

Being a Father in the Military: An Exploration of Six Canadian Veterans Subjective

Experiences

by

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B.A., University of Calgary, 2007

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of

MASTERS OF ARTS

in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership Studies

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Abstract

This study used a qualitative approach to explore the experiences of six veterans, who were employed by the military and who were fathers at the time of their military employment. Semi-structured interviews with participants were used as the primary method of data collection. The researcher asked participants, “What do I need to know to understand what it is like to be a father in the military?” Additional probing questions were used to clarify and expand on the participants’ experiences of bonding emotionally with their children as a father in the military, as well the participants’ experiences of separating from their family and subsequently reuniting following military deployments and occupational travel. Using thematic analysis, the researcher constructed the following themes: (1) “You miss out” (2) “You feel like an outsider” (3) “You try to disconnect from family to deal with work” and (4) “The military comes first.” The current research adds to our understanding of the subjective experience of fatherhood in the military. The themes extracted will be helpful in delineating valuable counselling strategies for fathers in the military, as well as developing military policies and practice that support these fathers in their contribution to the healthy development of their children.

Table of Contents

Title Page	i
Supervisory Committee	ii
Being a Father in the Military: An Exploration of Six Canadian Veterans Subjective Experiences	ii
Abstract	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Figures	vi
Being a Father in the Military: An Exploration of Six Canadian Veterans Subjective Experiences	1
Chapter 1	1
Background	1
Rationale for the study	4
Research Topic and Question	6
Chapter 2	7
Review of the Relevant Literature	7
Role of the Father Underrepresented in Academic Literature	7
Nature and nurture	10
Attachment	12
Fatherhood in Academic Literature	15
The father role is different to that of the mother	20
Factors contributing to family stress in military families	27
Deployment	27
Exposure to traumatic stress	32
Other features of military life	35
Gender Roles	36
Abuse	37
Stress and Substance Use	38
Physical injury and somatic complaints	39
Summary	40
Chapter 3	42
Method	42
Qualitative Research	42
Phenomenological Research	44
Rationale for Qualitative Methodology	46
Participants	47
Recruitment	50
Data Collection	50

Interview Procedures	52
Analysis of the Data.....	53
Ethical Considerations	55
Research Rigor.....	59
Location of the Researcher	61
Transparency.....	65
Member Checking.....	65
Verification Strategies	66
Chapter 4.....	69
Results.....	69
Theme 1: You miss out.....	69
Theme 2. You feel like an outsider.....	70
Theme 3: You try to disconnect from family to deal with work	72
Theme 4: The military comes first.....	74
Summary of Findings.....	75
Chapter 5.....	77
Discussion and Conclusion.....	77
Findings in Relation to Previous Research Literature	77
Literature on challenges in the military	77
Attachment.....	81
Unique findings.....	84
Deployment.....	84
“You miss out”.....	85
“You feel like an outsider”	86
“You try to disengage”	87
“The military comes first”	89
Limitations.....	91
Recommendations for Future Research.....	96
Implications for Practice.....	98
Summary and Conclusions	100
References.....	102
Appendix A. Subject Informed Consent Form	116
Appendix B. Invitation to Participate Poster	120
Appendix C. Interview scripts	121
Appendix D. Counselling Resource List	123
Appendix E. Demographic Questions	126

List of Figures

Figure 1. Quality framework for qualitative research.....61

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Chapter 1

Background

Historically, fatherhood has played a less prominent role than motherhood in both the academic literature and society in general (Lamb, 1982; Mackay, 2001). Fathers are often seen as support providers in parenting and “second fiddle” (Bowlby, 1973, p.15) to the mother. As care giving support, fathers have been recognized as filling the roles of protector and provider in a very general sense. Traditional divisions of labor often require the father to leave the home while the mother stays in the home. Historically, some occupations have required fathers to travel great distances from the home and remain removed for extended periods of time. For example, both in historical and contemporary societies, soldiers have often had to leave their homes for significant periods of time, leaving their families behind. Only recently have the effects of absent fathers begun to be explored and examined critically.

Over the past three decades the role of the father, though still overshadowed by the role of the mother, has received considerably more attention (Daly, 1993; Lamb, 2000; Roy, 2008). New research and literature in the area of fatherhood is beginning to emerge with greater frequency and often challenges previous assumptions held with regards to the role of fathers (Lamb). This new research has begun to identify fathering situations and practices that are beneficial to the development of children. Rather than dismissing the role of fatherhood as secondary, protective, or purely instrumental, more recent research has begun to look at the contributions of fathers independent of the

contributions of the mother. It has been recognized that fathers play a vital and unique role in the development of their children (Gottman, 1997; Mackey, 2001; Pollack, 1999). Further, rather than providing tertiary support to the mother's primary relationship, it has been found that fathers have individual bonds with their children that are exclusive to the bond that is shared between the mother and the child, and that these bonds are also unique in their positive contribution to the development of the child (Mackay, 2001).

The relationship between a parent and a child has been found to be a highly influential and a dominant feature in child development. One theory that examines this relationship in great detail is attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969; Karen, 1998). Current literature suggests that fathers who are securely attached to their children better prepare their children to explore and interact with the outside world. Securely attached children have been found to have fathers that are both present and available to their children. According to Bowlby (2006), having a "secure base" provides children with the perceived safety necessary to begin to move outward from caregivers and better explore and more fully interact with the world outside the home.

However, just being a dependable physical presence is not enough; fathers must also be emotionally present with their children in order to more positively influence healthy development. Emotionally responsive fathers prepare their children to interact effectively both outside and inside the home. Current literature suggests that fathers who are both physically and emotionally present are essential in optimal development (Gottman, 1997; Karen, 1998).

Although research and academic literature for the past two decades in the area of fatherhood supports the critical role of the father in child development, other segments of

society will likely be slower to adopt these findings. For example, occupations with a long tradition of implementing policies influenced by anachronistic views of acceptable fathering may be slower to change. An example of this is military employment where long absences are required but has been described as harmful in academic literature (Peebles-Kleiger & Kleiger, 1994). As such, some occupations place fathers in situations directly opposed to practices supported by current research. In some occupations, fathers may be forced to choose between what society expects, what their job expects, and what they themselves value. These decisions are further complicated when, as noted, what is expected by one role is diametrically opposed to what is expected by the other.

At first glance, it appears as though some occupations (e.g., military) do not allow fathers to take full advantage of practices that have been described as beneficial in the nurturing of healthy development in offspring, such as physical (Bowlby, 2006) and emotional (Gottman, 1997) availability. Some of the key challenges identified by previous literature on military families include physical absence (Bowling & Sherman, 2008), relocation (Hanson, 1985), and exposure to traumatic stress (Ruscio, Weathers, King & King, 2002). Based on a review of this and other literature looking at fathers in the military and families in the military, the military appears to provide a work environment that at times is in direct opposition to current knowledge of beneficial fatherhood practices (Bowlby, 2006; Gottman, 1997). For example, father's who are in the military may experience extended work related absences, often in the form of "deployments" (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson. 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Vormbrock, 1993) that make the maintenance of consistent physical availability to offspring difficult if not impossible. Essentially, a tension may be experienced between performing

successfully in an occupation and effectively taking advantage of current knowledge of positive fathering. How fathers experience this tension is currently unknown, as limited, if any, research is available that looks at the unique experience of fathers in the military from the perspective of the father.

Rationale for the study

Previous research on military families has identified a number of unique features in military employment. Two of these features that appear regularly in the literature, and directly relate to what is currently known about emotionally and physically available fathering, are deployments (Taft, Schumm, Panuzio & Proctor, 2008) and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Ruscio, Weathers, King & King, 2002). Research shows that both deployments and PTSD have a number of negative effects on relationships. As discussed, fathers are most beneficial when emotionally and physically present in their children's lives (Bowlby, 2006; Gottman, 1997). According to research on military families, deployments and PTSD can negatively influence the father's ability to remain physically and emotionally present (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Ruscio, Weathers, King & King, 2002; Vormbrock, 1993). Previous literature also suggests that military relationships are often wrought with interpersonal problems and challenges relating to communication and connection between spouses, and between parents and children.

Previous research has identified the problematic nature of emotional numbing, occupational separation, and other features of military work. However, despite widespread recognition, previous research has not looked at the subjective experiences of military fathers whose career has included deployments and exposure to traumatic stress.

The father's perspective may provide both a unique perspective and the clearest window into potential solutions, as the father, or the system surrounding the father, will likely be some of the primary agents involved in addressing any of the problems uncovered.

Studies that have explored the topic of military families and military fatherhood have often emphasized, or focused, on the negative occupational features of military life (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Ruscio, Weathers, King & King, 2002; Vormbrock, 1993). These issues and challenges are largely explored in terms of their effect on wives and children, but often fail to recognize, or further explore, the experience of the military father. A search of PsychINFO and Academic Search Complete databases using the keywords "Military", "Fathers", "Families", and "Deployment" in all combinations revealed no previous research that sought to thoroughly examine the experiences of fathers in the military. This examination is essential for addressing the challenges faced by military fathers and the consequent effects on the healthy development of their children. A more complete and comprehensive understanding of the father's experience of life in the military will be a valuable first step towards developing or improving beneficial theory, policy, and practice in this critical area. Fathers' experiences of a career with a number of recognized challenges to interpersonal and family life is yet unknown. Approaching the phenomena of fatherhood in the military from the fathers' perspectives will help fill a gap in the current literature.

The specific areas of interest investigated in this study include the military father's experience of physical disconnection, emotional disconnection, and physical reconnection. Previous literature has been largely one-sided in approaching military

relationships. Rather than merely identifying challenges, the qualitative approach adopted in the current research will provide a venue for these challenges to be explored and discussed in terms of the breadth and depth of the fathers' experiences.

The current study employed a qualitative semi-structured interview method. The particular method was selected based on its ability to provide a more holistic, inductive, and in-depth view of the subjectively experienced lives of the participants. The current research asked participants "What do others need to know in order to understand what it is like to be a father in the military?"

Research topic and question

Broadly, the current research looks at the interaction between the role of fatherhood and a career that requires massive individual and family commitments. The purpose of the current research is to explore the experiences of fathers in the military, discussing and contrasting these experiences with current literature on positive fathering practices. The general research question asked by the current research is, "What do I need to understand to know what it is like to be a father in the military?"

Chapter 2

Review of the Relevant Literature

The topic explored by the current research is fatherhood in the military. The literature discussed will include a historical overview of parenting, and specifically fatherhood, in academic literature. Further, literature that discusses some of the specific challenges related to military families and military fatherhood will be presented.

Role of the father underrepresented in academic literature

Though the influence of parenting on the development of children is well represented in literature, the unique influence of the father's role is not. The role of parents in shaping the development of their children has been an important topic in psychology since its conception over a century ago. Freud, often considered the "father of modern psychology", made reference to the quintessential primary relationship shared between the parent and the child in many of his writings (Cath, Gurwitt, & Ross, 1982). In fact, those wishing to recognizably impersonate Freud often need to do little more than don an Austrian accent while asking, "zo, tell me about your mozzah?" At the time of Freud, patriarchal family structures were expected and normal (Mander, 2001). Fathers served unchallenged as both the providers and rulers of most homes. Freud saw that the parent-child relationship, in early childhood, had a critical impact on psychological development. Freud's work initially looked at specific individual interactions between parents and their children but later recanted much of this work in favor of theories that were dominated by ideas childhood fantasies and projections as opposed to genuine interactions (Herman, 1997).

Freud's initial work largely focused on the father's patriarchal role in the home, as would be expected, based on common family structures of his time. The conflictual and emotional nature of the parent-child relationship is best illustrated by his Oedipal theorizing. Oedipal theories asserted that between the ages of three and five, during the "Oedipal Phase" in ego development, children are sexually drawn towards opposite sexed parents. Young girls, in recognizing they do not possess a penis, become envious of the penis and desire men, initially the father. On the other hand, young boys experience Oedipal rivalry with the father, competing for the mother's sexual attention. (Cath, Gurwitt & Ross, 1982; Rycroft, 1995). Followers of Freud, however, shifted from an emphasis on the central patriarchy present in Freud's time to more maternally biased models, such as object relations theory (Fairbairn, 1952) and attachment theory (Bowlby, 1997), following the First World War (Cath, Gurwitt & Ross, 1982).

Freud and his early followers maintained that children's *fantasized* or projected realities with parents were the key influences in healthy and unhealthy psychological development (Karen, 1998). As such, many of Freud's early followers failed to recognize fully the importance of the *experienced* external environment of the child. The physical features of the home and the parenting relationships were not understood to be the most relevant features in a child's psychological development. Instead, like Freud, many early followers focused on "imagined" relationships and fantasies towards parents as shaping features in a child's socio-emotional development (Karen, 1998).

Object Relations emerged as an extension of the early childhood "fantasy" driven theories pioneered by Freud. An example of these can be seen in Melanie Klein's 1948 essay on childhood anxiety and guilt. In this essay she writes, "When I analyzed infantile

anxiety-situations, I recognized the fundamental importance of sadistic impulses and phantasies from all sources which converge and reach a climax in the early stages of development.”(p. 27) According to Object Relations theory, the first and primary relationship experienced by children is not with the mother or father, but with the mother’s breast. This breast becomes the “object” upon which frustrations and pleasures are projected. Early Object Relations theory removed actual parenting behaviours from the sphere of influence in the academic literature: the child’s fantasies were not projected onto the parent directly. Object Relations theory stated that the fantasies, were in fact projected onto the body part of the parent with the most utility to the infant - the breast.

In stark contrast to these theories, Bowlby’s (1997) research of “real” and non-fantasized caregiver behaviours suggested that the parents’ behaviours directly influenced child development. Bowlby’s research findings challenged the theoretical assumptions of Object Relations Theory and early psychoanalytic theories. Bowlby’s early work with orphans recognized and described some of the outcomes for children who were deprived of warm and intimate relationships with caregivers. Bowlby theorized that actual, and not fantasized, parental care was of “vital importance” for a child’s “future mental health” (Bowlby, 1990, p. 13).

The emphasis on fantasy as opposed to genuine environments placed responsibility for developmental outcome within the child, as if it was the child’s fantasy with regard to the role of the parent and not the parents’ actual behavior that was responsible for the child’s development. According to early psychoanalytic theories centered on fantasized parental interactions and related stage progressions, the child’s ability to navigate the stages successfully determines the type and degree of difficulty they will experience.

Recognizing the developmental impact of the actual lived environment of the child suggests the environment, including the parent's behaviour is responsible for the child's development and parent's behaviours can be viewed as contributors to problems the child experiences in development. As such, variations in external environments directly influence the emotional, psychological, and physical development of the child and require the thoughtful attention of the caregivers in order to maximize healthy development.

It was not until Bowlby's work emerged that the powerful influence of the external features in the environment, and more specifically children's early relationships, were examined as important in a child's development (Karen, 1998). Essentially, Bowlby took the problem from within the child and placed some responsibility back in the hands of parents, a move that would initiate a great deal of controversy in the years following its emergence and dissemination (Karen, 1998). As such, modern theories in early child development espouse the view that the "real" environment experienced by the child is critical in development, rather than fantasies and projections. As such, researching the "real" parenting behaviors and characteristics of a child's home became much more important than working with the child's fantasies and projections (Karen, 1998).

Nature and nurture

Another early and ongoing debate in psychology has revolved around the idea of nature vs. nurture: how much of what an individual becomes is determined by genes (nature) and how much is determined by the environment (nurture)? At one end of the debate, behaviorists such as John B. Watson, (1930) asserted that the environment was the key feature in determining the behaviour of the developing child. At the other end of

the spectrum, supporters of the eugenics movement, such as Arnold Gesell (1928) asserted that genetics were the primary determinant of behaviour. Essentially, according to genetic determinists, caregivers matter little and the developing child will develop based on internal factors regardless of the quality of care and home environment the child experiences (Karen, 1998).

Research over the past few decades has shown that both nature and nurture play critical roles in a child's development (West & King, 1987). Individually focusing on either nature or nurture without taking the other into account provides a narrow and incomplete view of development. Further, ongoing debates between nature and nurture typically espouse a view that the two are not mutually exclusive. It is believed that both nature and nurture play a role, but how big a role is played by each, and which feature is more influential appears to be the primary area of contention. The current debate essentially asks "how much of each?" as opposed to "which one?" Further, some researchers have begun to include the role of other influences such as spirituality (McLafferty, 2006). Further, building on previous work, some researchers are developing complex models that describe the interconnectivity of nature and nurture and their reciprocal influences on each other (Meaney, 2001). Despite the ongoing debates, there is much consensus around the idea that some environments are distinctly better than others in terms of psychological and emotional developmental impact. Summarizing the argument succinctly, psychologist Donald Hebb is attributed to have said that debating over nature or nurture is akin to debating whether length or width contributed more to the area of a rectangle (Meaney, 2001). It is clear that environment does play an important role in a child's physical, psychological, and emotional development. Furthermore,

compared to role of genetics, environment is a feature that can be altered with relative ease. One of the most monumental and enduring environmental features in a developing human's life is the relationship experienced between a child and his or her parents. This critical early relationship is the first relationship experienced by most humans. This initial and quintessential human relationship has been the focus of attachment theory for the last half a century. The genesis of this literature can be traced back to British psychoanalyst and father of attachment theory, John Bowlby. Attachment theory has since formed the keystone upon which modern parenting strategies are often built (Bowlby, 2006; Karen, 1999).

