



Fathers on the Front Lines

Military Family Research Institute
at Purdue University

By

Shelley M. MacDermid, Rona Schwarz and Anthony Faber
Purdue University

Joyce Adkins and Matthew Mishkind
Walter Reed Army Medical Center

Howard Weiss
Purdue University

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Approximately 1.5 out of every 100 male workers in the U.S. serves on active duty in the military (Military Family Resource Center, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). One additional male out of every 100 serves in the National Guard or Reserve (Military Family Resource Center, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). More than 89 times between 1975 and 2001, U.S. military members were deployed to locations around the world to serve as peacekeepers (e.g., Operation Joint Guardian in Bosnia), to provide humanitarian aid (e.g., Operation Avid Response in Turkey), or to engage in armed conflict (e.g., Operation Desert Storm in Kuwait; Center for Defense Information, 2004) At the moment this chapter is being written, estimates are that over 150,000 military members are deployed in the Middle East (“US forces,” 2004).

Children who grow up in military families experience multiple separations from their military parent lasting anywhere from a few days to many months. About 44% of active duty military members and 38% of members of the guard and reserve have children, about two-thirds of whom are younger than 14. Today, upwards of 750,000 children in the U.S. are under age 14 and have a parent serving in the military (Military Family Resource Center, 2002).

During deployments, military fathers become “nonresidential.” They both resemble and differ from other nonresidential fathers in important ways. Like long-haul truckers and commercial fishermen, deployed military fathers are repeatedly separated from their families, sometimes for prolonged periods of time, because of work demands. Like incarcerated fathers, deployed military fathers are not free to visit their families when they wish. And like divorced fathers, deployed military fathers depend heavily on mothers for contact with children. Unlike any of these fathers, however, deployed military fathers are expected to be prepared to risk their lives engaging in armed combat. As has been the case with studies of other nonresidential fathers, we have only a sparse understanding of deployed military fathers. In part because they are

difficult to recruit and retain as research participants, and because military duties during deployment can be intense, deployed fathers are rarely studied. Studies of the effects of deployment on children often conceptualize fathers simply as “absent.” (e.g., Amen, Merves, & Lee, 1988; Hiew, 1992; Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis, & Bain, 1989).

The editors of this volume have proposed a framework with which to understand how “physical sites and social settings” (Marsiglio, Roy, & Fox, this volume, p. 2) affect men’s thoughts and actions as fathers. Military deployments would seem to offer a provocative and instructive opportunity to learn about the power of settings, with the potential to generate insights about how fathers encounter and deal with challenges to their involvement as parents. In this chapter, our goal is to use the editors’ framework to understand the experiences of fathers recently returned from military deployments. We document the experiences of these fathers, discuss their connections to fathers’ thoughts and behavior, and speculate about the utility of the framework for future research.

Procedures

Data were gathered through focus groups conducted with 27 fathers at Walter Reed Army Medical Center over a four-day period in the summer of 2004. The number of participants in each focus group ranged from two to six individuals. Each focus group lasted approximately two hours and consisted of a series of open-ended questions used to stimulate discussion.

Participants were recruited through announcements made at morning and afternoon formations, occasions where all soldiers were required to assemble. Interested soldiers were screened to ensure they met the following eligibility criteria: U.S. Military service member, father of child(ren) younger than 18 years of age, returned from a deployment within the last 12

months, no life-threatening or incapacitating injury or cognitive impairment due to illness, injury, or medication. Eligible soldiers then were scheduled for a focus group.

Most of the participants were military police in the Army, who had recently returned from deployments to the Middle East ($n=22$), Guantanamo Bay Cuba ($n=3$), or in the U.S. ($n=2$). All of the participants had been evacuated from their deployments for medical reasons; hence their presence at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. None of their physical conditions was life-threatening or incapacitating; examples include arm injuries and herniated disks. Although the sample was small and homogeneous in terms of military job, the participants were diverse in terms of their military and marital histories, ages of their children, locations of service, and ethnicity. Most participants had been deployed multiple times -- up to 5 -- but 10 had just completed their first deployment. Most participants ($n=15$) were members of the National Guard, 7 were reservists, and 1 was active duty (4 participants did not report their status). Most participants were African American ($n=22$), and most were married ($n=21$); the remainder were divorced ($n=4$), separated ($n=1$) or engaged ($n=1$). Most participants had more than one child or stepchild (10 had 2 children or stepchildren, 10 had 3 or more children or stepchildren); the maximum number of children was 6. Children ranged in age from 1 to 26.

