 2. His two deployments have given him experience in how to connect with his children across long distances and how to prepare his paternal-child relationships for separation. Drew described how he relies on his wife to support

him as a father and to support him in his father role. He described how she excelled at this and facilitated a lot of interactions that he used to connect with his boys while he was deployed. He also felt that his wife was a great support to him while he transitioned to returning from deployment and utilized Army Behavioral Health Services. He encouraged other family members to be informed and involved with what returning soldiers may be facing in terms of mental health concerns when returning from deployment.

**Michael** is a 37-year-old father of two- a 7-year-old daughter and a 4-year-old son. He is a Major in the Army. He has been deployed twice- once to Bosnia before he had children and to Iraq. Michael felt that preparing his children to be independent and take care of many of their own needs through learning different life skills was a valuable skill but also prepared his family for times when he was away from them. He and his wife also routinely assessed their family patterns and practices to determine if they fit with family goals and the tempo of their schedule, which was often shaped by military assignments and requirements. He and his wife recently decided to homeschool their children because of the flexibility of schedule that this offered. Michael and his wife felt that they could maximize the amount of time spent together as a family while still allowing Michael to meet the demands of his leadership role.

**Gary** is a 42-year-old father who had two daughters, ages 7 and 4. Gary has been deployed three times- twice to Iraq and once to Afghanistan. He described balancing work, family, and life roles as a juggling act, where you are juggling chainsaws. He felt that while the Army did have some unique work life stressors, he felt very similar as a dad to a civilian friend of his. He described how the Army offered some great benefits to his family, particularly health care related resources, and the ability to travel and see different parts of the world.

**Ben** is 37-year-old father who has one daughter. He is an officer in the Army- a newly promoted Captain. He is currently separated from his wife. She and their daughter have recently moved out of state. Ben spends a lot of leave time traveling to visit his daughter. He and his wife have established a friendly relationship for the benefit of their daughter. Ben purchased a house for his wife and daughter and has a room there for when he visits. Ben entered the Army as an enlisted soldier and later attended Officer Candidate School to earn his commission as an officer. Ben has been deployed twice- once to Iraq and once to Afghanistan. He discussed his ability to compartmentalize as a way to manage time and balance family and work roles. He also described fatherhood as a “redemption” meaning that there is someone in your life that “you can always be there for” and “treat right.”

**Frank** is a 32-year-old father of three daughters, ages 8, 5, and 2. He has deployed once. He recently received notice that he is eligible to become a warrant officer, transitioning from the enlisted ranks to the officer ranks, following additional training. He had used daddy dolls and Skype communication as a means to connect with his daughters while he was deployed. He and his wife also relied on a strong network of family and friends for support when he was away during deployment or for other work obligations.

**Jon** is a 38-year-old Major as an active duty Army officer. He has four children- two daughters and two sons, ages 6, 4, 2, and 18 months. He has been deployed twice and his second deployment occurred when he was a father. He felt that his ability to focus on work while at

work and home and family life when at home with them was a strength that allowed him to find balance. He felt that this ability to switch between work and family roles and focusing solely on one thing at time enabled him to be effective in fulfilling both roles. He was also greatly valued the support of his wife and her ability to take care of the children and maintain family relationships when he had to focus on work obligations and responsibilities.

**Henry** is a 38-year-old father who has two daughters, ages 11 and 8 years. Henry is currently in the Army National Guard but has also served for a number of years in Army Special Forces. He discussed how his experiences with children while deployed had influenced his relationships with his own daughters. Henry described his relationships with his daughters and wife as an emotional bank account. He felt that he needed to strengthen them and “make deposits” when he was with them in order for them to be able to draw on these positive experiences when he was away. In transitioning from Active Duty Army to the National Guard, Henry was more able to be involved with his daughters’ lives- being involved with attending sporting events and supporting his daughters not only on an emotional level but by also being physically present at different events

**Samuel** is a 36-year-old captain in the Army Reserve. He has also spent time as a member of the active duty Army. He has deployed once and described how this process had influenced his relationships with his two sons, ages 12 and 9. He felt it was difficult for his sons to feel a sense of stability during his deployment because he was away and his wife experienced some health difficulties at the same time. Their family has worked to strengthen relationships and make contingency plans in order to create a stronger sense of connectedness and resiliency.