Attachment

Attachment theory is the predominant framework adopted when looking at parent-child interaction in early childhood within contemporary psychology. John Bowlby, in observing the characteristics of young orphan thieves in England, began to hypothesize the nature and role of early parental bonding and the effect this bonding has on emotional development (Karen, 1998). The theory was expanded with Ainsworth's conception of Security Theory, or the idea that a child derives security from being in proximity to caregivers (Bowlby, 2006). This felt "security", according to Ainsworth, enables the child to begin to explore their external world (Karen, 1999). Security theory, and the concept of caregivers providing a "secure base" (Bowlby, 2006), is essential to attachment theory and has served as a catalyst for academic exploration of the importance of early relationships. Security theory led to the development of the Strange Situation (Ainsworth, Bell & Stayton, 1971) behavior task in which an infant's ability to draw on, and have confidence in the security derived from a parent was observed. Attachment

researchers hypothesize that insecurity and security in the strange situation behavior task can identify key emotional relationship features between a children and caregivers (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971). The strange situation behavior task allowed researchers to correlate parenting behaviors with the sense of security the child derives from the parental bond, and subsequently the effect this attachment has on the child's behavior.

Three principle patterns of attachment have been identified based on the strange situation behavior task (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971). The first of these patterns is a secure attachment. This pattern is characterized by children who are confident that their caregivers will be “available, responsive, and helpful” (Bowlby, 2006) during periods of elevated anxiety, or risk. These children are self-assured and explore the world independently and actively. Early relationships between securely attached children and caregivers typically involve a parent, or parents, being available, sensitive, and responsive when the child is distressed. The second pattern is that of anxious resistant attachment. In this pattern, the child does not know whether or not the parent will be available during periods of distress. The anxious resistant pattern is marked by uncertainty and anxiety, as the child does not know how the parent, or caregiver, will respond. Early care patterns of anxious resistant children are marked by caregiver inconsistency, in which the caregiver is sometimes available and loving but at other times not. The third pattern described by Ainsworth, Bell and Stayton (1971) is anxious avoidant. In this pattern the child has no confidence that security will be provided in times of distress. Children in this pattern often have little trust in others. This lack of trust is often directed at caregivers and other intimate relationships and as such these children

often have difficulties in social reciprocity. Early relationships with those with anxious-avoidant attachment patterns are typically marked by periods of neglect, unresponsiveness, or abuse. Essentially, when the child needed support early in life there was consistently no one there to provide comfort or security, and sometimes caregivers added to the distress.

In the present study of the experience of military fathers, attachment patterns play an important role. Some occupations, by nature of the tasks and lifestyle, do not allow for the development of healthy attachment. Specifically, many occupations within the military are characterized by long absences and factors that impact the emotional responsiveness of the parent, such as high stress, and repeated exposure to trauma. These considerations, paired with current knowledge of the positive developmental impact of healthy attachment, may suggest the need to make changes to improve conditions currently experienced for both caregivers within these occupations and their children in order to better foster healthy attachment.

Children experience a number of nurturing relationships throughout their early lives and essentially balance a number of individual opportunities for attachment and secure bonding. For example, in a “traditional” household with a mother and a father present, the child has the opportunity for at least two individual attachment relationships, the mother-child attachment and the father-child attachment. Bowlby (1973) originally hypothesized that the primary attachment figure, typically the mother, is essential in determining a representational model of the self in relation to others. Diener, Isabella, and Behunin (2008) describe this representational model as a “prototype” for the relationships that follow. Fox, Kimmerly, and Schafer (1991), in a meta-analysis of 11 studies

examining the concordance of attachment between mother and father, found that an infants attachment style to one parent was correlated to attachment style to the other. Fox, Kimmerly and Schafer (1991) suggested that possible explanations for this were influences of concordant styles of parenting and the influence of infant temperament. However, despite the finding that overall concordance existed between attachment to mother and father, thirty-nine percent of the sample in the meta-analysis displayed non-concordant attachment with mother and father. In these cases, the child was securely attached to one parent but insecurely attached to the other. This finding suggests that, in situations where a secure attachment is not available, or more difficult, with one parent, secure attachment with another caregiver is still possible. More research is needed to identify the outcome of discordant attachment, but previous findings indicate that having at least one secure attachment can serve as a buffer against a number of adverse features (Werner & Smith, 2001).

The current study will focus on military fathers' subjective experiences and, as such, will explore bonding in terms of subjective paternal experience. Historically, as will be discussed, research and the academic literature have biased the mother-child bond. As such, paternal attachment, though long seen as important (Bowlby, 2006), has received limited attention. Research has a substantial lineage of maternal overshadowing in literature relating to child rearing, attachment, and infant development (Lamb, 2000).

Fatherhood in academic literature

Anthropologist Margaret Mead (2001) once wrote, "motherhood is a biological necessity, but fatherhood is a social invention" (p. 170). Pursuing this further she suggested that what comes natural to women has to be learned by men. Essentially, early

beliefs about motherhood suggest an innate biological role of care giving, and an evolutionary attribution and advantage in this area. Similarly, from his observations with Rhesus monkeys, Harry F. Harlow commented that:

“The relative absence of innate biological paternal potential would imply, of course, that the paternal affectional system was not designed to serve an essential biological function. In nonhuman primates, when it occurs, it does often serve as a secondary protective system for infants. Paternal love occurs so irregularly in monkeys and apes, however, that this function appears to be little more than a coincidental consequence of learning to love and protect a baby through frequent contact with the baby’s mother” (Harlow, 1971, p. 63).

Essentially, Harlow believed that male’s seek proximity to females, and that females seek proximity to infants. As such, male relationships with infants were a byproduct of proximity to females rather than an individual bond (Harlow, 1971).

In Bowlby’s ground breaking work with small children and caregivers, and the subsequent development of modern attachment theory, the unique nature of the mother child bond, and the biological predisposition mothers have to this role, has been forwarded adamantly, often to the subjugation of paternal roles (Benson, 1985). As such, the role of the father in child development has been grossly overshadowed both in quantity and in depth by literature exploring and discussing maternal influence and predisposition. Benson (1985) wrote that, “Bowlby’s view assigns the mother a more critical parental function because of the basic physiological imperatives governing the mothers role” (p. 31). Given a mother’s natural ability, and the father’s inability, to

provide physical nourishment to the child via breastfeeding, the same conclusion is often drawn in regards to emotional nourishment.

The physical act of giving birth and being physically able to provide nurturance to newborn children has often been brought forward as evidence pointing towards a maternal care giving bias. For example, Erik Erikson (1964) wrote that a women's "somatic design harbors an inner space destined to bear the offspring of chosen men and, with it, a biological, psychological, and ethical commitment to take care of human infancy . . . whether it be realized in actual motherhood or not." (p. 586) The assumption appears to have been made that because the human male's body is not designed to give birth, or provide physical sustenance in the form of milk, to children that by extension other forms of support and nurturance towards children are also outside of their design and as such unnatural. This assumption can certainly be heard in the voices of Mead (2001), Erikson (1964) and other early commenter's.

Cann (as cited in Berman, 1980) found that when male and female college students were presented paired pictures of adult and infant animals, that women prefer pictures of infants more often than men. However, Berman (1980), in discussing Cann's research, comments that women's preference to pictures of infants did not vary throughout their stages in life but that men's preferences did. Berman states that there was a "significant developmental effect for men, with a significant increase in the choice of infant pictures as their wives moved through the family statuses of marriage, first pregnancy, and mother of infant." (p. 685) Cann (as quoted in Berman, 1980), in discussing this finding, wrote that women are likely "oriented much earlier toward the functions of parenthood than are men." (p. 14) The finding that men's preference changed overtime appears to indicate

that gender socialization may play a role, and further that men are capable of being drawn to infant images, and by extension proximity and bonding.

Mackey (2001) pointed out that women, or the maternal bond that women share with their children, played the dominant role in the literature. Further, it has been commented that this literature rarely discusses the role of the father (Lamb, 1982). This is true in both research and theory. Fatherhood has largely been ignored in theories of child development, despite the existence of fatherhood in all societies (Benson, 1985). Fathers, in a number of historical theories, are seen largely as providing very little more than instrumental support (Benson, 1985).

There are a number of potential explanations for the more frequent investigation of motherhood in academic literature. One possible reason for the historical imbalance of literature favoring a focus on mothers may be the classic consideration that fathers are less important to the development of their offspring (Mead, 2001), and as such warranted less attention. Another possible explanation is that fathers are often less available for research (Karen, 1998). Similarly, research that looks at parental interactions with children is often lopsided: many maternal studies looking at the role of mothers focus on the quality of the interaction, where as studies looking at fathers largely focus on quantity of time spent with the child in relation to that of the mother (Hall, 2005).

Despite the emphasis on the mother-child bond, recent literature endorses the importance of the fathers' role in the development of their children, and that fathers enjoy a unique, and separate bond from that of the mother, with their child (Cabrera, Shannon, & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Fox, Kimmerly & Schafer, 1991; Mackey, 2001). In the preface to the 2006 edition of Bowlby's "A Secure base", and despite Bowlby's emphasis

on the mother-child bond, Jeremy Holmes comments “Bowlby was always insistent that mothers and fathers mattered when it came to providing a secure base” (p. XIV). This necessary and unique relationship has been the focus of a growing body of research over the past few decades and, though still not as prominent as literature on mother and child interactions, has valuable implications for parents, policy makers, and society in general.

The past few decades have seen a shift in views on fatherhood (Daly, 1993; Lamb, 2000; Roy, 2008). Hillman (1996) asserted, “only today is absence so shaming, and declared a criminal, even criminal producing, behavior” (p. 81). Further, simply being present is not enough; fathers are now expected to be more than just “breadwinners” (Griswold, 1993) or the family’s liaison to the outside world. New age fathers are expected to be both involved in the home and outside the home (Daly, 1993; Roy, 2008). It is believed this new societal trend towards a more emotionally and physically engaged practice of fatherhood emerged in the early 1970’s (Lamb, 2000). However, despite modern expectations, Daly (1993) asserts, “conduct of fatherhood, as marked by men’s active participation in child-rearing activities, has been relatively slow to change” (p. 510). In regards to this apparent discrepancy between modern fatherhood expectations and practice Daly asks, “in light of changes in gendered experience in recent years, how do men reconcile the “good provider” model of their father’s generation with the current societal expectation that they be the new nurturant father?” (p. 511). Based on these assumptions, some fathers are walking a delicate line between historic, and current expectations that may create a lose-lose situation where neither expectation can be met, at worst, or at very least, result in excess anxiety and confusion from unclear or unrealistic expectations. However, changes in expectations for modern fathers are supported by

literature emphasizing the positive and, at times, unique role a father can play in the development of a child.

The father role is different to that of the mother

William Pollack (1999) stated that, “Fathers are not male mothers” (p. 113) Despite the long standing emphasis on the role of the mother and the mother-child bond, both historically and currently, a great deal of evidence suggest that fathers have a *unique* bond with their children and also play an important role in their development. Mackay’s (2001) research, drawn from over 55,000 parent child dyads from 23 countries, supported the hypothesis that “fathers possess a unique, predictable, and nontrivial affiliative bond with their children that is separate from any man-woman bond or any woman-child bond.” (p. 25).

Evolutionarily speaking, Mackey suggests that a father who likes his children is more motivated to provide for them, and subsequently attracts a mate seeking a father to nurture their children. Historically, men are often are seen as providers and protectors, as was found in Harlow’s work (1971) with rhesus monkeys. Male rhesus monkeys, according to Harlow’s observations, would not allow mothers to abandon or abuse infants, and also warded off predators or researchers, as the case often was in the laboratory. For such behavior to continue, bonding between the father and infant would provide additional motivation. In writing about fathers and their sons, Pollack (1999) states that, “though they may express it differently than mothers do, studies show that many fathers feel deep empathy for their sons and want to stay closely connected with them.” (p. 116) Pollack’s writing was specifically about boys, but research also supports the existence of connection with daughters as well (Brown, McBride, Shin & Bost,

2007).

Lamb, Hwang, Frodi, and Frodi (1982) found that when children were stressed and both parents were available, infants consistently prefer their mother. Karen (1998), in discussing this finding, wrote that this is evidence for Bowlby's contention that "children arrange their attachment sympathies in a hierarchy". Karen goes on to comment that most children are flexible enough to switch the father to the top of the hierarchy when the mother is unavailable. Also, though Bowlby admitted an emphasis on the mother child bond (Bowlby, 2006), he also cited work by Main and Weston (1981) where no correlation was found between the pattern shown to one parent and that shown to the other. Further, Weston and Main (1981) found that infants with a secure attachment with the father and a non-secure attachment with the mother were more open to forming new relationships with outsiders. This result further suggests a unique role for the father in the emotional and social development of the child.

Karen (1998) writes that, "Although fathers are usually secondary caregivers, they are not merely secondary mothers" (p. 199). One area where the *unique* relationship between father and child has received the strongest support is in regards to play. Harlow (1971), though discounting a biological father-child bond, first discussed the unique role of "play" as it pertains to the father by noticing that fathers participated in a different and far more engaged form of play with the young. Harlow found that father rhesus monkeys would tolerate heightened levels of aggression when engaged in reciprocal play with infants. Similarly, Bowlby (2006) theorized based on his research with human subjects that the father's role is distinctive to that of the mothers. Further, Bowlby comments that this role is especially unique when it comes to play. Bowlby writes that the father "is

more likely to engage in physically active and novel play than the mother and, especially for boys, to become his child's preferred play companion" (p. 12). In his description of this finding, Karen (1998) asserted that in addition to providing a more stimulating and exciting play environment, fathers displayed less overt intimacy and appeared to possess a natural resistance to coddling.

William Pollack (1999) described father son play as "enthralment". He comments that, "while mothers tend to soothe their children and shield them from too much stimulation, the average father is inclined to arouse the emotions and stimulate a boy, playing with him zestfully and "jazzing" him up." (p. 113) This type of play results in joint enthralment and allows the infant the opportunity to experience a wider range of emotion than would be experienced with other types of play. Among others, Pollack cites one of the key benefits of these early interactions as providing the child the opportunity to learn to both tolerate and regulate their feelings in different settings and in a wider range. Fathers who are absent, or emotionally disconnected may lack the resources to offer these valuable interactions, or may do so with less connection and benefit.

Power (1985) found that mothers were typically less directive during play and that fathers would often take responsibility for determining the direction of play but also suggest that this may be a result of the mothers increased familiarity in the area of infant toy play. According to Karen (1998), behaviors like these may serve as a "stepping stone to the outside world where the child will have to relate to people who are not in perfect sympathy and attunement to him" (p. 199). Because the child comes to expect a more robust form of play from the father, fathers become the preferred play companion (Lamb, 1982). Mothers on the other hand, typically engage in more conventional, "containing"

modes of play (Belsky, 1979; Lamb, 1982).

Aside from the period of 12-18 months, where distressed infants typically prefer their mother to their father when distressed, research indicated that such a preference was not evident for both 8 and 24 month old children (Lamb, 1982). Fathers, similar to mothers, have the ability to serve as a “secure base”, during early childhood, from which children feel safe to explore their external environment. Also, children who are securely attached to both the mother and the father have been found to have a social advantage and co-operate better with peers and unfamiliar adults (Lamb, 1982). Further, children securely attached to both the mother and father were found to be more “persistent and enthusiastic in challenging situations” (Lamb, 1982, p. 187), which would suggest greater resiliency. Secure attachments to both parents were found to be more beneficial than a secure attachment to either the mother or the father alone. In addition, recent research has found that children with secure father-child attachment are more social and have better quality social interactions (Lamb, Hwang, Frodi, & Frodi, 1982; Parke, 2002). Secure father-attachment attachment has also been linked to fewer behavior problems (Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999).

Trautmann-Villalba, Gschwendt, Schmidt and Laucht (2006) looked at whether or not father and infant interaction patterns were linked to children’s externalizing behavior problems later in life. The study found that fathers whose behaviors towards their infants displayed lower levels of sensitivity and responsiveness were associated with more externalizing problems at ages eight and eleven years old. This result echoes what is suggested from attachment literature and general current knowledge of beneficial fathering practices. Further, the current research has drawn the major themes of

emotional responsiveness, and emotional and physical availability as two themes relevant to beneficial fathering practice and the highly related potential challenges in military fathering practices.

Spelke, Zelazo, Kagan, and Kotelchuck (1973) looked at children's reactions to unfamiliar individuals based on their interactions with their fathers. Fathers who interacted less with their children were found to have babies that protested the strongest when left in the care of a stranger. Fathers who interacted most frequently with their children typically had babies that reacted minimally to being left with a stranger. This research supports the idea that fathers often provide a bridge to the outside world for the child.

The role of fathers in the development of male offspring has been well documented. Werner and Smith (2001), in their study of resiliency, found that resilient boys often had an active male role model in the home. One of the reasons often suggested for why fathers have been slow to adopt the more emotionally and physically available fathering practices (Griswold, 1993) is that they lack exposure to appropriate male role models (Daly, 1992; Palkovitz, 1984). Fathers then, when effectively engaged and emotionally and physically available, can serve as valuable role models for their children in modeling healthy, emotionally advanced behaviors, especially for male offspring. Further, Shannon, Tamis-LeMonda and Margolin (2005) found that fathers who received greater levels of acceptance from their own fathers engaged in more responsive-didactic behaviors with their own children and less negative-overbearing behaviors. As such, not only has emotionally and physically available fathering been found to produce better developmental outcomes with children, but it also is more likely to produce fathers who

are more capable of being emotionally and physically available to their own offspring in the future.

Some recent academic and popular literature has begun to recognize the unique value of emotionally involved father. John Gottman (1997), in his book titled "*Raising an emotionally intelligent child: The heart of parenting*", asserts that fathers "may influence children in ways that mothers don't, particularly in areas such as the child's peer relationships and achievement at school" (p. 166) Father's who are active and engaged serve a valuable function but, according to Gottman, "not just any dad will do" (p. 167). Children's emotional development is greatly enhanced by fathers who are able to effectively validate, show empathy for, and explore their children's emotions. This difference is often seen in how the child interacts with the outside world. The father can play a unique role in emotionally and physically preparing the child to enter that world. The father's emotional sensitivity is important and has been found to be predictive of similar characteristics developing in their children (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1984).