The design of the focus group protocol was based on the conceptual framework proposed by Marsiglio, Roy and Fox (this volume). For example, to get at the issue of transitional elements, we asked fathers, "How do you switch roles, from combat to peacetime, from warrior to father, and back?" The focus groups were audiotaped and transcribed *verbatim*. N6 software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2002) was used for analyses. Each author coded transcripts for the elements of the conceptual framework. Early in the process a coding meeting was held to discuss the conceptual clarity of the data associated with each element and to make coding decisions. For

example, we decided that infrastructure for communication was a ‘physical condition,’ while rules for access to communication were ‘institutional policies.’ We then returned to the transcripts and coded each for all elements. Each author then wrote a summary of a subset of elements. The other authors read their summary and group discussions were held to ensure once again that each element was as conceptually distinct as possible and that the descriptions fairly represented the transcripts.

Findings

Not surprisingly, there is considerable overlap among the various physical, temporal, and social elements of settings. For this reason, we group elements of the conceptual model in our presentation of findings. We begin with the spatial and temporal elements of the setting, which also includes the juxtaposition of public and private spaces.

Space and Time

The experiences of deployed fathers are heavily defined by both space and time. Space includes not only their immediate physical conditions but also their location on the planet. In turn, location on the planet had a great deal to do with the degree to which time posed challenges for fathers.

Physical conditions. The fathers stationed in Iraq experienced primitive living conditions. Soldiers who arrived early in the war or were members of mobile units slept wherever they could, often under or inside vehicles. Other units set up temporary base camps in damaged empty public buildings. With no access to regular showers, soldiers used baby wipes for personal cleanliness, sometimes making makeshift showers out of body bags. The climate was challenging, with temperatures ranging from 120 to 160°F and 100% humidity. Sand storms and

sand fleas were common. The conditions made it difficult for soldiers to stay focused on their job or to sleep, particularly after 12-16 hour workdays.

Being a gunner in the [turret] you just don't see nothing because the wind is hitting you and you are like, 'Please don't shoot me because I ain't even going to see you.' The heat would just burn you but you could not come down. F1: 782

You work all night, you get back in the morning and it's so hot you ain't getting no sleep.

You go to sleep you wake up in a pile of sweat. That's why I can't sleep now. F1: 863

As American forces became more established in Iraq, more permanent base camps were established, with bathroom facilities and tents equipped with cots, wooden floors, and – sometimes - air-conditioning. For fathers deployed to Guantanamo Bay, living conditions were less austere from the beginning. There, the soldiers in our focus groups lived in townhouses with air-conditioning, cable television, and internet access. They had access to recreational activities such as snorkeling and swimming.

Regardless of location, the fathers described their military duties as unpleasant and dangerous. Soldiers in the war zone reported constantly feeling in danger.

One time I let down my guard thinking that it was just a little bit safe but got a quick reality check. A soldier was shot right in the neck in the Market Square and that was deemed a secure zone. So you never know. F3: 907

Fathers' access to communication with their families varied widely as a function of physical location and conditions. Communication facilities were very sparse for soldiers who arrived early in the Iraqi conflict, for whom weeks or even months passed without talking to their families.

... a lot of us had laptops but we had no way to hook up to the internet, and then once a signal came in we had to fight for the signal.... We went almost the whole year without contacting our families. F2: 114

Land mail sometimes was not delivered because of attacks on convoys and theft along the way, and slow when it was delivered, taking an average of two months. Fathers accustomed to daily contact with their children found the isolation difficult to tolerate.

As conditions improved, satellite phones and computers were installed at some base camps. In addition, soldiers who were stationed at more permanent locations or whose job required the use of computers, such as supply sergeants, had access to the internet, video cameras, and cell phones. Despite the improved infrastructure, however, soldiers reported having to wait in line for six or seven hours to be given only 10-15 minutes of use, or to be denied access entirely by telephone malfunction or by enemy attacks.

Temporal dynamics. Fathers deployed to Iraq faced many challenges in timing their military duties with their contact with families, including the time difference, constant movement from one location to another, and work schedules.