**Max** is a 50-year-old father of three daughters, ages 24, 22, and 17. He has deployed to combat twice. He described how he has made “little contracts” with his family related to how much he is away from them due to Army assignments and how often they were required to move to a new home. Max described how he turned down some prestigious duty assignments and accepted others because of the needs of his family and their desire for a sense of stability. While the military has influenced how they carried out their relationships, he highlighted how his sense of his role as a father and the importance of this did not change based on his work responsibilities. Max felt that his role as a father was like a “commission from God” and he felt that this dictated the level of importance he should give to this role and the resultant behaviors.

## **Appendix C**

### **Interview Guide Protocol**

#### *Interview Guide*

I'm going to start by asking you a little about you and your family today. As we talk, I'm going to be making a timeline. It will help me get a good picture of the timing of some of the big events in your life.

#### *Background*

- **Family**

- How many children do you have?
- Are you married? How long have you been married/ together?

- **Residence**

- Where are you living now (general area/ description)?
- How long have you lived there?
- Who do you live with?
- [If not residing with child(ren)] Who is/ are your child(ren) living with?

- **Military service and related training**

So, what branch of the service are you in?

- What is your rank? MOS? Current status in the military?
- How did you decide to join the Army (*or substitute in other branch as needed*)?
- What kind of schooling or training have you had? (How long/ level of attainment/certifications- *use these follow up probes, as needed*)

- **Military history**

- Is your spouse in the military? If yes, how do you manage care of your child(ren) (who else is involved in care of child(ren))?
- Let's go over your deployment history. When were you first deployed? When was your next deployment? (continue with this until all deployments described).

### *Family and Military Contexts*

- **Family context**

- When did you first become a father? When did you find out that you were going to be a father?
- What was it like for you to find out you were going to be a father (*If occurred while in the military, ask about transition and thoughts about work- family*)?

- **Father ideals**

- What does it mean to be a father? How has this changed since you first thought about being a father?
- Who taught you to be a father?
- What kinds of things does a “good father” do? Has your definition of what a “good father” does changed? If so, how?

- **Father-child bond**

- How would you describe the relationship or connection between you and your child(ren)?
- How does a father create a strong, positive relationship with his child(ren)?

- Do you think your relationship with the mother of your child(ren) influences what you do as a father? If so, how?
- **Military context**
  - What does it mean to be a father in the military (*or military dad or other- depending on what label interviewee uses*)?
  - If you had to describe the process of becoming a military father to another serviceman who has just had a child, what would you say?
  - Do you think how you are as a father differs from a civilian father? How so?
- **Living between two contexts**
  - Some servicemen have talked about the different roles they play, both when they are deployed and when they are at home- like military responsibilities, father responsibilities, husband/ partner responsibilities, community responsibilities, extended family responsibilities. What is it like for you balancing different roles?
  - What has your experience been like in balancing being a member of the Army and being a member of your family?

***Strategies and Resources for Positive Fathering***

- How do you stay connected to your child(ren) when:
  - You are living at home?
  - Preparing for deployment?
  - Deployed?
  - Back home following deployment?

*(Examples, if needed, may include support of wife/ partner, extended family, military programs, online resources, community programs)*

- Tell me a little about what it is like to manage work and family demands.
- What kinds of things help in managing the different roles you play?
- What kinds of things make it difficult to balance different roles?
- **Deployment and distance**
  - What is your management of different roles like when you are getting ready for deployment? During deployment? When back home after deployment?
  - What advice have you gotten about staying connected with your child(ren) when preparing for deployment? While deployed? When returning home?
  - Where/ from whom have you gotten this advice?
  - What specific programs, resources, or strategies have you found especially useful in helping you as a father while at home? When you are away during deployment?
  - How does/has deployment changed what you expect to do as a father? How is this the same as when you are living at home? How is it different?

***Process of Pre-deployment, Deployment, and Reunification and Fathering***

- What are things that help you stay *(use interviewee words/ description as appropriate)* connected to/ involved with/ feel close to your child(ren) when at home? When you are preparing for deployment? How about when you are deployed? Back home after deployment?

- Have these strategies changed as your children have gotten older? (*If the father has*) As you've been deployed and come home repeatedly? After seeing what works and what doesn't during deployment and reunification?
- Are you two different fathers- when you are at home and when you are deployed? If yes, how so? If no, why not?
- When deployed, what is communication/contact with your child(ren) like?
- How often and in what ways do you use the following forms of communication:
  - Phone
  - Text messaging
  - Email
  - Letters
  - Postcards
  - Photos
  - Teleconferencing
  - Webcam
  - Audio and video recordings (in advance and during deployment)
  - Other forms of communication?
- Are there any barriers to being involved with your child(ren) when you are at home? How about when you are deployed? Back home after deployment?
- What things support you as a father when you are at home? Preparing for deployment? Deployed? Back home after deployment?
- As I'm sure you know, some lengths of deployments have been increasing, as well as the frequency, and the time between deployments may be shorter. What

has your experience been like? Has this had any influence on your fathering/  
relationship(s) with your child(ren)? If so, in what ways?