Easterbrooks and Greenburg (1984) built on this by arguing that qualitative aspects of parenting may be more salient predictors of child development than some of the quantitative measures used to investigate father involvement. For example, the historical reliance on data featuring the time spent with children and its apparent relative benefits, versus the quality of the time spent with the child, may be misleading in predicting trends towards optimal development (Hall, 2005). Not all time spent together is necessarily positive or beneficial. Brown, McBride, Shin and Bost (2007) found that when fathers engaged in negative fathering practices, more interaction was actually related to less secure attachments. Thus, it has been argued that modern research on fathering be based

on measures of positive fathering practices, such as sensitivity, as opposed to traditional measures of quantity of involvement (Brown, McBride, Shin & Bost).

In summary, fathers play an important role in the optimal development of children. Fathers prepare their children to interact with the outside world by providing stimulating play, a male role-model, a secure base from which to explore, and an “emotional coach” to foster healthy emotional development.

The changes in societal expectations around fatherhood suggest that parenting practices have changed over the past few decades and that further change would benefit child development. We do not yet know whether these changes are reflected in the policies within fathers’ workplaces. Are father’s able to take advantage of current knowledge of beneficial fathering practices? Research shows that values and recommendations around fatherhood have changed, but have occupational settings, government policies, and other relevant external factors kept pace with current findings? For example, occupational settings with regular and extended absences were once common for males. Hillman (1996) wrote that historically a father’s “job is elsewhere” (P. 80). Hillman goes on to theorize that fathers are typically described throughout history as belonging away from the “nest.” He states that:

“Fathers have been away for centuries: on military campaigns; as sailors on distant seas for years at a time; as cattle drivers, travelers, trappers, prospectors, messengers, prisoners, jobbers, peddlers, slavers, pirates, missionaries, migrant workers. The work week was once seventy-two hours” (Hillman, 1996, p. 81)

However, current research, as noted, suggests this historical placement of the father is associated with an environment that is less adaptive for the development of his

children. The absent and aloof fathers that dominate historical accounts of manhood appear to be incompatible to some degree with current knowledge on optimal child development. Such occupational absences, when looked at through the perspective of Bowlby's attachment theory, could be highly detrimental to a child's sense of secure bonding with parents and the ability of the child to then explore the outside world. Further, jobs that negatively impact the emotional health of fathers may have detrimental consequences the emotional availability of fathers to their young. Military involvement seems to be a fitting example of one such career where what is expected occupationally appears to be in opposition to the modern emotionally and physically available father that is expected by society, and recognized to be most beneficial in child development.

Factors contributing to family stress in military families

Little, if any, research is available examining the role of fatherhood within the military and the subjective experience of military fathers. However, there is a substantial lineage of literature that has examined some of the unique and, at times, detrimental factors, involved in military service. Specifically, some of the major themes that emerge in the literature on military families are in regards to the effects of deployment, exposure to traumatic stress, instability, stress, and abuse.

Deployment

One of the most common features of military life, often discussed in the context of parenting, is the separation of soldiers from their family when deployed (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Vormbrock, 1993). Much of the research in the area of job-related separation, and specifically military deployments, focuses on the impact it has on those left behind. For example, Julia Vormbrock (1993) reviewed

literature around the wives left behind by military husbands and the impact on secure attachments such job related absences can have. Vormbrock found that spouses responded to job related separations in similar ways, and with similar distress responses to those seen in children when separated from a caregiver. For example, mothers with deployed husbands have been found to show higher levels of negative affect, and these mothers may withdraw emotionally from their children while their husbands are deployed.

How children react to deployments has been another area often discussed. Studies have found that children of deployed parents have shown higher levels of anxiety and depression, though these differences were not always observed by caregivers and other involved adults (Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989). Jensen also suggested that younger children and male children were at greater risk for deployment related problems. Though research suggests that deployments have an effect on all family members (Levai, Kaplan, Ackerman & Hannock, 1995), it has also been found that this affective response is likely experienced differently depending on the age and gender of the child. Slone and Freidman (2008), in addressing returning troops and their families, write that “the impact of separation on your children is difficult to gauge, as it can influence children differently at various developmental stages, but it’s safe to say that separation has a detrimental effect on most children of any age, even babies and toddlers.” (p. 117)

Peebles-Kleiger and Kleiger (1994) described military parent deployment during wartime as a “catastrophic” (p. 179) stressor to children and parents. The criteria that lead to this conclusion were that the deployment during wartime was unexpected, disruptive,

and hazardous. Based on the inclusion of these criteria it would appear that not all deployments are equal in the effect they have on the family.

Another stressful part of military deployment is the return and reintegration of the deployed parent (Mitchum, 1991). Reintegration after absence from the family is a difficult transition for military families to make. Slone and Friedman (2008) comment that, “children often feel resentment, sorrow, or anger when a parent is deployed. Depending on their age, they may also feel a sense of abandonment. Homecoming can also bring back your child’s normal fears of separation.” (p. 128) Both the families left behind and the deployed parent may have made considerable adaptations and changes to cope with their respective stresses during the deployment. Returning home to these changes, especially when combined with the emotional response to the deployment, likely presents a difficult challenge for the family to navigate.

Bowling and Sherman (2008), looked at four key challenges in reintegration after deployment: (a) redefining roles, expectations, and division of labor, (b) managing strong emotions, (c) abandoning emotional constriction and creating intimacy in the relationship, and (d) creating shared meaning. Based on the research on optimal child development and the positive role that a father can play in this process, these tasks, and the ability for fathers to navigate them successfully, seems vitally important in circumventing or minimizing the potential negative effects of a deployment.

Fathers in the military return home to families that have been functioning without them for the duration of their absence. Successfully fitting into this new system takes considerable communication and flexibility (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Doyle and Peterson (2005) comment that, “Not infrequently, when the returning soldier asserts a

claim to prior responsibilities, the spouse is left feeling that her (or his) efforts during deployment are now invalidated” (p. 369). Similarly, returning military members may believe that they are no longer needed, or like they are “outsiders” whereas others may feel exhausted upon return and need time to re-adjust, requiring the patience of their family.

Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid and Weiss (2008) describe returning home as an “ambiguous presence”. In exploring the topic of absence and reintegration after deployment, Faber et al. interviewed sixteen military reservists who were deployed to Iraq for fifteen months and eighteen family members of those deployed. Seven interviews were conducted within the first year of returning home from deployment. Results showed that, when interviewed reservists were away, despite being physically separated, they felt psychologically connected. Upon returning, these participants found many challenges relating to new roles that could not be predicted or prepared for. Some of these challenges included opening communication that had become closed, and navigating the transition between soldier and civilian. Essentially, ambiguity arose when returning soldiers were perceived to be physically present but psychologically absent by their families. In discussing the healthy development of males, James Garbarino states, “Human beings need connection. Disconnection is a threat” (1999, p.41). Deployments represent disconnection on a variety of levels.

Further, though psychological changes and challenges are present upon reunion, changes to the actual physical home environment are also present upon return. For example, children grow physically, emotionally, and intellectually while the father is absent, leaving fathers the difficult task of reconnecting with children that are vastly

different from those they left behind. Children also adjust to changed discipline patterns while fathers are absent: the father is no longer the primary, or expected, source of discipline in the home while away. Re-establishing a pattern of healthy discipline, especially if attempted before a healthy relationship with the child has been re-established, can also be problematic (Weins, & Boss, 2006).

As noted, one key tenet of attachment theory is a sense of security derived from caregivers who are available and responsive (Bowlby, 2006). In the most basic sense, fathers who are absent will have a difficult, if not an impossible, task of creating a sense of availability and responsiveness. Though secure attachments can be formed with other caregivers (Fox, Kimmerly & Schafer, 1991), in removing a father from the home, the father's ability to provide a secure attachment to their child is potentially lost. Further, the additional stress on the family and increased workload assumed by other caregivers, due to the absence of the father, may hamper the ability of remaining caregivers to be responsive and available at a sufficient level to support secure attachment. For example, Kelley (1994) found that mothers had higher levels of depression during pre-deployment, and mid-deployment than during post deployment and that these effects were more pronounced in those with younger children than those with older children. Previous research has found that maternal depression is negatively related to attachment security (Teti, Gelfand, Messinger & Isabella, 1995).

Also related to the elevated family stress levels during deployment is the finding that child maltreatment is higher during times of deployment (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper & Johnson, 2007). Neglect, physical abuse, emotional abuse, and neglect all were found to be higher during periods of deployment and highest during deployments with assumed

risk, such as deployment to active combat. These increases in abuse may further create barriers to the returning father's ability to establish secure attachments and emotional connections with their children.

As noted, the effect of the deployment on the family can have a number of negative effects on military families and the experience of the military father. Not all deployments are equal. Research shows that the duration of the deployment, type of deployment (combat or not), gender of child, age of child during deployment, family stress prior to and during deployment, are a few factors that are important considerations when assessing the impact of deployment. Looking at individual *experience* is important, as few studies have attempted to record how those in the military experience these factors: the focus has often been on those left behind. Further, looking at these experiences through the lens of fatherhood is valuable given the impact that deployments would appear to have on both those deployed and those left at home. Research findings indicate that military families encounter significant challenges related to deployment, but we don't know very much about how military fathers experience those challenges with respect to the fathering role.

Exposure to traumatic stress

Elevated levels of combat exposure have been related consistently to increased post-conflict stress symptoms (Card, 1983; Kulka et al., 1990). Those active in the military, by nature of their employment, have an increased likelihood of being exposed to combat. Further, research has shown that those returning from active combat have elevated rates of relationship problems (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). Studies also consistently report that posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in soldiers returning from active combat

often contributes to relationship problems and violence in relationships (Orcutt, King, & King, 2003; Taft, Schumm, Panuzio, & Proctor, 2008). The nature and intensity of posttraumatic stress is directly related to the ability of the father to be emotionally available and responsive to their offspring (Ruscio, Weathers, King & King). Taft, Schumm, Panuzio, and Proctor (2008) found that the experience of PTSD symptomology was positively co-related to physical aggression in close relationships and attributed this aggression to poorer interpersonal functioning reported by those experiencing PTSD symptomology.

In the available research on military activity and families in the military, the relationships between spouses are an area that has been widely discussed (Gimbel & Booth, 1994; Vormbrock, 1983). Gimbel and Booth (1994) found that when they controlled for age, race, mental aptitude and age at entry, combat exposure had a statistically significant relationship to marital adversity. Further, not only does marital conflict affect child development and parental relationships (Du, Shamir & Cummings, 2004), it also increases stress in the home and marriage, decreasing the ability of either parent to connect emotionally with each other or the child.

Jordan et al. (1992), in discussing the impact of PTSD on relationships, commented that:

“Clinicians often see patients whose symptomatology creates distress for family, friends, fellow workers, and even strangers. Individuals closest to a person with a major psychiatric disorder may suffer most, and the effects of such problems can extend from one generation to the next.” (p. 916).

Research by Jordan et al. (1992) found that families of male veterans with PTSD showed

higher levels of marital and family adjustment problems, parenting skills deficits, and an increase in violent behavior. In reviewing literature surrounding the intergenerational transmission of trauma, Dekel and Goldblatt (2008) found that PTSD diagnosed veterans' parenting was often characterized by controlling, overprotective and demanding relationships with their children. Further, the study indicated that the passing of symptomology from parent to child was common.

Dekel and Goldblatt's (2008) research was largely based upon samples of Vietnam veterans, and as such, may not generalize as easily to more contemporary samples. However, despite the caution, Dekel and Goldblatt suggest that rather than modern conceptualizations of fatherhood serving as a protective factor, that "the increased involvement of fathers in raising their children may intensify transmission of distress from father to son" (p. 287). Though no research has looked at the phenomena of intergenerational PTSD in more recent samples, the potential negative impact of such a suggestion is clear. This becomes even more relevant when looked at in the context of research investigating the quality of the father's interaction with children. If the quality of time spent together is negative, more time, may be harmful to children.

Over the past few decades, a large body of literature has endorsed the link between PTSD and interpersonal difficulties (Gimbel & Booth, 1994; Jordan et al., 1992; Rosenheck & Thomson, 1986). The few studies that have looked at PTSD, as it relates to fathers' relationships with their children, have focused on behavioral features evident in the children of veterans diagnosed with PTSD (Caselli & Motta, 1995; Jordan et al., 1992). One study looking at combat veterans children, found that internalizing and externalizing behaviour problems in children could be predicted reliably by the father's

diagnosis of PTSD and was not related to combat level experienced by the father (Caselli & Motta, 1995).

In one of the few studies that looked at characteristics of the father, Ruscio, Weathers, King and King (2002) collected data from 66 Vietnam veterans. The study compared PTSD symptom clusters with perceived quality of relationship measures. Results indicated that the emotional numbing component of PTSD is the cluster most related to interpersonal impairment, and, specifically, fathers perceived relationship with their children. Similarly, Kashdan, Elhai and Frueh (2006) found that the emotional numbing symptoms of PTSD are also highly related to lowered affect and greater emotional numbing increased the likelihood of being diagnosed with depression (Kashdan, Elhai & Frueh, 2006). Further, research indicates that emotional numbing is an essential PTSD symptom cluster to consider when looking at interpersonal dysfunction (Ruscio, Weathers, King & King).

As discussed, emotional responsiveness and attachment security are two fathering tasks commonly recognized as beneficial to child development (Bowlby, 2006; Gottman, 1997). Current knowledge on both the interpersonal disconnection related to PTSD and the effect of emotional numbing suggests challenges in both of these areas. As such, based on available research, exposure to conflict and trauma may negatively impact a father's ability to connect with their children.

Other features of military life

The two most commonly discussed areas of military life discussed in reference to family relationships are deployment and PTSD; however, there are a number of other features of military life discussed in the literature that may contribute to the experience of

fatherhood in the military. One such feature is the perceived lack of stability in living situations. Hanson (1985) theorized that military life was both “transient and disruptive” and that this lifestyle cannot provide the “secure environment” that children need (p.63). Some military fathers are required to move to fulfill occupational demands and likely experience challenges as a result.

Gender roles

Further, the military has traditionally been considered a highly masculine culture. Hanson (1985) writes that, “consequently men who remain in the service tend to adopt rather traditional sex-role behaviors.” (p.63) However, it has also been asserted that those drawn to military service may do so based on adoption of traditional gender roles prior to military service and that these attitudes may influence the decision to enter military service. For example Jakupcak, Osbourne, Michael, Cook, & McFall (2006) suggest that men who hold more traditional gender roles may be more likely to enter military service. However, current theorizing in the area of gender roles in the military lacks supporting research (Jakupcak, Osbourne, Michael, Cook, & McFall, 2006). In recent years a great deal of energy has gone into “reinventing” fatherhood in favor of a more equal distribution of “breadwinning” and care-giving. An example of this shift can be seen in the Swedish “dual earner, dual-career family” where distribution of “family” tasks and earning is more even between partners (Klinth, 2008). However, despite public emphasis on more equality in parenting roles, Klinth (2008) comments that this drive towards reinvention often presents fathers as “powerless” and not “powerful”. Also, campaigning for modern fatherhood and gender equality, according to Klinth (2008), often reflects more idealism than reality and neglects male resistance. In cultures such as the military,

where gender roles are defined, this resistance or opposition may be more likely than in other groups. Another finding from research in the area shows that mothers were spending more time in the workplace and less time in the home (Pietropinto, 1986). This finding, which over two decades old, was described at roughly the same time as other writers describe a shift in fathering roles taken place (Griswald, 1993; Lamb, 2000), and may be reflective of this. For fathers whose jobs do not allow for adaptation within the home, additional pressure may be placed on both parents.

Pietropinto (1986) surveyed 400 physicians regarding the changing role of fatherhood and found that, according to those surveyed; fathers were spending more time with their children, and played a more active role in their child's development than they had in the past. This trend has also been endorsed by more recent findings (Lamb, 2000). However, despite societal trends or changing perceptions of the father role, occupations entrenched in more traditional gender role identification may deter fathers from making similar changes. Gender roles may also impact outcomes of exposure to traumatic stress and emotional responsiveness. Jakupcak, Osbourne, Michael, Cook and McFall (2006) commented that in working with male military veterans, with a diagnosis of PTSD, a discussion about gender roles in society and military culture is essential. A number of the features commonly associated with PTSD are inherently masculine, such as stoicism in the face of trauma, may compound PTSD symptomology.

Abuse

Research shows that higher rates of abuse have been observed when parents are deployed. Military families have also been found to have a higher incidence of child abuse in general, regardless of parental deployment (Hanson, 1985). Schaefer, Alexander,

Bethke and Kretz (2005) report that national statistics for the United States show that fathers are the perpetrators of physical violence slightly less than mothers (45% vs. 55%), and that men are far less likely to be the perpetrators of reported emotional abuse. Based on these rates, it has been suggested that mothers are over-represented in the literature, and fathers have been underrepresented (Haskett et al., 1996). Haskett et al. (1996) found that there are gender differences in the factors related to abuse, and as such, studies on women likely are not an accurate reflection on fathers' behaviors or factors related to abuse by the father. Within the military, Schafer Alexander, Bethke and Kretz (2005) found that, by gender, the predictors of abuse in the military also varied. Predictors of abuse for fathers were low family expressiveness, and for mothers predictors were found to be marital dissatisfaction, low social support, and low family cohesion. In the context of the surplus of literature detailing both deployment and the emotional numbing symptoms of PTSD within the military, predictors for both spouses seem relevant and likely common. Further, McCarroll, Ursano, Fan and Newby (2004) found that an army sample presented 3 times the rate of emotional abuse to that of a civilian sample drawn from Washington State. The army also classified more cases of severe physical abuse than did a civilian sample (11% vs. 5%) (McCarroll, Ursano, Fan & Newby, 2004). Though more research is needed, looking at abuse both in and outside of the military, specifically as it relates to the behavior of fathers, current information suggests that abuse may be a significant factor impacting the health of military families.