Well like in the desert, you're under hostile fire and you get a chance to talk to your kid, you know, not knowing what your kid's itinerary is, you know, what they doing. Cause like I say, it's like a six-hour difference, if you call at 3:00 in the morning the kid sometimes dead asleep. A lot of times I had to wake my kid up at 3:00 in the morning just to talk to him because, the flip side of it, the other times, I'm trying to protect my life. F3:

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...it's hard to catch up to a soldier if you're moving. If you're constantly moving they can't, sometimes they don't even find you, takes 'em months to find your unit. So it

[communication] really takes a long time....So, the gap between there, lots of things could happen that you didn't pick up on that were going on at home. F4: 191

Fathers in Cuba had an easier time because they had more communication facilities, more predictable work schedules, and were located in a time zone closer to home. Nonetheless, their communication time was rationed, making it difficult to juggle communications with every family member. One father describes his rationing of the two 15-minute telephone calls he was allowed each week:

...you had to make sure that those two morale calls that you got, and I have a daughter in college and a daughter out of college, you see what I'm saying? You try to talk to the grandson and my wife at home and then you try to talk to your daughter away at school, you know, and then I have my oldest daughter, if I don't get to talk to her, she's feels left out even though she's 26 year old, you see what I'm saying, its unfair. F3: 263

Fathers expressed some ambivalence about contact with their families. On the one hand, they craved contact as an important source of emotional support and a connection with the outside world. One soldier commented, "that's basically what saved my life over there, just talking to my family"(F4: 227). But family contact also caused tension, because it had the potential to distract soldiers while they were on patrol. Several soldiers commented that it took significant amounts of time to 'decompress' from phone calls before they were fit for a mission.

I just limit myself to calling a lot, because after you get off the phone its like it takes you a while to get back into that mode to go out and do patrol. Because you have to you refocus again after you get off that phone. Because then you get up and you're like missing he's crying on the phone, wife is crying on the phone so you limit those calls home as much as you want to, you don't want to. Cause then you get off and you gotta sit there and try to,

at one time I was sitting there and my friend was like ‘come on, we gotta go on a mission’ and I’m like ‘can I go later’ because I didn’t recuperate from that phone call and then I finally had to go back out again. Because when you got out you want to be focused, because if you’re not focused the slightest thing will, your life or your buddy’s, so you’re responsible. F1: 874

Private/public. Because deployed soldiers are almost never truly off-duty or alone, they operate almost exclusively in public space. Most soldiers complained about the lack of privacy and the omnipresence of strangers watching and listening; with 12 and sometimes even 70 people in one tent, accommodations were tight and soldiers did their best to construct privacy for family conversations.

... every time, I kind of like, looked around the guys were always like this (he covered his head and bent down and covered himself up and tried to muffle the sound so that people wouldn’t hear what he was saying on the phone) you’re like, it doesn’t matter, you can have this big, this big room but if you pick up the phone in Iraq, everybody was like this on the phone, just huddled in like one little corner. F4: 381

On other hand, the lack of privacy could sometimes be beneficial in that it promoted the sharing of stories, advice, and discourse about fathering with other fathers in the unit.

And a lot of times, other dads will come up to you and say, “What should I do?” you know “You think I should do this?” What would I do, I would do this, what would he do? I don’t know. It does get, bonding, yes, is it natural, yes. It’s a way of passing time. F7: 257

Fathers’ public and private worlds collided to affect their parenting in two major ways. First, fathers experienced the tension between wanting to answer their children’s difficult

questions and reassure them, but needing also to avoid revealing information that could compromise the safety of the fathers themselves.

...you can say 'Hello, how are you doing in school?' and that kind of thing but if they start to ask you questions that you can't answer and you're sitting on the other end looking stupid like, 'Ok, my kid is asking me a difficult question here and I can't answer it because of the security reasons.' And you know you go through a thousand briefings about what you can say and what you can't say...It's hard to communicate with your family and tell them what they really need to know so that they can have kind of have some kind of closure, or some kind of understanding of what you're doing. F3: 200

Public and private also collided when television news brought the public events of the war into the private space of the home with vivid images of military action. The existence of 24-hour news frequently dictated how fathers conversed with their children. Again, this illustrates the dual role of soldier – trying to maintain security – and father – trying to respond to children's questions.