If there were one last thing you could tell me to better understand your experiences as a father in the military, what would that be?

**Appendix D**  
**Interview Informed Consent Form**

<b>Project Title</b>	Military Fathers and Families: Experiences Across Contexts, Space, and Time
<b>Purpose of the Study</b>	<i>This research is being conducted by Dr. Kevin Roy and Nicolle Buckmiller Jones at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a father in the Army with at least one child between the ages of 5 and 12 years. You have also been deployed at least once. The purpose of this research project is to better understand the relationship between fathers and their children as they balance the demands of being in the military, preparing for deployment, being deployed, and reuniting with their children.</i>
<b>Procedures</b>	<p><i>You will be asked to participate in an interview about your experiences as a father in the military. The interview will last approximately 90 minutes. Examples of the type of questions asked include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>○ How does a father create a strong, positive relationship with his child?</i></li> <li><i>○ What does it mean to be a father in the military?</i></li> <li><i>○ What advice have you gotten about staying connected with your child when preparing for deployment? While deployed? When returning home?</i></li> </ul> <p><i>The interviews will be conducted at the Army Community Service Centers in Ft. Meade, MD or Ft. Myer in Arlington, VA. As a part of participating in this study, you will be offered minimal compensation in the form of access to all findings and reports as well as an art activity kit for your child. All interviews will be audio recorded.</i></p>
<b>Potential Risks and Discomforts</b>	<i>There may be some risks from participating in this research study. Discussing your experiences as a military father may evoke uncomfortable emotions or cause you to reflect on personal and/or familial situations that may cause you some discomfort. If needed or desired, referrals to individual and family support services and/or mental health and family therapy services can be given.</i>
<b>Potential Benefits</b>	<i>There are no direct benefits to participants. However, possible benefits include an increased awareness of certain strategies and experiences that have helped you to strengthen your relationship with your child or children. We hope that, in the future, other people might benefit from this study through improved understanding of how military fathers negotiate different roles in their families and in the military. The information gathered could also be used to inform others of strategies and resources that can support fathers and strengthen family relationships through the transitions of deployment and reunification.</i>

<b>Confidentiality</b>	<p><i>Interviews will be recorded using an audio digital recorder. Recordings and subsequent data will be stored in a locked file cabinet and password protected computer. All persons involved in the transcription of interviews will sign a confidentiality agreement. To protect your privacy, a pseudonym and code number will be assigned to you following the interview and transcripts and data used in the analyses will utilize this pseudonym and code number. Only the researcher will have access to the identification key. Data will be securely maintained until the conclusion of the military father study at which point it will be destroyed.</i></p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards your information may be shared with the appropriate authorities if there is any disclosure of (1) physical, emotional, and/or sexual abuse of children or disabled/elderly adults, (2) serious intent to do harm to yourself or others, and (3) any other situations in which we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
<b>Medical Treatment</b>	<p><i>The University of Maryland does not provide any medical, hospitalization or other insurance for participants in this research study, nor will the University of Maryland provide any medical treatment or compensation for any injury sustained as a result of participation in this research study, except as required by law.</i></p>
<b>Right to Withdraw and Questions</b>	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p><i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator, Kevin Roy at: 1142T School of Public Health Building University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742-7515, 301-405-6348, or <a href="mailto:kroy@umd.edu">kroy@umd.edu</a> or to Nicolle Buckmiller Jones at: 801-712-4216 or <a href="mailto:nbuckmil@umd.edu">nbuckmil@umd.edu</a>.</i></p>
<b>Participant Rights</b>	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: <a href="mailto:irb@umd.edu">irb@umd.edu</a> Telephone: 301-405-0678</b></p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>
<b>Statement of Consent</b>	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have</i></p>

	<p><i>been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
<b>Signature and Date</b>	<b>NAME OF SUBJECT</b> <b>[Please Print]</b>	
	<b>SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT</b>	
	<b>DATE</b>	