Stress and substance use

Hourani, Williams and Kress (2006) used an anonymous survey of 12,756 active military families in 2002 and found that one third of active military families reported

experiencing “a lot” of occupational stress. In a sample of over 800 military personnel, Pflanz and Ogle (2006) found that more than one quarter endorsed suffering from “significant job stress” (p. 171). Pflanz and Ogle also found that, in their sample, depression and job stress were significantly and positively related to each other. Bray and Hourani (2007) found that over the past two decades cigarette smoking and illicit drug use has decreased significantly in the military, but heavy alcohol consumption has remained relatively stable and was endorsed by nearly twenty percent of their sample. Whether deployed, returning, or active and not deployed, increased stress and substance abuse are further factors that affect both the father’s ability to bond with his children and how he experiences his role as father.

Physical injury and somatic complaints

In addition to the increased risk of psychological injury and strain, military service members exposed to traumatic war zones are at increased risk for physical injury. Some injuries, such as loss of limb or eyesight, spinal chord injuries, and traumatic brain injuries, among others, can cause considerable change that dramatically impacts the military service member and their family. Learning to live with these changes, and making the necessary adaptations can significantly increase stress, financial burdens, and require great physical and emotional sacrifice. In addition to the more obvious and observable injuries, less easily observed health problems have been reported as well. Slone and Friedman (2008) state that, “deployed troops who experience trauma often report more physical health issues, such as headaches, nausea, or other stomach problems.” (p. 185) Vision problems, hearing loss, paralysis, neck and back pain, chronic fatigue, bronchitis, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, migraines, and other

psychosomatic problems have also been linked to exposure to trauma (Levine, 1997). Levine (1997) comments that, “any physical system capable of binding the undischarged arousal caused by trauma is fair game.” (p. 165) Further, current research deals with reported symptoms and it is unknown what percentage of experienced injury, illness or pain go unreported and as such are unavailable for research data.

Summary

The role of father, though underrepresented in academic literature, is integral and unique to that of the mother (Lamb, 1982). Fathering practices have been found to dramatically impact the positive development of children (Spelke, Zelazo, Kagan & Kotelchuck, 1973) and responsive fathers have been found to be beneficial in preparing children to interact more effectively with the outside world (Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999). Two critical parenting practices that have been described in the literature as beneficial to children’s emotional and psychological development are: (a) creating a secure base (Bowlby, 2006) and (b) being emotionally responsive (Gottman, 1997). Secure bonding and the subsequent healthy attachment of children allows them to explore their environment, take risks, and develop healthy self-awareness (Karen, 1998). Emotionally responsive parents are able to not only recognize and respond to the emotions of their children in a nurturing manner, but also provide models for healthy emotional expression, regulation and awareness (Gottman). Parents employed by the military may face a number of challenges in these areas (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). Deployments may drastically limit the physical and emotional availability of parents (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989; Kelley, 1994; Mitchum, 1991; Vormbrock, 1993). Further, exposure to trauma may emotionally numb fathers and negatively impact how

emotionally responsive they are to their children (Monson, Price, Rodriguez, Ripley & Warner, 2004; Ruscio, Weathers, King & King, 2002). Currently, the literature suggests negative impacts on children, and families of those deployed or exposed to trauma, but does not tell us how these phenomena are experienced by the father who experiences the trauma, separation, and the relational problems and stresses. Currently, no literature has looked at the subjective experiences of fathers in the military, specifically as it relates to their role as a father and how they experience relationships with their children. Work that explores this topic may provide valuable insight into strategies to better manage some of the challenges faced by these fathers and subsequently provide improvements to the emotional environment that they raise their children in. The purpose of the current research is to explore and record the subjective experience of fathers in the military. The research sought to answer the question, “What do I need to understand to know what it is like to be a father in the military?”

Chapter 3

Method

The current study used a qualitative semi-structured interview approach. In doing so, the emphasis was not on what events took place in the fathers' lives, but on how the fathers subjectively experienced being a father who was also in the military.

Qualitative research

In selecting a research approach with which to pursue the topic of fathers in the military, the first decision was whether to adopt a qualitative or a quantitative research methodology. Quantitative approaches, such as correlational research, typically offer researchers the opportunity to quantify, or count, behaviours or phenomena. Often, these counts are used to draw conclusions about samples that can be generalized to larger populations. Also, quantitative research finds its origins in deductive hypothesis testing. Essentially, quantitative research is typically used to find objective evidence for a pre-derived theory or hypothesis regarding a certain phenomenon. Qualitative research on the other hand is rooted in an inductive, exploratory tradition. Generally, qualitative research does not accept or reject a null hypothesis but rather explores a phenomenon with greater breadth.

In qualitative research, counts and statistical analysis are often not necessary as qualitative research seeks to explore subjective experiences rather than objective realities. Traditional scientific exploration or positivistic inquiry seeks "facts" void of the subjective experience of individuals. Qualitative approaches recognize that describing the subjective "lived experience" of individuals is highly valuable but impossible within the tradition of positivistic inquiry. Traditional scientific strategies that seek objective truths fail

to capture a number of aspects of the lived experience, including thoughts, perceptions, and viewpoints of individuals. Essentially, qualitative approaches can draw information from what is experienced, how it is experienced, and how it is shared and co-constructed or understood by the researcher and participants.

An example of this distinction between approaches can be seen in the work done by Ruscio, Weathers, King and King (2002). As discussed, Ruscio, Weathers, King and King compared PTSD symptomology and perceived father-child bonding. Using a quantitative approach, PTSD symptom ratings were compared with father child bonding ratings and the authors found that emotional numbing was responsible for greater variability in relationship features than other symptomology. There are a number of valuable implications that can be drawn from this research, including the applied interpretation that work done with those with PTSD who are experiencing relationship problems may benefit most from work done on the emotional symptom cluster. Ruscio, Weathers, King and King tested a hypothesis by collecting quantitative data. This study quantified the intensity or frequency of experience, rather than the quality of the experience.

A qualitative approach is more focused on the descriptive features of the experience rather than an arbitrary numerical measure of symptom severity, or relational ratings. For example, a qualitative approach to this topic might look at *how* emotional numbing is experienced, or more broadly, how fathers experience PTSD. Father's are given the opportunity to describe the experience in their own words rather than endorse or rate preconceived researcher defined variables. Both types of research provide valuable information and advance current knowledge if conducted effectively. The

decision to choose a particular approach is best based on (a) what is already known in the area? and (b) what specific questions would the researcher like to investigate?

In approaching the current research it was evident that there was a gap in the literature on the subjective experiences of military fathers and, as such, general exploration was necessary. The question: “What do I need to understand to know what it is like to be a father in the military?” is qualitative in nature in that it focuses on exploring and describing the “experience” as opposed to investigating objective observable and quantifiable data.

Phenomenological Research

The current research approached the topic of fatherhood in the military using a qualitative phenomenological approach that sought to understand co-construct the subjective experiences of the phenomenon. Phenomenological research typically uses introspective interviewing to access the direct conscious experience of the participant rather than inferring conscious processes based on objective observation (Osborne, 1994). Phenomenological research, in its broadest form, is concerned with the totality of lived experiences in a single subject (Giorgi, 1997). *Experiences* in phenomenological research refer to both intuitive and experienced presences. *Experiences*, as traditionally defined, refer to presences that carry an index to reality. Phenomenological research is concerned with both experiences and the broader *intuitions*, which refers to the more common awareness, and includes presences with no reference to “real objects” (Giorgi, 1997). A persons experience contains reactions to both objective and subjective realities, and respond to both “real” and “non real” stimuli (Giorgi). By including all conscious experience, no matter how partial or marginal, the full experience of the individual is

captured; not just those features of the experience grounded in the objective observable world.

The current research is exploratory and interpretative in nature. However, the researcher has been exposed to existing literature in the area of fatherhood and families in the military and as such, it is not purely hermeneutic in the sense that previous research has influenced the focus rather than described and co-constructed lived experience alone (Dahlberg, Drew, & Nystrom, 2001). Typically, the questions asked in phenomenological research are inductive in that theories are often constructed based on the findings. However, as we are looking at a specific group from which general population patterns have been established, the analysis and focus points will be weakly inductive in nature as it is influenced and will build on what is currently understood and can be drawn from previous literature in the area. An example of this “research influenced” induction can be seen in the current research focus on emotional connection and physical disconnection drawn from the broader research area of fatherhood, rather than leaving the focus and direction of the experience shared completely to the participant.

The current research seeks to explore the subjective *experiences* of military fathers. Bentz and Shapiro (1998) note that in phenomenological research, “the intent is to understand the phenomena in their own terms — to provide a description of human experience as it is experienced by the person herself” (p. 96). As such, phenomenology appears to be an effective method in allowing an open expression of experience and, in collaboration with the researcher, inter-subjectively co-constructing the essence of how fatherhood in the military is experienced by those interviewed. Currently, as has been discussed, little, if any, research has explored how military fathers experience fatherhood.

Rationale for qualitative methodology

Previous academic inquiry has approached military families and unique aspects of military culture from a variety of research orientations. Most have focused on, and collected information from, family members, such as spouses and children, and not the father. In the past, qualitative approaches have been used to tell the stories of military spouses, or of military servicemen diagnosed with PTSD (Vormbrock, 1993).

Quantitative measures have been applied to military fathers and families to objectively determine the presence of psychological constructs or diagnostic symptom patterns, such as those for depression, anxiety, and PTSD. As a result, a great deal of important and highly valuable information on a broad range of topics is now known. Elements of military father's experience have been implied, discovered, or described by previous qualitative and quantitative findings, including those that describe the interpersonal difficulties, emotional disconnection, and difficulties reconnecting. However, very little or no research has investigated, the comprehensive subjective lived experience of fathers in the military.

The classic eastern fable of the blind men and the elephant helps to illustrate how current research has approached the topic of the lived experience of fathers in the military and assists in more clearly illuminating the rationale selected in exploring the current research questions. In this fable a number of blind men touch an elephant to learn what it is like. Each of these blind men then describe the part of the elephant they felt.

Descriptions of tusks, ears, the tail and other individual parts lead the blind men to believe that they had all felt different entities when in fact they described individual components of the same animal. Similarly, peripheral and core components of the lived

experience of fathers in the military have been explored, but currently a coherent understanding of the phenomena, as a whole, has not been established. The phenomenon under investigation can be broadly defined as the experience of fathers in the military; emotional numbing, physical disconnect, relationship problems and other unique features of this population that have been explored may emerge as appendages. Until these appendages are seen in context to the whole, obtaining a holistic, functional picture of these different aspects in relation to the whole phenomena is likely not possible. This is not to suggest previous researchers are blind, as this is not the case. Previous research in the field has found valuable, fascinating, thorough, and rich information that have answered a variety of questions appropriately. Approaching this topic from a phenomenological stance places the emphasis on the subjectively reported experience of military fathers rather than specific components, and asks broad questions rather than specifics. In looking at how fathers process these experiences as a whole, cohesive strategies targeting the complex and often reciprocal features of experienced fatherhood in the military can be developed to approach some of the challenges faced by these fathers. Working from the actual lived experience of the fathers, and not from suggested or imposed challenges will help produce strategies and understanding more inline with the goals and lives of fathers in the military and as such will likely yield positive applied and theoretical outcomes.

Participants

This study explored the subjective experiences of six Canadian military veteran participants. The sample size of six was identified by the researcher as a manageable and an acceptable sample size for the current study. The key criterion for participation

eligibility was fatherhood during the participants' military service. Further, participants had to be able to express themselves clearly in the English language, as this is the language understood by the researcher. Also, participants needed to be willing to participate and share their stories with the researcher in order to be included. Participants were all willing to commit to continued participation, specifically member checking, which required more than one meeting with the researcher. Participants in the current research were veteran fathers who were active in the military while raising their children. Participants were not restricted based on age or ethnicity. No current or previous clients of the researcher were included, nor were those with personal relationships with the researcher prior to research, such as friends or acquaintances.

Participants were drawn from a sample in Victoria, British Columbia. Victoria was an appropriate location to conduct this research and recruit participants due to its close proximity for the researcher who is based in Victoria. Also, Victoria, British Columbia has a high concentration of military personal and veterans employed previously or currently by local military bases and installments in the area. Victoria is home to Canada's largest naval fleet as well as numerous other significant military groups.

The current study was interested in capturing a great depth of experience. In order to accomplish this, interviews allowed for in depth exploration of the experience of military fatherhood. As such, fewer participants were required than in traditional quantitative research. Six military fathers participated in the research. The research goal was to explore in great depth and breadth the subjective experience of a few participants rather than investigating limited and specific variables in a large sample. Six participants

allowed for discussions of many different specific experiences as well as the inclusion of detail, clarification and elaboration for any theme or situation. Following participant interviews, the researcher believed that he had reached redundancy in themes.

“Saturation”, according to Creswell (2005), refers to the point in which the researcher has identified the major themes and feels that more information would not contribute any new themes or critical aspects to the phenomenological narratives.

“Purposeful sampling” refers to selecting clients that are “information rich” (Creswell, 2005). Participants with the requisite military involvement during fatherhood were identified as information rich as they had specific experience in the area of interest. Where possible, maximal variation sampling was used to draw out a variety of experiences from within the same phenomena. For example, participants from different age groups, with different family sizes and composition, marital status, military organization involvement and years of military experience, were sought out to add complexity and breadth to the findings as well as finding themes that exist across sample differences.

Fathers in the current research were all retired from the military and as such had ceased to be employed by the military prior to participation in the current research. Participants in the current research spent a minimum of 24 years in the military. Participants averaged 27.83 years of military involvement with a range of 24-34 years. All participants reported being deployed, and endorsed being deployed more than five times in their careers. In listing deployments relevant to their roles as fathers, one father listed three deployments, one father listed four deployments, and four fathers listed five or more deployments that they believed were relevant to their role as a father. The

average deployment length listed by fathers was 9.14 months with a range between 4 and 36 months. One of the six fathers interviewed stated that he had been diagnosed with PTSD. All fathers interviewed were currently married to the mother of their children. Participants averaged 2.5 children with a range of 1-5 children. The modal response was 2 children with three fathers endorsing this response. Half of the fathers interviewed endorsed leaving the military due to family related concerns. One father reported leaving the military as his children and wife asked him to not deploy to an active war zone. Another father described leaving the military due to a belief that he was spending too little time with his child and another father reported leaving the military, as he did not want to disrupt his child's education and social functioning at school by having to relocate for employment.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through both "word of mouth" and snowball sampling. Advertisements were electronically distributed to the researcher's colleagues and potential participants. Advertisements invited fathers who had been in the military to participate, stated the criteria for inclusion, briefly described confidentiality, and provided information on how to contact the researcher (Appendix B). Printed posters were also distributed to colleagues and potential participants. These posters contained the same information as the advertisements.

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. In qualitative research, and particularly phenomenological qualitative research, the interview is an essential tool in capturing and coauthoring the inter-subjective experience

of the participants. Kvale (1996) stated that the interview used in good qualitative research “is literally an inter view, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest,” in which the researcher attempts to “understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of peoples' experiences” (p. 1-2).

Interviews were conducted in private, comfortable locations selected by the researcher in communication with the participant. Locations included participant's offices, University of Victoria counselling rooms, and private residences. Interviews began with a brief unscripted orientation to the research provided by the researcher, followed by the collecting of general demographic information and specifics of the participant's military experience. After this information was collected, the participant was asked to share their experience of military fatherhood. Initially, the prompt was left open to allow the participant to discuss topics most relevant to them. Once the participant had been able to fully describe their experience of military fatherhood in response to the open introductory prompts, more specific prompts were used to further explore the experience of military fathers as it related to emotional connection and physical unavailability. For more information on the interview formats, see detailed interview scripts in appendix C. Interview lengths varied between 45 minutes and seventy minutes. Interview scripts were pilot tested with willing peer participants prior to being applied to the sample for the current research. This allowed the researcher the opportunity to assess and improve the duration and format of the research interview.

Interviews were recorded using a digital handheld recorder supplied by the researcher. Before the participant arrived, or briefly before the interview began, the

researcher noted a brief description of the time and place of interview as well as any other significant contextual information in a research journal. All completed interviews were transferred to and stored in a password-protected folder with a backup copy stored on a portable hard drive. Files have been saved under the title of the randomly assigned participant number (i.e. Participant 101).

Interview procedures

Following initial contact and verbal agreement to participate, participants scheduled a time to meet with the researcher for the initial interview. Upon arriving for the initial interview, the participant was greeted, thanked for their participation and provided with a copy of the Subject Informed Consent Form, see appendix A. At this point confidentiality was described to the participant, including limits to confidentiality as noted below. Clients were then given a brief verbal outline of what to expect during the initial interview, including the procedures, estimated duration, and a brief discussion around follow up and member checking. Following the verbal outline, clients were then asked to fill out a brief demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E). Once demographic information was completed, initial interviews began. Clients were then verbally reminded of their right to withdraw at any point and of their right to pass on any prompt or topic they did not feel comfortable discussing. Following the interview, participants were thanked for their participation and arrangements were made for a follow up meeting once transcription and analysis of the data was completed, as noted below.