One of the main problems I was having was he [son] was watching the news a lot and I told his mother keep him away from it cause I don't want him you know, to try to see, can he see me on TV cause he know I drive trucks and a lot of convoys getting hit. F2: 207

The fathers in this study who were deployed under combat or wartime conditions, particularly on the front lines of armed conflicts, focused heavily on basic necessities of life – safety, sleep, and hygiene. The physical conditions of their deployment were unpredictable and unstable. Accommodations depended on whatever was available at their location, and fathers in Iraq moved frequently with little notice. Fathers who experienced such isolation and uncertainty seemed particularly invested in contact with their families, providing detailed and emotional

descriptions of both the importance and the risks of such contact. For fathers with access to computers and the internet, cyberspace in the form of electronic mail, internet video, and cellular telephones supplemented more conventional modes of communication. In many ways, the online environment functioned as “psychological space” (Suler, 2002), stretching the definition of fathers’ ‘presence.’ Especially in Iraq, the temporal features of deployment were particularly striking. Fathers’ job duties were extensive, demanding, and frequently changing. Fathers had little control or foreknowledge of their schedules, and the time difference between Iraq and home made it very difficult to reliably reach children.

Deployed fathers must negotiate fatherhood without access to private space and without sharing physical space with their children. Nonetheless, fathers’ public roles as soldiers and their private roles as husbands and fathers repeatedly came head-to-head, challenging fathers to simultaneously ‘serve two masters,’ caring for their children but also fulfilling their responsibilities for safety and security.

The Sociocultural Context

Marsiglio, Roy & Fox (this volume) describe the social structural aspect of settings as a “negotiated normative order,” a description particularly apt of the military. A ‘total institution,’ the military requires 24/7 availability of its members and imposes a myriad of regulations and resources in areas ranging from housing to health care to family preparation for deployments. As such, the military is both a culture – with macro-level policies, traditions and expectations – and an institution driven by policies and programs. For military members deployed to isolated areas with few resources, distinguishing between the ‘culture’ and the ‘institution’ must be nearly impossible because of their total reliance on the military for life’s necessities.

Social structural. When asked to characterize the culture of the military regarding soldiers' families, the fathers we spoke with offered slogans they had heard repeatedly from military leaders or colleagues. The most common example was 'mission first, family second.' Another example was 'if the army had meant for you to have a family, it would have issued you one' (this is a good-for-all-occasions slogan used for many things in addition to 'family').

Although it would probably be a mistake to conclude that the military is more hierarchical than large private employer organizations, it certainly has a very explicit and visible hierarchical social order. Nonetheless, it was also clearly a negotiated order. Fathers' accounts suggested that commanders had considerable discretion to act supportively or unsupportively toward family issues (we use the term 'commander' as a generic term for military superiors, not as an indication of any particular rank or level in the organization). Fathers had a good basis for their observations because of the frequent rotations of leadership that are common across the military.

I worked for one guy and he came and introduced himself, said "You know what? This is how I feel. I going to tell you I been to wars, I got kids don't care about them don't care about their mother don't care how long we gonna work." I've been with some that on Fridays he would try to get, if the people that were married you know and had a little kid they would try to get you all, but he would also compensate the single people also. So it just depends on who you work for. F1:571

In fathers' accounts, both they and commanders connected family concerns directly to performance of military duties, as opposed to treating them simply as a morale issue.

...some leaders will say, 'Well, you know if your family's not right then I can't use you. You need to go take care of that and then when you come back. Until your family is taken care of you ain't no good to me.' F2: 538

Commanders' actions directly impacted not only soldiers but also their families when commanders made decisions about soldiers' travel home for family reasons. Fathers told stories of being denied permission to travel home to be with an ill spouse or to be present for the birth of a child. At the other extreme, one commander involved his wife in sending emails to update soldiers about administrative matters that were being pursued on their behalf (F3: 696). Participants in our focus groups rarely distinguished between superiors immediately above them and superiors at higher levels of the organization, but when they did so it was to give examples of inconsistency, or policy decisions at one level being contradicted by decisions at another.

Culture also is constructed with coworkers and peers. Here too there was diversity, but in general, fathers described supportive and sympathetic treatment by colleagues.