**Appendix E**  
**Summary of Questions and Results Chapters**

	Chapter 5: Question 1	Chapter 6: Question 2	Chapter 7: Question 3
Organizing Question	How do men create roles and identities as fathers within and across the military context and the family context?	What strategies and resources do father utilize to support positive fathering when living with and apart from their families?	How does the process of pre-deployment, deployment, and reunification shape men’s fathering over time?
Summary of Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Meaning of Being a Father</li> <li>-Army Core Values and Fathering</li> <li>-Army Pride</li> <li>-Time Management and Organization</li> <li>-The Give and Take of Army Fathering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Communication Lifeline</li> <li>-The Emotional Bank Account</li> <li>-Remotely Sharing the Load</li> <li>-Maximize Pre-deployment time and Leave</li> <li>-Fostering Independence in Children</li> <li>-Access Faith and Religious Networks</li> <li>-Support and Influence of Mothers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Different Dads</li> <li>-Mental Health and “Getting Myself Right”</li> <li>-We Do It For Them</li> <li>-Follow My Family’s Lead</li> </ul>
Distinguishing Concepts For Themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Compartmentalization &amp; Decompression</li> <li>-“Army is a Family Too”</li> <li>-“Those Kids”</li> <li>- “Your Kids Are Not Your Soldiers”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Creative Communication Behaviors and Routines</li> <li>-Focus on Quality Time</li> <li>-Following your Child’s Lead for developmentally appropriate fathering</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Downrange Dad vs. Civilian Dads</li> <li>-Deployment Heightens Appreciation</li> <li>-Finding Patience Again</li> <li>-Putting on a “Tough Guy” Face</li> </ul>
Focus on Context, Space, and/or Time			

**Appendix F**  
**Army Values (U.S. Army, 2013a)**



Many people know what the words Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage mean. But how often do you see someone actually live up to them? Soldiers learn these values in detail during Basic Combat Training (BCT), from then on they live them every day in everything they do – whether they're on the job or off. In short, the Seven Core Army Values listed below are what being a Soldier is all about.

**Loyalty**

Bear true faith and allegiance to the U.S. Constitution, the Army, your unit and other Soldiers. Bearing true faith and allegiance is a matter of believing in and devoting yourself to something or someone. A loyal Soldier is one who supports the leadership and stands up for fellow Soldiers. By wearing the uniform of the U.S. Army you are expressing your loyalty. And by doing your share, you show your loyalty to your unit.

**Duty**

Fulfill your obligations. Doing your duty means more than carrying out your assigned tasks. Duty means being able to accomplish tasks as part of a team. The work of the U.S. Army is a complex combination of missions, tasks and responsibilities – all in constant motion. Our work entails building one assignment onto another. You fulfill your obligations as a part of your unit every time you resist the temptation to take “shortcuts” that might undermine the integrity of the final product.

**Respect**

Treat people as they should be treated. In the Soldier's Code, we pledge to “treat others with dignity and respect while expecting others to do the same.” Respect is what allows us to appreciate the best in other people. Respect is trusting that all people have done their jobs and fulfilled their duty. And self-respect is a vital ingredient with the Army value of respect, which results from knowing you have put forth your best effort. The Army is one team and each of us has something to contribute.

**WWW.ARMY.MIL/VALUES**

### Selfless Service

Put the welfare of the nation, the Army and your subordinates before your own. Selfless service is larger than just one person. In serving your country, you are doing your duty loyally without thought of recognition or gain. The basic building block of selfless service is the commitment of each team member to go a little further, endure a little longer, and look a little closer to see how he or she can add to the effort.

### Honor

Live up to Army values. The nation's highest military award is The Medal of Honor. This award goes to Soldiers who make honor a matter of daily living – Soldiers who develop the habit of being honorable, and solidify that habit with every value choice they make. Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity and personal courage in everything you do.

### Integrity

Do what's right, legally and morally. Integrity is a quality you develop by adhering to moral principles. It requires that you do and say nothing that deceives others. As your integrity grows, so does the trust others place in you. The more choices you make based on integrity, the more this highly prized value will affect your relationships with family and friends, and, finally, the fundamental acceptance of yourself.

### Personal Courage

Face fear, danger or adversity (physical or moral). Personal courage has long been associated with our Army. With physical courage, it is a matter of enduring physical duress and at times risking personal safety. Facing moral fear or adversity may be a long, slow process of continuing forward on the right path, especially if taking those actions is not popular with others. You can build your personal courage by daily standing up for and acting upon the things that you know are honorable.

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