At the arranged time of the member checking interview, participants were presented with the themes drawn from the data. A brief description of member checking will be provided as well as rationale. Participants were then asked to read the theme

descriptions and check them for accuracy and completeness. If new information was shared this was recorded and transcribed and added to the data, explicated, and included in themes as deemed relevant by the researcher.

Once the entire interview was recorded and transferred, interviews were transcribed. Initially, a rough transcription took place that captured all verbal utterances of both the researcher and participant. In transcribed data, participants are referred to by a randomly assigned participant number (ie. “Participant 101” or “P101”). The researcher was referred to as “Researcher”, or “R” in short. Following the rough transcription, select passages were re-transcribed in greater detail to clarify and expand on key features of the data. Details such as pauses, and other “process” features were not transcribed, as these were not considered significant in answering the research question.

Analysis of the data

As noted, areas related to specific research questions, such as “how do military fathers experience emotional connection with their children?” were re-transcribed in greater detail. Once transcribed, themes were abstracted from the data. Both collective themes (which are common to all transcribed interviews) and individual themes (which are specific and unique to individual narratives) were abstracted and reported on. Where possible, specific events described by participants were abstracted and grouped by the general phenomena described. For example, specific deployment details were grouped thematically to reflect deployment in general. When reported, all themes were described in detail and then complete samples of the raw data from which the themes were drawn have been presented. Where possible, the actual transcribed data was presented to illustrate and support the themes drawn from the data.

The stages used in analysis of data in the current research, and a simplified version of those described by Groenewald (2004), were:

- 1) Bracketing and phenomenological reduction.
- 2) Delineating units of meaning.
- 3) Clustering of units of meaning to form themes.
- 4) Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary.

Bracketing of phenomenological reduction refers in a broad sense to the researcher familiarizes themselves to the complete, or “gestalt”, of the recorded and transcribed materials and beginning to categorize or “bracket” information without interpretation (Groenewald). When *delineating units of meaning*, the researcher extracts from bracketed material those statements that are believed to “illuminate the research phenomenon” (Groenewald, 2004, p.19). During this stage the researcher is required to make subjective judgments of the data, excluding those statements deemed redundant and including those whose perceived meaning is believed to capture the phenomena researched. *Clustering units of meaning to form themes* refers to the process of organizing non-redundant units and composing clusters of units representing a similar component of the phenomena researched (Groenewald). “Themes”, in a very basic sense, can be seen as statements that capture the essence of these clusters (Hycner, 1999). *Extracting general and unique themes from the interviews and making a composite summary* involves inter-interview organization of themes and matching of like themes into a composite, abbreviated list, or summary (Groenewald). The researcher’s primary concern and the product generated from interview data is to find themes that are common in most or all of the interviews.

Common themes are believed to represent a more complete representation of the phenomena rather than simply a description of one participant's singular individual experience.

Ethical considerations

Rosenlatt (1995) comments that there is no formal, wholly accepted definition for what is ethical. Rosenlatt continues by stating that in a general sense, "what is ethical includes what a person and those in the person's ethical community consider to be good, right, moral, just, proper, virtuous, and lawful" (p. 139). Inherent to the consideration of ethics when approaching research is the recognition that ethics is often a case of best fit rather than a right answer. For example, what is moral may not be what is lawful, and what is virtuous may not be just. Further, what is best for the individual may not be best for the group. As such, in a broad sense, ethics do not represent a series of narrowly delineated practical boundaries that the researcher can meet and then set aside as she or he proceeds with the research. Rather, ethical research necessarily includes an ongoing discussion that balances what is good, just, moral, right, proper, virtuous, and lawful (Rosenblatt, 1995). Davies and Dodd (2002) comment that, "Understanding ethics to involve trustfulness, openness, honesty, respectfulness, carefulness, and constant attentiveness means ethics is not treated as a separate part of our research – a form that is filled in for the ethics committee and forgotten." (p. 281) Rather than a specific set of rules or guidelines that are satisfied at the beginning of the study, ethics are viewed as a series of dialectics held and considered throughout the process of research. These dialectics address potential problem areas in the research where any of the above listed values risk being compromised.

In a broad sense, ethics represent a fluid discussion around reducing harm and increasing benefit at all times. However, in a more specific sense, creating research that is ethical also requires adherence to policy and structure from a series of ethical communities. The research was completed in order to explore the researcher's area of interest, and as a required component of the Masters Program in Counselling Psychology at the University of Victoria and involved interviewing retired members of the military, or ex-military fathers. The study required and received approval from the University of Victoria Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) and as such, specific considerations were made to align the current research with human participant ethical guidelines outlined by HREB.

The guiding principles outlined by the HREB have been adopted from the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS). The TCPS outlines their guiding principles as respect for human dignity, respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, respect for privacy and confidentiality, respect for justice and inclusiveness, balancing harms and benefits, minimizing harm, and maximizing benefit. These principles applied to the current research both in devising methodology and protocol informed by these principles, presenting findings appropriately, and maintaining an ongoing dialogue throughout all stages of research inclusive of these principles.

The current research was also influenced and structured to adhere with the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) on the ethical conduct of research involving human's definition of minimal risk. According to the TCPS:

“The research can be regarded as within the range of minimal risk if the potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research.”

The research incorporated interviews with participants that were minimally directive and in no way forced discussion around difficult topics. Affectively challenging or sensitive topics were discussed at the discretion of participants, as they would be in everyday life situations. Given the nature of the interaction, and the population involved, it was likely that some emotionally distressing topics would be discussed, and many were. Ensuring and maintaining confidentiality worked to maintain the safety of the experiences shared and the participants who have shared them. Participants were all informed prior to the interview of both the nature of confidentiality and the limits to confidentiality.

Participants were told that if at any point of the interview the researcher believes the client is at risk of suicide, there is imminent risk to another person, or a child or vulnerable person is being abused or neglected in any way, based on the interview discussion, provisions would need to be made to breach confidentiality and involve the appropriate authorities. Participants were informed that should such information be brought to the attention of the researcher, the researcher would first discuss the mode in which this information would be shared, and ideally, have the participant report the information themselves to the appropriate services or authorities. At no point during the interviews did the researcher believe content dictated the breaking of confidentiality based on the previous stated criteria.

The primary researcher was involved in interviewing, transcribing, and analyzing the data. Transcribed interviews were, and currently are, stored in a password-protected file on the researcher's personal computer. Only the primary researcher has access to this computer. The researcher's supervisor will also be granted access to these files should it be requested. Contact information for participants will be maintained in order for follow up during member checking. Further, upon report and analysis, pseudonyms, or participant numbers, were assigned to participants to further protect anonymity. Signed informed consent was obtained upon first meeting (see appendix A) and implied and verbal consent was and will be maintained throughout. Confidentiality was maintained throughout, however complete anonymity was not provided, nor suggested, as member checking was used to ensure accurate theme extraction and analysis. Member checking required participants to be contacted following data analysis and for responses to be identifiable for both the researcher and the participant.

The potential risks of the research, as stated, were minimal, and included both the negative affect related to processing and retelling of experience, and the inconvenience related to the time devoted to participation in the research. In an effort to minimize these potential risks, participants were provided with a list of potential resources where counselling services could be accessed should the telling or retelling of experiences result in any discomfort, or dysfunction. Also, were the participant to have experienced strong negative affect as a result of the interview, the researcher planned to ensure that the participant was emotionally stabilized before leaving the research location. Counselling skills of containment and active listening would have been used, not as a therapeutic intervention, but as a method to process and stabilize difficult emotional experiences and

minimize harm. No participants reported experiencing discomfort in excess of what could be expected in the “real world”, however resources were offered to all participants. All participants declined the offered resource list following their interview.

The researcher was mindful of the time offered by participants and provided flexible interview times and locations that minimized occupational, or other interference to participant’s daily routines and obligations. Further, meetings and interviews were conducted efficiently, and necessary preparations were conducted prior to interviews, including pilot testing, room booking and arranging, and logistical setup to ensure efficiency and researcher proficiency.

One of the key benefits of participation in the current research was the opportunity for participants to have their unique experience witnessed and recorded. The sharing of experience, often in the form of narratives, has been found to be therapeutic (Thornhill, Clare, & May, 2004). Narratives have been referred to as both the method and the phenomenon of interest (Moen, 2006) in regards to their power as a therapeutic tool and method of organizing and gathering information. Participants also had the opportunity to knowingly contribute to a body of research that will be of benefit to increasing understanding of the military father’s experience, and hopefully influencing positive change in military policy, therapeutic interventions, and appreciation for the challenges faced by military fathers by the larger population.

Research rigor

Rigor is a term often associated with the evaluation of “good” research and, as stated by Davies and Dodd (2002), often generally refers to the “reliability and validity” of the research. However, Davies and Dodd also assert that traditional definitions of rigor

often favour, or bias, quantitative methodology. Defining rigor based on the type of research used is essential in gaining clear evaluation criteria for research quality (Bradbury-Jones, 2007). To apply quantitative definitions, or measures, of rigor to qualitative research is inaccurate (Dreher, 1994).

Davis and Dodd (2002) state that instead of rigor in qualitative research reflecting replicability across time and contexts, that:

“Rather, we aim for a reliability in our data based on consistency and care in the application of research practices, which are reflected in the visibility of research practices, and a reliability in our analysis and conclusions, reflected in an open account that remains mindful of the partiality and limits of our research findings.”

(p. 280)

Meyrick (2006) developed a pluralistic approach to performing “good” or “quality” qualitative research. The model is built around the common principles of transparency and systematicity (See Figure 1). Meyrick’s framework provides decision points throughout, and presents ideals rather than a strict, checklist style, outline of requirements. The model informs researchers of key issues and values at each point.

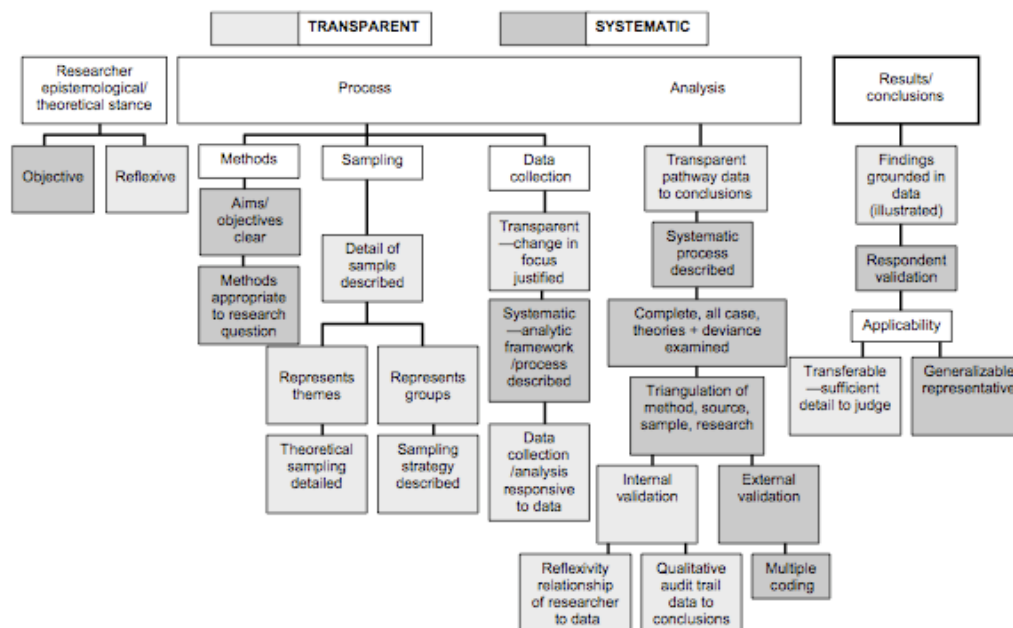


Figure 1. Quality framework for qualitative research. (Meyrick, 2006)

Location of the researcher

The first stage in Meyrick's pluralistic model is the researcher's epistemological and theoretical stance. Balancing the dialectic of objectivity and reflexivity is an important discussion in qualitative research. The goal of the current research was to record the stories of others, however, doing so requires a certain level of reflexivity. Ideally participants share their experiences in an environment of safety and transparency and as such researchers must be present and an active part of the experience. Traditionally detached, and purely objective, models of quantitative research do not fit, as the researcher will be less effective in building the necessary trusting relationships should they stay uninvolved. As such, discussing both the elements of objectivity and reflexivity with systematicity and transparency is essential. Failure to do so would provide readers with an incomplete picture of the subjective experience recorded and the reliability of the

researcher in accurately capturing and recording that experience. Being transparent throughout, at times, is beyond what is necessary in the assurance of quality research and can be an ethical issue. In general, ethics and rigor are topics that, though separate, are often deeply interrelated. Davies and Dodd (2002) write:

“Ethics are integral to the way we think about rigor and are intertwined in our approach to research, in the way we ask questions, how we respond to answers, and the way we reflect on the material. An implicit part of ethical practice thus involves the acknowledgment and location of the researcher within the research process.” (p.281)

As such, before a description of both rigor in general and rigor as it relates to practices within the current research, a discussion of the location of the researcher will be beneficial. In more quantitative approaches to research, researchers attempt to separate themselves as much as possible from the data so as to not influence the results in anyway. In discussing qualitative research, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state that:

“Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world ... attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.” (p. 3)

In qualitative research, the researcher is not merely an objective observer, but rather a participant in the experience. Failing to recognize the role of the researcher in the

experience provides an incomplete view. As such, locating the researcher within the research is essential.

Literature from the area of military families, and military experience, often looks at the negative aspects of military life and the detrimental outcomes associated with the unique features of work and life in this occupation and culture. As such, the researchers exposure to the area has been largely a focused on negative aspects, such as the impact of exposure to trauma and physical disconnect from the military person's family.

Approaching research with this in mind creates a number of challenges. The first, and perhaps most obvious, is that questions asked, and areas explored emphasize areas of known challenges, and exclude unknown, or unreported areas that likely contain both positive and negative aspects. Essentially, this researcher's assumption, based on the findings of published literature and lack of any personal experience suggesting contrary findings or data, is that military fatherhood has a number of conflicting and problematic features. This researcher's personal exposure to military life is limited. At no point has the researcher ever enlisted in the military or been directly involved as a military member. The researcher's experience is limited to conversations, discussions and observations of acquaintances that are employed by the military.

Explicating the worldview of the researcher is an essential component in establishing rigor. Participant's share experiences contain both objective and subjective elements. As noted, "experience", when broadly defined, represents both subjective and objective components. As such, how the researcher approaches, carries out, and reports research may reflect aspects of a topic that resonate with the researchers own experience (Sherrard, 1997). The researcher's worldview in the current research is that of a 29-year-

old Caucasian Canadian, who is university educated, married, and the father of an infant daughter. The researcher is from a middle class family of origin with parents who are both university educated. The researcher's interest in the area stems from his work with children, his belief in the importance of emotionally responsive fathering in optimal child development, and his recent personal experience with parenting. The researcher has experience providing counselling and therapy for a variety of clientele, including work with children and youth populations experiencing mental health concerns. In working with these clients, the researcher has heard many narratives describing the impact of military involvement on fathering practices both from children and their fathers. Working with the fathers to develop skills and overcome boundaries to emotionally and physically available fathering has instilled a deep curiosity related to the stories of these fathers, specifically as they relate to the development of programs geared towards these fathers and their unique occupation related features. Further, exploring these issues may bring to light changes that can be made to improve the quality of the experience felt and lived by fathers in the military and their children.

Phenomenological interviews have been selected and used as the primary source of data collection. Building trust and creating an open and safe environment where the experience of the participant can be articulated and recorded was vital. The researcher's background and education has provided specific skills in the area of counselling that was likely beneficial in both interviewing participants and in establishing the necessary relationship and environment in which personal experiences can be safely shared and recorded.

Transparency

Remaining open and transparent along with reporting in full is vital in establishing rigor. Field notes were maintained throughout the entirety of data collection, data analysis, and reporting periods of research: both were as candid and complete as possible. These notes contained detailed accounts of the researcher's subjective experience before, during, and after the interview. Further, potential alterations to proposed research methodology, such as question exclusion or additional analysis strategies, was recorded in full, including the full reasoning behind research decisions. Peshkin (1998) comments that researchers must, "systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research." (p. 17) "Reflexive Journals", or journals that detail the researcher's subjectivity and self awareness's, are an essential part of the audit that must take place in looking at which aspects of the recorded experience represent the participants and which represent the researcher (Bradbury-Jones, 2007).

Transcriptions were both thorough and accurate in capturing all vocalizations by both participant and researcher during the interview period. Guiding questions, prompts, and any verbalizations provided by the researcher were recorded in full and noted. Further, member checking was used to assure accuracy. In member checking, explicated themes were presented to the participants to ensure their experience was accurately captured and articulated.

Member checking

Guba and Lincoln (1989) comment that member checking is the "single most critical technique for establishing credibility" (p. 239). Alternatively, some researchers, such as Rolfe (2006) and Sandelowski (1993), have argued that reality in qualitative

research is co-constructed, and as such “repeatability” is unnecessary. Member checking was used in the current research as a means of ensuring accountability, respect for dignity, accuracy, and completeness. The goal of phenomenological research is to capture the entirety of the lived experience of a phenomenon; member checking will provide another opportunity to ensure that the entire experience is captured in a manner consistent with the participant’s understanding.