...the people that I was dealing with constantly when I got started basically back to what you said, we had an understanding. If there was something wrong with your child or something wrong at home, we'd be like "okay, go handle your business, we'll cover for you." But then you have some people who say 'burn the bridge at both ends,' constantly using that excuse. F1:550

Single people in Iraq volunteered to give up their leave so that married ones could go home. F2: 635

Institutional conditions. According to Marsiglio, Roy and Fox (this volume), institutional conditions comprise "explicit or informal organizational policies about how space is to be used and how fathers can navigate within it." Certainly the military does not suffer from a lack of

policies. Fathers specifically mentioned policies related to pay and military allowances, which affected wives' effort in the labor force; re-deployment, which could result in very short intervals between deployments; and family visits, which made it difficult to know whether or when they could see their families or to afford to do so.

Because military policies are so comprehensive, they tend to extend and reify the privileges of military rank. For active-duty soldiers, access to on-base housing, various financial allowances, and housing standards all become more generous at higher ranks. Perhaps as a result, fathers had much to say about social disparity, although less from the perspective of their status as fathers as from their statuses as front-line soldiers, men, and members of the National Guard.

Commanders had the phones they were using them constantly all the time. They had computers, they were using it, we were not allowed to use it. So, communication in my unit really sucked. F1: 73

...later on in the winter it was so hot they finally got a pool in there but you couldn't, we couldn't even get close to that. We would just pass it and look at the water it looks all nice and blue. The commanders in there, they be chillin' in there, you just like sit there and take the heat. I'm doing 12-16 hours a day doing force protection, couldn't even get to go in there. F1: 854

... no military folks [got to bring their families to Cuba] unless very high-ranking F2: 943

A few fathers reported that female soldiers received preferential treatment during deployment (F3: 611). Fathers in the National Guard also objected to discrepancies in their treatment *vis a vis* active duty troops. One father said the guard is treated as “a stepchild until the nation needs us” (F1: 1295).

Personal power and control. In some ways, military life seems to be a lesson in lack of control. Military members may have little choice about their duties, or where or when they must go to carry them out. Fathers commented that they had just a few days to a couple of weeks to get everything in order before being deployed, which caused hardship for their families and delayed activities like family vacations and children's events.

My first deployment was for a year and it was at the Pentagon just when I thought I was going home they hit me with a deployment to Cuba with no break or anything a week later I was going to Cuba. It was tough on everybody my wife, my children. You think you'll be back at work at your civilian job and you know back to your normal life and it's like you get deployed but this time you're overseas and it like nothing you can do about it. How can you fight it? F2: 1331

We asked fathers about their experience of fathering from a distance and the degree to which they felt any control over their children's behavior during deployment. In general, fathers reported feeling little control over their ability to discipline or comfort their children, but there was considerable diversity in how fathers responded. Some fathers resigned themselves to the situation:

You just have to let it go. At first you think maybe the first couple of weeks I still can play that role and then reality sets in where you just have to let it go. Say, 'hey you can't do nothing about it, you're here and there nothing you can do about it.' F3: 1052

Other fathers confronted feelings of powerlessness by developing strategies for active involvement. A few regularly contacted their children's teachers to check up on how their child was doing in school and work with the school on getting their child help if needed. Another father secretly told his family's friends and neighbors about tasks or errands that they could do to

help his wife and children. Yet another father had his daughter email him her future math assignments, which he would work on during down time and then be able to help her when he talked to her. Many fathers turned to technology.

...a lot of people started buying the video cameras and they started buying the camera phones. And a couple of people came in and we had a computer guy who was really great and would set your camera or your video cam into that computer, he would program it in, so you could get a live feed, but a lot of times you would have to call them, tell them to get on-line, but it was like you was on a time limit, so you had to do these things like quickly, but it did work out. F3: 320

Some fathers were particularly playful and creative. One recorded himself reading children's stories before he was deployed. Then each evening his wife would play the video tape to his daughter so each night he was still able to read his daughter a bedtime story. Another father found a way to "be at home" with his family even while he was in Iraq.

[to his wife on the phone] I'm just listening - just leave the phone there and you can put it on speaker phone and I'll tell you when I have to go and I'll just listen, kind of like you were there. So I had the headset on working at my desk typing or doing something getting ready for another mission and I could hear them all in the background playing talking and everything. Then I'd finally have to say 'gotta go' and turn around and go take off and do what you need to. F6: 707

For the military fathers we spoke with, personal power and control appeared have a great deal to do with their thoughts and actions as fathers. Some deployed fathers felt as though they had no ability to control anything about their children's lives and resigned themselves to a distant, disengaged relationship. Other fathers, perhaps in different circumstances at home or at work,

viewed the lack of control and power as a challenge to develop new techniques and strategies for active fathering.