Verification strategies

Many of the topics discussed in regards to verifying the data, or ensuring rigor, are broad research issues that have largely been discussed already within this text. However, verification strategies, like other aspects of qualitative inquiry, stress that lines are not simply crossed as one advances, but rather, that ongoing discussions continue throughout the research process to ensure both transparency and systematicity. Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson and Spiers (2002) identify a number of key areas of focus in verifying qualitative data. These areas are:

- 1) *Methodological coherence*. This represents the ongoing discussion as to whether or not the method chosen matches the research questions asked. The ongoing interactive experience of research may demand that questions or method be modified and drawn to congruence.
- 2) *Appropriateness of sample*. Samples should be comprised of those who are information rich in the phenomenon being explored. For example, in the current research, interviewing someone who was not a father while active in military service would not be appropriate given the questions asked in the current study. Also, sample size should be informed by “saturation and

replication”, such that the phenomenon is fully explored by the sample selected.

- 3) *Collecting and analyzing data concurrently.* This represents the interaction between “what is known and what one needs to do” (p. 18). As more is learned, questions and approaches to topics may vary to reflect the evolving knowledge in the area.
- 4) *Thinking theoretically.* Morse and colleagues state that “Thinking theoretically requires macro-micro perspectives, inching forward without making cognitive leaps, constantly checking and rechecking, and building a solid foundation.” (p. 18) As new ideas emerge from and are confirmed by successive interviews, theoretical perspective on the phenomena of focus should adapt concordantly.
- 5) *Theory development.* Thinking theoretically throughout the entire research process leads to the ongoing development of theories. Morse comments that, “Valid theories are well developed and informed, they are comprehensive, logical, parsimonious, and consistent” (p. 19).

Conducting research that is both transparent and systematic is essential. Further, maintaining the appropriate mindset in approaching the research, performing the research, and reporting the research, is essential in verifying the data. Good research adds to current understanding and practice. Previous research has identified a number of challenges faced by military families, and military fathers in particular. Findings resulting from research conducted with a high level of rigor will likely add valuable information

that will benefit military families, as well as the systems that both support them and are supported by them.

Morse (2002), in reference to the validation strategies listed above, commented that:

“Together, all these verification strategies incrementally and interactively contribute to and build reliability and validity, thus ensuring rigor. Thus, the rigor of qualitative inquiry should be beyond question, beyond challenge, and provide pragmatic scientific evidence that must be integrated into our developing knowledge base.” (p.19)

Rigor refers generally to the quality of research performed: adherence to the principles, and strategies identified increases the likelihood of conducting research of maximal benefit.

Chapter 4

Results

The fathers interviewed in this study described a complex range of experiences. Through the extrapolation of the data four key themes emerged that were consistent in all or most of the interviews. All themes presented are direct answers to the research question, “What do I need to know to understand what it is like to be a father in the military?” In asking fathers this question, the themes that emerged were a) You miss out, b) You feel like an outsider, c) you try to emotionally disconnect to make it easier, and d) the military comes first.

Theme 1: You miss out

All fathers interviewed described the experience of “missing out”. Participants reported that being a father in the military meant missing important events and bonding opportunities in the lives of their children. Events were missed due to deployments or employment related physical absence. The events missed included holidays (such as Christmas and birthdays), and milestones (including births, first steps, first words, and other developmentally significant occurrences). Fathers described feeling a number of emotions in regards to missing these events including guilt, sadness, sorrow and regret. A few fathers described missing out on a whole relationship with a child, rather than just specific events within that relationship.

Participant 101: “You know I was never there for the big things in their life; to show them how to do things... I guess that’s what impacted me the most; never being there when there’s the, you know, important events in her life...I’m very sorry about that”.

Participant 102: “Oh yeah. Yep. And things like birthdays and anniversaries. More often than not you weren’t there for them...doing things like riding bicycles and learning how to ride bikes and things like that and I miss all that stuff eh”.

Participant 103: “They went to private schools and I was stuck at sea. So every three months, or whatever, I would come home for a week or so, and ah, it was ok, but it was a very distant relationship. I was home but not for the important stuff...you know, cause in fourteen months I actually saw my family maybe a month”

Participant 104: “There are lots of exercises, training exercises. So I missed the first, I’d say almost 9 years of her birthdays, never there for any of her birthdays for 9 years... But it was just consistently missing. You miss the first one, you miss the second one, and you missed the third one; you can’t see the end to it”.

Participant 105: “On my side I think it was the fact that I was living on a ship for six months, I was going to miss six months of my daughter’s upbringing. Six months of experiencing life with my family which is, I’m a very family oriented guy, that did take a toll”.

Participant 106: “Especially when they’re young right. You come home and they’ve changed. You left and they weren’t talking and you come back and they’re talking up a blue streak. Or they were crawling when you left; they’re walking when you get back. You missed those things you can’t get them back...Oh yeah, there’s always regret when you miss a milestone.”

Theme 2. You feel like an outsider

Most fathers described feeling like an outsider who needed to rejoin the family upon return from deployment. Most of the fathers interviewed used the term “stranger” or

“outsider” in describing their experience of returning from deployment and others talked about the theme of not being part or returning on the outside and needing to re-enter the family. Fathers described feelings of sadness and anxiety related to believing they were outsiders in their families.

Participant 101: “I know my daughter would look at me as the outsider. One point that really struck home with me one time I asked her to do something and she went to my wife and said, “Mom do I have to do what that man asks?” and that kinda hit me pretty hard as a matter of fact...we’re both the stranger when I came back they weren’t sure what to make of me and I probably changed too...I was the outsider...I was...”who’s this guy?”

Participant 102: “It was my wife who knew all their moods and knew when one kid did this and said this then she was really pissed off and that went just right above my head. I still to this day don’t get all those nuances. Little buggers use that against me too... being the outsider”.

Participant 103: “I went back home and... what hurt me the most as a father and being very young and not understanding in French father is “Papa” and my father-in-law is German and “Pappa” is “Umpa”, really German for grandpa but he got the kid to call himself “Papa”. So I came home and the first thing I hear is “Papa”. So I was like he thinks of him as dad. So, well my son has really never seen me. So he’s a year and a bit old by the time I get back home and so like, who the hell are you? So he’s scared of me...it was really my wife and the two kids again and me excluded...I was always the outsider trying to come back in”.

Participant 104: "...they get into routines with each other and then I would come home and jump into a tightly cohesive family unit following routines that I knew nothing about. So from that perspective when I would come home there was always me coming into the house almost as a stranger...like you know, where are the glasses, where are the bowls, can't find stuff cause the kitchen's been reorganized or things have been moved around and you know oh where's the chocolate milk...Their life has changed dramatically and you're not a part of their new life".

Participant 105: "You have to realize the feminine energy is going to be very strong when you get home with my daughter and my wife cause it was just them alone and yeah so you'd be picked up you know big hugs, kisses and that stuff. It would take two or three days to get back into the family... it was really a period of re-entering"

Participant 106: "Yeah they were functioning fine and I'll use someone else's metaphor, it's like standing at that merry-go-round, that spinning thing, going ok when do I get back on?"

Theme 3: You try to disconnect from family to deal with work

Most fathers interviewed discussed trying to disconnect as entirely as possible from family while deployed. Fathers described avoiding thoughts, feelings, and physical connection with family at some point to make it easier to deal with work, or specifically work related absences or stresses. Some of the feelings the fathers described, that were associated with seeking withdrawal from the family, included sadness, guilt, and regret. Fathers described the workload, especially when stationed on a ship, as very time consuming and often physically tedious. They reported that the commitment required for this type of work was helpful in reducing thoughts or feelings of home. Also, half the

fathers described disconnecting emotionally and physically prior to deployment as a way to avoid negative feelings associated with absence from their family. Some fathers reported beginning to disconnect up to one month prior to deployment. Further, while deployed, fathers described communication as a “mixed blessing” as it made running a household more efficient but made disconnection more difficult. Overall there was a pattern described of trying not to engage with family in a variety of ways.

Participant 101: “...you know we were estranged to each other. You know they’re growing up and changing almost daily...you just try not to think about that when you’re gone”.

Participant 102: “Right soon after I got there I just shut the whole family out of the mind there eh...after I’d been there for a few months I was attached to an American unit and we were out in the field and we were identifying mass graves and people in them and digging them up and all that stuff so the thoughts of the family were...I put them away into another little compartment and for probably five months I didn’t think of the family”.

Participant 102: “When you go, and you can talk to any of the spouses and they’ll tell you, we start disengaging from the family. For me probably it was a month or three weeks before I left. That was natural thing to do was just sort of disengage. You didn’t go to the kid’s things anymore. You usually didn’t even eat supper with them anymore... Sometimes you got to the point where by the time you got on that plane that you don’t even remember saying goodbye to the wife...”

Participant 104: “When I was away working, I was away and when I was at home I was at home...if you’re constantly worrying about home, your not doing your job well”.

Participant 105: “You try to take as much emotion as you can out to be able to persevere for that period without your family”.

Participant 105: “I always thought of my daughter, but when you deploy, again you get into that, if it’s a six months deployment, about five of that you really are just concentrating on your job and you’re very careful not to get too emotional about the family back home cause what were you going to do? Cause you’re on a ship in the middle of nowhere...just try to replace the feelings with work”.

Participant 106: “You can go through periods of time where you didn’t think about them at all. Through most of the day they don’t come to your mind and it’s easier to do your job. It’s when you lay your head on the pillow and you have time to think. Because its busy and there’s work to be done and you’re on a mission and you’re hyped up and the adrenaline’s running. But when you lay your head down at night is when you think about family, that’s when it’s tough”.

Theme 4: The military comes first

Most fathers described the military, or their job within the military, as their first priority and their family second. Some fathers described this as a personal belief and others described this as a job expectation. Placing the military first for the fathers interviewed included always giving priority to the military and placing job requirements, including deployments and relocations, in front of their family’s needs. Fathers described experiencing some sadness around the discomfort experienced by their family at the expense of career requirements or requests.

Participant 102: "...the needs of the Canadian Forces kind of outweighed the needs of my kids and that was always very difficult and the older they got the more they held it against you."

Participant 102: "In the old days they'd say, "If we wanted you to have a wife and kids we would have issued you one"... That was more than just a saying. That was a strong feeling in the military. You are ours. Our family is kind of just there but if I tell you you're going to Afghanistan, you're going to Afghanistan... The military came first, not the family".

Participant 103: "But for me and my job, the military asked me that I be available unrestricted so if I want that job I gotta play by their rules".

Participant 104: "Well you just want to be there and you're not, and the military's attitude is that...and I mean in the big picture, that's just not important...the military doesn't prioritize going home for birthdays or anniversaries, or even births. It was rare that I got to go home".

Participant 104: "If there were a priority I would say family was a priority over work. But, when you're deployed there is only one priority because there is no way, in fact the second priority or the first priority it's now gone it's taken from me".

Participant 106: "My duty is to, when I put the uniform on, my duty is to the country and to go do these things, that means some hardships to my family and that will win out before hurting them but I would never choose damage to them".

Summary of findings

The four themes Constructed by the researcher from participants interviews were
1) You miss out, 2) You feel like an outsider, 3) You try to disconnect from the family to

deal with work, and 4) The military comes first. All participants were presented with the above themes and descriptions during member checking and endorsed that these accurately reflected their experiences.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study add a unique perspective on the experience of fatherhood in the military. The author was unable to locate any previous research that explored the experience of fatherhood in the military. The current study adopted a qualitative, semi-structured interview methodology in order to explore the topic. The overarching research question guiding the researcher in this study was, “What do I need to understand to know what it is like to be a father in the military?” Despite the open-ended nature of the research question, a number of similar themes emerged in all, or a majority, of the interviews. The four themes that were constructed by the researcher and validated by participants included: 1) You miss out, 2) You feel like an outsider, 3) You try to disconnect from the family to deal with work, and 4) The military comes first. Though the findings of this study cannot be used to draw any causal conclusions, they do provide an enlightening and potentially disturbing view on the subjective experiences of the fathers interviewed, and perhaps fatherhood in the military in general.

Findings in relation to previous research literature

Literature on challenges in the military

As noted, the researcher was unable to find any previously published studies looking at the subjective experience of military fathers prior to the current research to the knowledge of the researcher. The current study identifies several themes associated with the challenges involved in deployments (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Vormbrock, 1993), and a transient and disruptive lifestyle. Some of the

challenges within military families that have been identified that are connected to the themes extrapolated from the data in the current studies are deployments (Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Hanson, 1985; Mitchum, 1991; Vormbrock, 1993), and a transient and disruptive lifestyle (Hanson, 1985). As noted, many of the extrapolated themes, if not all of them, are directly related to deployment or work related absence. The themes “you miss out”, “you feel like an outsider”, and “you try to disengage...” appear to be reflected in some of the previous literature on deployment. For example, as noted in Chapter 2, Bowling and Sherman (2008), looked at four key challenges in reintegration after deployment: (a) redefining roles, expectations, and division of labor, (b) managing strong emotions, (c) abandoning emotional constriction and creating intimacy in the relationship, and (d) creating shared meaning. The redefinition of roles described by Bowling and Sherman fit well with the fathers’ subjective reports that they felt like outsiders trying to re-enter the family. For example, participant 106 commented that when he came home his family “...were functioning fine... it’s like standing at that merry-go-round, that spinning thing, going ok when do I get back on?” In this case, participant 106 is using a metaphor to describe the experience of re-asserting himself within the family and defining his roles within that family. Fathers had to re-assert themselves in a home that was functioning independently while they were absent. The findings of the current study report the father’s subjective experience of feeling like an outsider and having to re-enter the family repeatedly. Bowling and Sherman’s task (c), abandoning emotional constriction (2008), is congruent with the theme “You try to disconnect from family to deal with work”. Fathers in the current research described employing a number of cognitive, emotional, and physical strategies to disengage from

affective and cognitive responses related to their absence from their family. Participant 105 shared that, “You try to take as much emotion as you can out to be able to persevere for that period without your family”. Many of the participants in the current study describe practicing these skills of emotional disengagement for the duration of deployments, which for these participants could be between four and thirty-six months. Abandoning these strategies and allowing themselves to experience emotional attunement within the family system, as suggested by Bowling and Sherman, would likely be a difficult challenge.

An interesting previous finding by Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid and Weiss (2008) that reservists report feeling psychologically connected to families at home when deployed appears to be in direct opposition to the experience of fathers interviewed in the current study. Specifically, Participant 102 stated, “Right soon after I got there I just shut the whole family out of the mind...” This sentiment was echoed in many of the statements from the other participants. Fathers in the current study endorsed actively trying to disconnect from home. Further, fathers in the current research identified connection to home as more emotionally challenging than disconnection. One possible explanation for this difference in this finding is that fathers in this study had completed careers of fulltime military employment spanning decades. The sample used in the Faber and colleagues study were reservists who had one deployment of 14 months, rather than a career of regular physical absence.

Previous literature also emphasized the impact of PTSD on familial relationships (Gimbel & Booth, 1994; Taft, Schumm, Panuzio, & Proctor, 2008). Only one of the fathers interviewed in the current study endorsed a diagnosis of PTSD. Previous research

indicates that the PTSD symptom cluster most highly correlated to relationship problems is emotional numbing (Ruscio et al., 2002). As indicated above, though most fathers in the current study did not endorse ever having a diagnosis of PTSD, all endorsed some level of intentional emotional disconnection. In order to meet the criteria for the numbing symptom cluster as defined by the DSM IV TR (2000) a person must endorse three of the following symptoms:

- (1) Efforts to avoid thoughts, feelings, or conversations associated with the trauma
- (2) Efforts to avoid activities, places, or people that arouse recollections of the trauma
- (3) Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- (4) Markedly diminished interest or participation in significant activities
- (5) Feeling of detachment or estrangement from others
- (6) Restricted range of affect (e.g., unable to have loving feelings)
- (7) Sense of foreshortened future (e.g., does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span) (Pg. 468)

A number of the fathers described experiences similar to a number of the symptoms described above. For example, Participant 102's comment that, "When you go, and you can talk to any of the spouses and they'll tell you, we start disengaging from the family... You didn't go to the kid's things anymore. You usually didn't even eat supper with them anymore..." appears to speak directly to symptom four; diminished interest or

participation in significant activities. The comment by Participant 105 that, “you’re very careful not to get too emotional about the family back home...Just try to replace the feelings with work.” This quote speaks to a “restricted range of affect”, or symptom six, as the participant describes dulling emotions. The entire theme of “You feel like an outsider” speaks to symptom five, or a “feeling of detachment or estrangement.” Some fathers even used the word “stranger”, such as Participant 104 in commenting that, “...I would come home there was always me coming into the house almost as a stranger...” Though only one of the fathers interviewed endorsed a diagnosis of PTSD, all of the fathers would likely endorse enough symptoms to meet the criteria for the numbing symptom cluster identified by Ruscio and colleagues (2002) as the most highly correlated with relationship problems. However, fathers in the current study endorse intentionally “numbing” their emotions as a strategy to cope with physical absence from their families.

Attachment

Lamb (1982) found that children with secure attachments to both parents were more “persistent and enthusiastic in challenging situations” (Pg. 187). In addition, as noted, recent research has discovered that children with secure father-child attachment are more social and have better quality social interactions (Lamb, Hwang, Frodi, & Frodi, 1982; Parke, 2002) and fewer behaviour problems (Verschueren & Marcoen, 1999). Secure attachments, as initially defined by Ainsworth and colleagues (1971), are characterized by parents who are available, sensitive, and responsive.

One of the key findings, the one that relates to almost all themes described, is the father’s report of an inherent physical unavailability as part of their employment in the military. Deployment was described as one of the key causes in physical unavailability.

As noted, fathers reported deployments ranging between four and thirty-six months. On interview, nearly all of the fathers began by describing the experience of deployment in some form as a response to the question, “what do I need to know to understand what it is like to be a father in the military?” Participant 101 began his interview by immediately stating, “Well I think the biggest thing for me was constantly being away...my son was born and I never even saw him for six or seven months”. Participant 104 responded to the interview question by stating that, “first thing that pops into mind is I have one daughter that was born in October. October is probably the most heavily deployed month” and Participant 106 began his interview by stating that “I don’t think it’s a whole lot different from being a father in any other profession with the exception of the fact that you have to spend periods of time away. Away from home number one”. All participants, immediately identified absence or physical unavailability as the key defining feature of fatherhood in the military, and essentially the largest difference between a father in any other profession. This key difference is also in direct opposition to the primary feature of the description of parents of securely attached children, namely, physical availability (Ainsworth, Bell, & Stayton, 1971).

The second component described by both Ainsworth and colleagues (1971) and Bowlby (2006) is responsiveness. This component is further endorsed and described by Gottman (1997) in describing fathers who promote the healthy emotional development in their children. Gottman comments that fathers who are able to validate, show empathy, and explore children’s emotions will foster healthy emotional development in children. Though Gottman describes the ideal, fathers who are emotionally attuned (Hughes, 2009), or able to recognize and mirror the affective state of their child, are believed to be

better able to foster the development of a secure attachment (Bowlby, 2006). Fathers in the current literature report a number of features that would challenge their ability to provide this for their children. Firstly, fathers reported intentional emotional disengagement from their families prior to deployment, and during deployment. For example, Participant 105 comments that, "...you're very careful not to get too emotional about the family", in his description of deployment. As noted above, fathers practicing strategies of emotional disengagement may have challenges re-accessing a full emotional range or level of responsiveness upon return, or re-engagement with family. According to this feature of deployment described by fathers, some fathers may also have challenges re-engaging responsiveness and providing children with the affective attunement, a hallmark of secure attachment.

Further, bonding between a child and caregiver is a reciprocal experience in which both participants derive individual bonding experiences that are influenced, but not identical, to that of the other. Children experience security and pleasure in attaching with a parent and parents receive comfort and pleasure in bonding with a child (Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). When viewed through a lens of attachment, all four themes extracted, and the emotion expressed by the participants in describing them, suggests a significant affective response related to challenges in bonding. Fathers described physically and emotionally missing out and felt guilt, sadness, and anxiety in relation to this upon return or re-engagement. Rather than singularly assuming that the children of the participants experienced some detriment to the formation of secure bonds with their father, it should also be assumed that fathers experienced some detriment to the formation and experience of bonds with their children and as such a loss of the associated pleasure and comfort.

One father noted on interview, “there is still a tension between us mainly because we didn’t get to know each other and bond; as you should as a father and daughter I guess.” This father describes missing out on the formation of a bond with his child and the lasting relational repercussions of that. Though more work needs to be done to better understand the formation and experience of attachment bonds between fathers and their children, the current findings, and extracted themes, suggest that the loss of these bonds was a significant feature of the participants experience of fatherhood by those employed by the military.

The current research lacks the ability to draw any causal conclusions based on its qualitative methodology, however the themes extracted raise a number of questions regarding father’s abilities to form secure attachment bonds with their children while employed by the military. Future research may further this discussion using correlational designs to investigate father-child attachment type for children raised in military families.

Unique findings

Deployment

As noted, when asked to describe their experience of fatherhood in the military, fathers immediately described their subjective experience of deployment. Though previous research has described some of the challenges of deployment, the initial response of fathers in describing deployment may further indicate the magnitude of the impact deployments have on fathers and their experience of fatherhood. No previous research found by the primary researcher examined the subjective impact of deployment on the fathers deployed as it relates to fatherhood. All four of the themes co-created in the study are, in some way, linked to the experience of deployment. Fathers “miss out” as

they are physically absent, deployment being the primary cause of such work-related absences. Fathers reported feeling like outsiders upon re-entering the home following deployments, or as a result of deployment related absences and the fathers typically coped with physical disconnection of deployment through emotional disconnection. The final theme, “the military comes first”, also relates to deployments in that fathers were willing to deploy and fully engage in deployment tasks despite the recognized negative impact on their families. This study shows that deployments had a significant impact on the participants’ experiences of military fatherhood.

“You miss out”.

All fathers interviewed described the experience of missing out. Typically “missing out” was described in reference to being physically unavailable for important events and experiences in their children’s lives. Further, the experience of missing out is separate from a simple description of a father who was physically not there. Not only did fathers physically miss out, but also they also subjectively experience missing out by both believing they missed something of value and described affective responses in relation to this belief. Fathers described regret, guilt and great sadness in relation to missing events. Thus, rather than just acknowledging that they were not present for things, fathers described a rich experience that included emotions and cognitions. Further, some fathers described a lasting sense of needing to make up for missed things. Making up for some fathers meant spending “extra” time with their children upon return and other fathers described buying presents for their children. Fathers also expressed remorse over having missed activities that could not be made up for. Fathers made comments like, “you can’t

get that back” or “there is no way to make up for that.” Based on their description, fathers appear to grieve the loss of events that cannot be re-experienced.

“You feel like an outsider”

All fathers discussed difficulty re-engaging with their families following deployment. Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid and Weiss’ (2008) findings relate to the theme of “You feel like an outsider”. However, though Faber and colleagues titled their study, “Ambiguous absence, ambiguous presence”, their discussion of ambiguous presence is largely concerned with the challenges of reengaging roles by spouses and children. There is no report on the experience of feeling like an “outsider.” One of the key themes that permeated the discussion of this topic in the current research was the sense that they were outsiders, or strangers, separate from their families. The quotes displayed in the results section address this in a very specific way but fail in some ways to capture the expansive range of experience that fit into this theme. Fathers discussed returning home from deployments to families that were fundamentally different from the families they had left. As noted, the average deployment endorsed by the participants of this research was 9 months, and the longest deployment listed was 36 months. These are significant absences, especially when considering absences during critical emotional, physical, and cognitive developmental periods. As a result, fathers returned to children who were in many ways different people, or strangers. Similarly, children, who had developed in a systems bereft of the influence of a physically, and potentially emotionally, present father, were forced to adapt to a strange or foreign system that included the father following his return. Families practiced patterns exclusive of the fathers for an average of nine months and sometimes more. Even four months, the

minimum deployment endorsed, can establish a specific behavioral pattern that is difficult to alter. Fathers also transitioned between grossly disparate environments. One father, in reference to this drastic change, stated that “one minute I was on the tarmac in Zagreb and I think it was twelve hours later I was in the tarmac in Winnipeg and my family was there. It was just an unreal, kinda dreamlike state that you’re in.” The fathers’ experiences while deployed may also effect significant change in who they are. As such, fathers may be returning to a home where in many areas they are “strange”, or different from what is expected or even remembered by the children, and as such are treated like strangers. Fathers described the adjustment, or the reconnection, as taking time; Time to get to know the children again, time to both recognize and re-enter family routines, and time to adjust personally to being a father, a task that following deployment they are also strangers to.

Many of the fathers interviewed described being surprised and deeply saddened by the lack of recognition from their children upon returning home. One father described the experience of his daughter asking her mother if she has to listen to “that man” as the hardest part of being a father in the military. Many fathers described a deep commitment to providing for their families and powerful emotions related to absence from them. For some fathers, returning home from a deployment to different children who didn’t acknowledge them, or their role as father in the home, was devastating.

“You try to disengage”

All fathers described some powerful negative emotions, such as sadness, regret, and anxiety, while discussing the experience of being absent from family. Also, some fathers described very emotionally challenging work tasks, such as exposure to violence

and death. Fathers described actively disengaging emotionally from family to cope with work related stress and negative emotions. Reduced emotionality, as encountered in the current study, was described as a coping strategy rather than a passively acquired symptom. Fathers intentionally avoided affective responses to family as a method of coping with work related absence. This theme has been described above in relation to previous literature. The following will be a brief description of this theme inclusive of some of the unique experiences extrapolated from the data.

Fathers reported experiencing a number of negative affective responses in reflecting on their experiences including sadness, guilt, and anxiety. No previous literature known to the writer has sought to explore the subjective experience of the father or any response from the father in regards to coping with deployment, or employment related absences. Recognizing that fathers experience these emotions in response to job requirements and the strategies employed to manage them appears to be a unique contribution. Further, the documentation of these emotions perhaps help to explain some of the affective responses at the root of the purposeful emotional disengagement described above.

One of the most common strategies in disengagement from the families was the intentional immersion in deployment tasks. Fathers described keeping themselves as busy as possible during their days to remain distracted from thoughts of the family and centered on their deployment tasks. Most fathers also described “downtime”, specifically bedtime, as a difficult time as the distraction of work was not available. Fathers also described feeling anxious that thoughts of home, and emotions towards home, would distract from the tasks of deployment and potentially threaten the safety of themselves

and others. One father, the only father who endorsed a diagnosis of PTSD, described compartmentalizing and putting away thoughts of his family to allow him to cope with the disturbing experiences encountered during his deployment. This father also discussed difficulty reengaging emotionally with his family on return, or de-compartmentalizing stowed emotional capacity.

“The military comes first”

Four out of six fathers stated that while employed by the military there is an expectation, either personal or occupational, that the military comes first. Inherent to this was a sense of powerlessness, or a lack of control, either tacitly surrendered or intentionally sacrificed. Fathers described a great sense of pride related to their involvement in the armed forces and some stated explicitly that if placing the military first meant subjecting their family to additional discomfort, this was a trade they were willing to make. However, fathers also expressed guilt, sadness, regret, anxiety, and shame over sacrificing aspects of their family’s lives for the military. One father, in relation to the priority and extent of the commitment required by the military stated, “Do one or the other. Military career or family; putting them both together causes a lot of grief.” Putting the military first, to the fathers interviewed, meant being completely subservient to military requests including deployments, relocations, difficult or threatening tasks, and significant time commitments for training and exercises.

One of the fathers that did not endorse or describe putting the military first in his own experience commented that he recognized this as the experience of those under his command. Participant 105, who endorsed being an engineer and an officer on interview, commented that he had a “choice”. Specifically, Participant 105 stated:

I do have control. Whereas I know guys that have worked for me that, in the non-officer types they would get a message and they would just be devastated and they, in my office, well I'd see the message before they did anyways, just not happy. Some enjoyed it. Some are, the recipe between wife and family and husband seem to work, other ones it's just stressful

Interviewer: "That's a very clear message of job first, family second, if you're being told that you're going".

105: And you don't have a choice, where as I had a choice. Yeah, as an officer I had a choice my last four years...that was by choice. So I could have cut any of that time back or even out cause I had already had my rides its just they needed some senior guys at sea and I was more than happy to go. But that's a very good point, if I was told to go it would not have been as much fun, put it that way...

Being an officer and having a choice appeared to impact this soldier's perceived ability to put the needs of his family first. Further, though this father did not state that the military came before his family, he still chose to go to sea for work rather than remaining with his family.

The theme "The military comes first" appears to speak directly to the challenge of finding balance. Fathers in the military are fathers while employed in a demanding occupation. Both roles require focus, perseverance, and physical and emotional presence. As such, fathers often had to choose between roles. The role not chosen, often

fatherhood, appeared to be a source of regret, sadness, remorse, guilt, and anxiety. The fathers interviewed endorsed missing out on things, on feeling like an outsider in their own home, in finding it challenging to be away from family and in employing various strategies to try to reduce the negative affect associated with all of these themes. Most of the participants stated that in the balance between family and work, the military came first. In interviewing the fathers, this did not appear to be a cold mechanical decision but rather a deeply emotional struggle that emphasized a deep love and sense of responsibility for their families, and an equally great sense of pride for the necessary role they played as a serviceman in the military.

The extrapolation of the common theme, “the military comes first”, is a unique finding in the research on military fathers that has yet to be investigated in the literature. Fathers discussed this theme openly and many had comedic sayings related to subservience and the outweighing of work priorities that had been passed down. The participants’ ease in describing this theme seemed incongruent with the severity of the dialectic and the painful consequences of placing work before family.

Limitations

The findings of this investigation provide a foundational look at the lived experience of military fathers. The methods used in the study allowed for a great deal of breadth and depth. The qualitative approach included intersubjective dialogues between the researcher and the participant and co-created themes that illuminate the experiences of fathers in the military. However, despite the many benefits of the methodology selected, there are some limitations to consider.

One feature not accounted for in the current research's design that became apparent as the research progressed was the fact that not all branches or positions in the military are identical. The current research included five navy participants and one army participant. The themes drawn from the data were endorsed by most; however, there were notable differences among participant interviews. Further, off and on record, many fathers anecdotally described differences in military branches and positions. Fathers in the navy reported that their lives included long deployments, but typically less relocations and less potential for exposure to traumatic stress or combat zones. This fit with the interview data in that participants reported some, though not many, relocations, and none of the fathers in the navy endorsed ever receiving a diagnosis of PTSD. The only father with a background in the army was also the only father in the study to endorse having received a diagnosis of PTSD. Further, the data collected from this father was unique due to the nature of his experience. This father described deployments to war zones and multiple exposures to death, dying, and other traumatic stresses. This father is referred to in this report as "Participant 102." Despite the differences in experience, Participant 102 contributed to all themes included in the current study. However, future research looking at the subjective experience of fathers in the army may find some unique themes related to the difference in employment experience and perhaps themes that reflect the increased prevalence of exposure to traumatic stress.

Another feature not accounted for in the current research was the distinction between officer's and others in the military. One of the key features identified by the officer included in the current research was the degree of perceived choice. This feature

is briefly discussed above under the summary of the theme “the military comes first.”

Participant 105 commented that:

The officer side, you go to sea normally, as an engineer fairly young. You might go back for one more tour but that’s very rare. Ship divers, MARS officers, the command type, captains of ships do a lot more sea time, but again a lot of that is by choice...A lot of that is by choice. It changes a bit. Choosing to go back to sea, it was something that my wife and I had decided on together. If she had said no, I wouldn’t have gone back...I do have control. Whereas I know guys that have worked for me that, in the non-officer types they would get a message and they would just be devastated.

Though Participant 105, an officer throughout the entire duration of the overlap between being a father and being employed by the military, endorsed some differences, he also contributed to all themes other than “the military comes first.” As noted, this was likely a reflection of his position in the military as an officer.

Suggestions for future research that attempt to account for differences in military branch and position do not discredit the inclusion of these participants in the current research, or the strength and value of the findings. Rather, the themes drawn from this research appear to generally span both branches and positions. It was interesting that despite the variance in branch and position the same themes emerged, aside from the theme “the military comes first” which was not endorsed by the only officer included.

Another limitation to the current research is the inherent bias in self-selection. All

participants in the current research agreed to participate and responded in some form or another to the researcher's requests for participants. As such, fathers included were fathers willing to discuss their subjective experiences and to have those experiences recorded. This is likely not accurate of all fathers in the military. Further, all fathers in the current research had intact marriages and appeared to be functioning well. Fathers in the current study commented, and previous research in the area indicates that, many marriages have a difficult time succeeding under the added stresses of a military lifestyle (Gimbel & Booth, 1994). Fathers with more challenges in their interpersonal and familial relationships, or guilt or shame regarding their experience, may have avoided discussing their experiences and may have had some unique contributions.

Fathers in the current research are all retired from the military and as such had ceased to be employed by the military prior to participation in the current research. This may suggest that these fathers are already biased in that they have decided to leave the military making them unique to those that stayed active. As noted, half of the fathers interviewed endorsed leaving the military due to concerns with their family. Future research may find unique results in interviewing active fathers in the military.

The current research included a small sample size, which fits the qualitative methodology best suited to answer the question posed by the researcher. Despite the appropriateness of the sample size for the current research, the small sample size and methodology selected preclude generalizability beyond the sample. However, the initial aim of the research was to obtain a broad understanding of what it is like to be a father in the military. The sample size used and methodology selected has allowed for this as is indicated by the themes extrapolated.

The fathers interviewed in the research appeared to have a difficult time articulating their affective experience. Some fathers described a mentality in the military that looks down on the admission of weakness or pain. For example, Participant 104 commented that:

[P]art of our attitude to things is a sort of a suck it up and a get over it attitude because that's what they tell us... you also actually believe it. Your kid falls down and skins his knee, eh, good for you. It's not broken? Carry on. You know get up and keep fighting, get up and keep going you know push, push, push; that's the... you know, there's no babying.

This attitude was apparent in many of the interviews as, at times, fathers discussed events almost void of emotion and with little regard to the personal impact of the content discussed. Further, in many cases it appeared as though fathers avoided even discussing the emotional or subjective experience of challenging features of their experience. In this sense, gaining a complete picture of the affective experience was difficult. Fathers used words like "sad" and "guilt" but did not elaborate on the experience of these emotions. Often fathers would change the topic following the endorsement or identification of an emotion. When describing their subjective experiences some fathers would follow rigid chronological histories providing a timeline of their experience with rare glimpses into the subjective experience of any one feature. This was a limitation as the interviews intended focus was on subjective experiences of these fathers, experiences fathers had a difficult time articulating.

The final limitation is the lack of experience by the primary researcher in conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews. Though a great deal of personal study was undergone prior to engaging in the methodology, practical experience with the methodology may have altered, and possibly increased the quality, of the findings. The researcher's background in counselling was likely beneficial in the interviewing, though greater familiarity with the particular style of population sampled might have also impacted the content of the data. Consistent supervision and consultation with a supervisor having extensive experience with this population, assisted in overcoming some of the challenges related to inexperience, and, despite this potential weakness, the interviews and methodology used appeared to capture unique and valuable data. Participants were also provided with the opportunity to validate, deny or modify the themes extracted as well as their contributions to those themes. Completed themes were provided via email to all participants with the request that fathers review the theme descriptions and their contributing quotes and answer the question, "does this fit with your experience?" In response to this, fathers all indicated that the themes and their associated quotes fit their experience. For example, one father commented, "I think what you have said sums up what we went through".

Recommendations for future research

Three recommendations made in the limitations section of this discussion were: 1) It would be helpful for future research to compare the experience of fathers in different branches or positions in the military, given that differences were identified by the fathers in the current study, 2) Quantitative research would include a larger sample that could validate and increase the ability to generalize the applicability of the four themes

explicated in this study to the larger population, and 3) Research looking at the lived experience of fathers currently in the military could add valuable and possibly novel themes. The discrepancy between the experience of enlisted men and officers was also highlighted in the current research, specifically as it related to the theme “the military comes first”. As noted, the only father who did not endorse this theme was an officer while a father in the military. This father also stated that he believed the level of choice he experienced as an officer impacted his experience. Further investigation into the different lived experiences of officers and enlisted ranks would allow this topic to be further explored. Also, the current research has explored the experiences of fathers in the military; a similar investigation into the experience of mothers in the military may provide valuable information and helpful comparative data. These three areas would address some of the limits of the current study and build on the findings of the current study.

Another area of future research may include further work with fathers who endorse a diagnosis of PTSD. Only one of the fathers in the current study endorsed a diagnosis of PTSD. As noted, the symptoms typically included in a PTSD diagnosis are located in the symptoms clusters of Avoidance, Re-Experiencing and Hyperarousal. Ruscio, Weathers, King and King (2002) found in looking at 66 Vietnam veterans that the emotional numbing component of PTSD found in the Avoidance cluster of the symptomology was the most predictive of interpersonal dysfunction or challenge. The current research found that fathers intentionally attempted to disconnect from families to make coping with work easier. Research that looks at this process with a larger sample of fathers who have been diagnosed with PTSD may further illuminate this process and

some of the conflicting variables to it. As only one father in the current study reported receiving a diagnosis of PTSD, discussion on the interaction between PTSD and the experience of emotional connection or disconnection of fathers as well as the experience of leaving, being away from, and rejoining families was not possible.

As noted previously, there appears to be a dearth in the literature exploring fatherhood and the experience of paternal care giving in general. The current study provided a unique contribution to the investigation of fatherhood, specifically the subjective experience of fatherhood in the military. Some valuable and unique contributions have been found in response to the question, “What is it like to be a father in the military?” A further, and likely valuable future study may be one that asks the question, “What is it like to be a father?” Broadening the topic and using a qualitative phenomenological research methodology to explore the subjective experience of fatherhood in general would help to explore and record the subjective experience of fathers, a topic not represented in the literature. Similar to work previous studies of military fathers, research focused on specific factors within the broader phenomena: studies of fatherhood generally look at components or features of fatherhood rather than the phenomena as a whole. A general, open-ended study asking fathers, “What do I need to know what it is like to be a father?” would likely yield novel and valuable data at a point in history where fatherhood appears to be transforming dramatically (Lamb, 2000).

Implications for Practice

This study investigating the subjective experience of fatherhood in the military revealed the following themes: (a) You miss out, (b) You feel like an outsider, (c) You try to disengage to deal with work, and (d) The military comes first. All of these themes

included the disclosure of emotions including sadness, anxiety, guilt, shame, remorse, and regret. This study was unique in its emphasis on the subjective experience of fatherhood from the perspective of the fathers. The experience of these emotions, and the four themes extrapolated are a unique contribution to the literature. Awareness and practice oriented towards these themes would likely be beneficial for practitioners working with fathers in the military.

Further, two of the themes that appear to create dissonance for military fathers are: feeling like an outsider and disengaging to make it easier. Working with fathers to find other strategies, aside from disengaging, to approach difficult beliefs and feelings towards family may be one way to address this dissonance. For example, fathers disengage emotionally to deal with separation from their families, and then find it is difficult to re-engage: they may have disengaged to an extent that they no longer feel connected at all. Working to develop and foster strategies that maintain connection but appropriately process affect, such as training in mindfulness, emotional self-care practices, and practice in emotional expression in a safe and accepting environment may be beneficial. However, this would likely be challenging given the repressive, and likely culturally bound, norms associated with expressing particular emotions in the military subculture. Anecdotally, fathers in the current study appeared to have a very difficult time discussing their parts of their personal experience and articulating emotions. Practitioners need to cultivate awareness that building safety in this context, and fostering a therapeutic relationship where the expression of emotions can be done so safely, will likely take longer and require more process specific work.

This research also supports previous literature on deployment and its impact on military families while adding the subjective voice of the father to the discussion. As noted, previous research has identified deployment as a significant challenge based on its impact on marriages, children, and spouses. In this study, father's report that they feel like outsiders, they try to disengage to deal with work (specifically deployments), and they miss out (typically because of deployments). In a very practical sense this data can be used specifically to work with deployed fathers in a counselling environment and address some of the themes extrapolated from the data. In a broader sense, these findings may be useful to influence military practice to alleviate some of the distress identified as being associated with deployment.

Summary and Conclusions

The current study is the first to look at the subjective experience of fathers in the military. The qualitative methodology used serves to lay a strong foundation for future work. Specifically, this research describes a number of previously unknown features of military fathers' subjective experiences. It also compliments previous research in the area of military families by adding the voice of the fathers to create a more complete picture of military families. In completing the research, six veteran military fathers were asked the question, "What do I need to know to understand what it is like to be a father in the military?" The researcher used prompts and an open interview format to further explore the experience of the fathers interviewed.

The researcher approached the topic with the view that fatherhood, for individuals employed by the military, did not positively facilitate healthy bonding with children. Previous literature in this area generally seemed to emphasize the challenges inherent to

fatherhood in the military from all perspectives other than the father's individual subjective descriptions. The findings from this study support the results predicted by reading current literature and, more importantly, begin to paint a rich image of the subjective experiences of the fathers interviewed. Participants shared a great deal of personal information in the course of their individual interviews and from this information four broad and generally endorsed themes emerged.

As noted, all themes were presented in response to the research question: (a) You miss out, (b) You feel like an outsider, (c) You try to disengage to deal with work, and (d) The military comes first. Despite the open nature of the interview question, these themes permeated most of the interview content. It is interesting to note that, were used by multiple fathers, for example, "missed", "outsider", and "stranger". Fathers in the military appear to walk a difficult balance between two very demanding and important roles. The current research has added a vital piece of information to the subjective experience of walking that balance between fatherhood and military.

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Appendix A. Subject Informed Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT

Investigator: Sean Larsen, Department of Counselling Psychology, snlarsen@uvic.ca

Supervisor: Tim Black, PhD, RPsyc

Project title: A Look at the Lived Experience of Six Military Fathers

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

I am a graduate student at the University of Victoria completing an MA in Counselling Psychology. The current research is a necessary requirement for the completion of my degree. This research is being completed under the supervision of Dr. Tim Black, who you may also contact at (250) 721-7820, tblack@uvic.ca, should you have any questions or concerns.

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experience of fatherhood in the military. This research will attempt to draw out the essential features of the experience of fathers who are in the military.

The primary objectives of the current research are: (1) to complete a scholarly study in an area that has not been adequately explored, and (2) to generate information that will be valuable for both military fathers and those who work with them in developing programs or providing services.

Importance of this Research

This research is important as information on beneficial practices in fathering is both emerging and becoming widely disseminated throughout society. Fathers in the military represent a large group with significantly differing experiences to other occupations and most of society. The current research, and other ongoing research on this topic, is essential in laying the essential groundwork towards allowing fathers in the military to benefit from current understandings of positive parenting practices.

Participant Selection

You have been asked to participate in this research because of your involvement in the military and your role as a father. I am seeking volunteers who meet the following requirements: (1) They were fathers while employed by the military, and (2) they are willing to share their experiences as a father in the military.

What is Involved

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide background information, including occupational history and specific details around military activity that will be used for comparative and contextual purposes.

As a participant you will be asked to participate in an unstructured interview. During the interview you will have the opportunity to share your experience of being a father while employed by the military. Some guiding questions may be asked during the interview to gather more information around specific areas of military activity that are hypothesized to relate to how the role of fatherhood is experienced. It is estimated that the interview will take no longer than 120 minutes to complete, and will most likely take 90 minutes or less to complete. If you agree to participate in this study you are free to choose not to answer any questions you do not feel comfortable answering.

Your participation in this study will also require your time to review a copy of the typewritten transcript of your interview(s) in order for you to verify its accuracy. You will receive the copy of your interview transcript via mail several weeks after the actual interview process. Although each individual will vary, it is anticipated that it will require 1 to 2 hours of your time for you to carefully review your transcript. One week after receiving your interview transcript in the mail I will contact you by telephone to obtain your feedback. At that time you will have the opportunity to identify any perceived inaccuracies in the written transcript, as well as having the opportunity to request the deletion of any text portions that you do not wish to be included in the thesis analysis process. I will subsequently make revisions to the written transcript based upon your feedback.

Lastly, 1 or 2 months following your review and feedback around initial transcript data, you will be provided with a document summarizing the general themes that my analysis has extracted from the interview transcript(s). These themes will attempt to capture the essence of your experience as a father in the military. In a similar process to that outlined above, you will be required to review a copy of this analytical summary in order to verify the accuracy of the identified themes. Although each individual will vary, it is anticipated that it will require up to 1 hour of your time for you to carefully review your thematic summary document. One week after receiving your thematic analysis in the mail I will contact you by telephone to obtain your feedback. At that time you will have the opportunity to identify any perceived inaccuracies in the thematic analysis, and I will subsequently make revisions based upon your feedback.

Inconvenience/ Risks/ Benefits

Participation in the current research may result in some inconvenience to you. Firstly, the current research will require time for an initial interview, transcript review and discussion, and theme review and discussion.

There are minimal foreseeable risks in participating in this research. Some of the potential risks associated with participating in the current research are that some participants may experience discomfort in describing certain feelings, thoughts, and

settings from their lives. In order to deal with these potential risks, the following steps have been taken: (1) *Right to Pass*: you are not required to answer / discuss any of the questions asked by myself during the interviews, (2) *Right to Terminate*: you may stop the interview(s) at any time, (3) *Support*: I will be available during and after the interview(s) to debrief and provide emotional support as necessary and reasonably possible, (4) *Follow-up*: you will be encouraged to contact me directly in the post-interview period should you feel that you wish to discuss any issues arising from the interview(s), (5) *Community Resources*: you will be provided with a list of names and contact telephone numbers of agencies within the Greater Victoria community that offer counsellors and/or psychologists who may be of therapeutic assistance if you require emotional support exceeding what can be reasonably offered in a debriefing session / follow-up telephone call, or if you have a desire to more deeply explore issues that arose in your interview(s), and lastly, (6) *Supervisor Contact*: you will have the name, contact telephone number, and email address of my UVic supervisor should you have any questions or concerns about the research process, its intent, your participation, or myself.

By participating in the current research you are providing valuable information to an area where only a small amount of research has been conducted. Your contribution will help research in this area better serve those who are currently, or have been at some point, fathers in the military. Further, it has been found that participation in self exploratory exercises, such as those provided by the current research, can provide positive outcomes, including better self understanding, and the benefit of having your unique story heard.

Confidentiality/ Anonymity/ Data Handling

Interviews will be transcribed for analyses and no one except the researcher and his supervisor will be allowed to see transcribed data while it is being analysed. Where possible, pseudonyms will be assigned to your transcribed interviews and any reported information to maintain your anonymity. However, as you will be asked to review both transcriptions and thematic analysis following your initial interview, complete anonymity cannot be offered. Should you decide to withdraw at any point you may choose to have your information excluded from the study, at which point you could select to have your information destroyed or have your incomplete interview included in the study.

Electronic data collected during the study will be stored on password protected portable hard drive. Paper data will always be locked and both paper and electronic data will only be accessed by the researcher and his supervisor. Transcripts may be used in future research by the researcher, however, the researcher will remove all identifying information and pseudonyms will be used to protect participant's identities.

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new

information throughout your participation. You are under no obligation, nor should you feel obliged to participate in the research, based on professional relationships with Dr. Black.

Participant's Name: (please print)

Participant's Signature

_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print)

Researcher's Signature:

_____ Date: _____

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Sean Larsen, BA: snlarsen@uvic.ca

Or, Dr. Tim Black

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or ethics@uvic.ca).

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix B. Invitation to Participate Poster

Fatherhood in the Military**University of Victoria**

Dept. of Educational Psychology
and Leadership Studies

*this study represents partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology*

If you are interested in participating in a study that has a goal of promoting a better understanding of how fatherhood in the military experienced, we would love to have you participate in our groundbreaking new study. Participants must fit the following criteria:

- You were a father while in the military within the past fifteen years, and
- You speak English fluently, and are comfortable with the idea of participating in an audiotaped interview where you would be required to discuss your personal experience of fatherhood in the military, and
- You would like to share your experiences of being a father in the military and provide valuable information that will be useful in providing programs and services to fathers in the military in the future.

Note: Confidential and anonymity will be ensured where possible.

Note: participating in this study does not restrict you from exiting the study. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences or any explanation.

Principal Investigator: **Sean Larsen**
Phone: **370-5042**
Email: **snlarsen@uvic.ca**

Research Supervisor: **Dr. Tim Black**
Phone: **721-7820**
Email: **tblack@uvic.ca**

Appendix C. Interview scripts

Possible Interview Questions

Interviews will be partially structured in that certain guiding questions will be used to direct responses towards the lived experience of specific areas within fatherhood in the military.

General Introduction and Prompt

- The purpose of this interview is to explore your unique experience as a father in the military. I want to capture your experience both generally and in regards to some more specific areas of military fatherhood. Please try to be aware of not only what events took place but also most importantly, how you experienced those events, especially as it related to you, as a “father”. Please, tell me about your experience as a father in the military?
- What would I need to know in order to understand what it was like to be a father in the military?

Deployment

- Were you ever deployed? (If yes)
 - Tell me about how you experienced the deployment both in being away and in returning home?
 - What would I need to know to understand what it was like being deployed as a father in the military?

Emotional Connections

- What can you tell me to help me know what it is like to connect emotionally to your children as a father in the military?
- What do I need to know to understand what it is like expressing and responding to emotions with your children as a father in the military?

Appendix D. Counselling Resource List

Victoria Community Counselling Resource List**1. Military Family Resource Centre**

- (25) 391-4212 (24-hour line)
- Services members of the armed forces and their families.
- Provides information and referrals, as well as short-term and crisis counselling, employment counselling, and deployment support.
- www.esquimaltmfrc.com

2. Crisis Intervention

- “NEED” Crisis & Information Line
- (250) 386-6323 (24-hour line)
- www.needcrisis.bc.ca

3. Addictions (Alcohol / Drugs)

- a) Alcohol & Drug Services (Victoria)
 - (250) 387-5077
- b) Alcoholics Anonymous
 - (250) 383-0417
- c) Specialized Youth Detox (Victoria)
 - (250) 386-8282
- d) Youth & Family Services
 - Target Age: 12 – 19 years of age
 - (250) 721-2669

4. Advocacy

- a) BC Coalition of People with Disabilities
 - (604) 875-0188
 - www.bccpd.bc.ca
- b) BC Aboriginal Network on Disability Society (BCANDS)
 - (250) 381-7303
 - www.bcands.bc.ca

5. Child and Youth Services

- a) Child Abuse Prevention & Counselling Society of Greater Victoria (Mary Manning Centre)
 - (250) 385-6111
 - www.marymanning.com
- b) MCFD Victoria Child & Youth Mental Health

- (250) 356-1123

6. General Counselling Services

- a) BC Association of Clinical Counsellors
 - (250) 595-4448
 - Professional regulatory association that will provide the public with referrals to Registered Clinical Counsellors in their region.
 - www.bc-counsellors.org
- b) Cascadia Counselling
 - (250) 216-1569
 - Offers a range of services, including individual and family counselling, psycho-educational groups (e.g. anger management, parenting, couples), leadership development, and advocacy.
- c) Citizens' Counseling Centre
 - (250) 384-9934
 - Offers a range of services, including individual, couples, and group counselling to adults. Counselling covers a range of concerns, with a focus on: anxiety, depression, anger management, communication, and relationships.
 - www.citizenscounseling.org
- d) Men's Trauma Centre
 - (250) 381-6367
 - Offers individual and group therapy for male survivors of physical, emotional, or sexual trauma.
- e) Pacific Centre Family Services Association
 - Phone: 478-8357
 - Offers a range of services, including individual, couples, and family therapy. Counselling covers a range of concerns, including: crisis counselling, counselling for women who have been abused/assaulted, outpatient drug / alcohol treatment.
- f) Victoria Native Friendship Centre
 - Phone: 384-3211
 - Offers a range of services, including individual counselling, community outreach, addictions counselling, personal / family crisis counselling for issues such as violence, abuse, or neglect.
 - www.vcfn.ca

- g) Victoria Separation and Divorce Resource Centre
- Phone: 386-4331
 - Offers a range of services, including individual and group therapy, legal support / information, grief counselling, transition support.

Appendix E. Demographic Questions

Demographic Information Questionnaire

1. When were you active in the military? (month/ year) - (month/ year)

_____ - _____

2. As a father, have you ever been deployed?

Deployment 1

Location:

Duration (month/yr – month/ yr):

Deployment 2

Location:

Duration (month/yr – month/ yr):

Deployment 3

Location:

Duration (month/yr – month/ yr):

Deployment 4

Location:

Duration (month/yr – month/ yr):

Deployment 5

Location:

Duration (month/yr – month/ yr):

3. Have you ever been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, Depression, or any other mental illness (If yes, what was the diagnosis)?

4. Family information

a. Marriage status? _____

b. Children's Date of Birth and Genders?

DOB: _____ M/F

DOB: _____ M/F

DOB: _____ M/F

DOB: _____ M/F

DOB: _____ M/F

5. Did you leave the military due to concerns related to your family? Y/N

a. (If yes) Briefly explain?