The explicit and thoroughly institutionalized hierarchical structure of the military reinforced a variety of social disparities, according to our participants. While they felt clearly disadvantaged as guardsmen and reservists, and members of lower ranks, the messages they received about their status as fathers were sometimes more positive, depending heavily on the views of particular superiors. Perhaps not surprisingly, the sheer size of the military bureaucracy, combined with the privileges of rank, provided commanders with considerable decision latitude, at least in the eyes of these fathers, but also relegated lower-level workers to the status of ‘numbers.’ Once again, uncertainty was an enormous factor in fathers’ lives, because fathers knew that unless they took action they would be treated ‘as a number’ but that their commanders had the power to grant access to families. As a result, fathers devoted considerable energy to negotiating their positions and one of the ways they described doing so most actively was with regard to family visits.

I took 5 months, 5 months from the time we got into the country, my chain of command knew that I had a soldier that his wife was going to have a baby in [month]. The whole time ‘Yeah, we’re working on it, we’re working on it, we’re working on it,’ that’s all I heard the whole time. I checked on it weekly, daily, you know ‘Lieutenant, what’d you hear? You find anything out from the commander?’ ‘Yeah, we’re working on it, working on it.’ We got back into Kuwait and it was, his baby was born [date] and we got back into Kuwait it was like [seven days before] and he still didn’t get to go home. They would not send him home. He’s on R&R [the whole week] and they would not send him home! For no reason, because he’s a number. Everybody’s a number. F5: 720

Interpersonal Context

Against the backdrop of the social and institutional context, fathers come to their role with a history of socialization for fatherhood, and values and preferences about the role. In this section, we focus on where fathers learned about their role, how gender figures into their attitudes, and how they enact their role while deployed.

Symbolic/perceptual. Here, we stretch Marsiglio et al.'s framework to consider fatherhood itself as a setting. Of course it is not a physical setting like a tent in the desert. But it is a role to which fathers come with ready-made definitions, constructed from their personal experiences and messages from others. We were curious about how the socialization these fathers experienced for their role might relate to their current thoughts and actions.

We asked fathers to tell us about how they developed their ideas about what it is to be a father and to describe the role of their own fathers and others in this process. The fathers in this study saw their own fathers as both positive and negative role models. Several participants commented that they did not want to emulate their own fathers because of verbally or physically harsh discipline, substance abuse, or emotional or physical absence. Some participants' fathers provided positive models, however, with respect and discipline as common themes:

I will never forget that first time when I was old enough, like I think I was about 3 or 4, I wanted to go run and jump in the car and he told me to get out. I thought he was crazy. He told me, 'You don't get in the car before your mother,' he made me get out, open the door for my mother and let her get in first. That was the start of, I guess, learning how to be a gentleman. You open car doors for your mother, you sit at the table, I mean you know, those are the things I remember that I guess carried over. F3: 804

A substantial proportion of our participants reported having little or no contact with their fathers because of death, divorce, abandonment, employment that took fathers far away, or emotional distance. In many of these cases, as well as in some families with two parents, participants mentioned important female role models in their lives.

...my mother taught me how to take care of my younger siblings, because she would put you out there on the spot and she would sit back and say 'ok, go help her do this,' or 'go teach her how to do this,' or 'go feed her,' or 'go take him and get his bath and everything.' You know, she would just sit back and watch you, because she wanted you to help pick up the slack. And that's the way she taught us. And it kept rotating. One day my brother do it, one day I do it, my sister, do it. F1: 655

Several fathers shared with the father quoted below both his military heritage and his socialization by several members of his extended family.

I lost my father at an early age, but he was a Navy man, so I got a good 8 years, you know, being the first one, so I knew what discipline was about and as far as responsibility. And after he died, my mother, her two aunts and my one uncle raised us, you know, and we turned out pretty fine because we had strong family values and that's where I got it from and still continue on. F3: 792

Results here are consistent with existing research in several ways. For example, Daly (1995) found that most of the fathers he interviewed rejected the parenting model their own fathers had provided. Positive views of childhood models were the exception or negative case. That pattern emerged in this study as well, although we are struck by the large percentage of participants who had experienced substantial disruptions in their relationships with their fathers through death, divorce, abandonment or drug use. Like participants in Daly's study, the fathers

in this study had strongly positive attitudes about what they had learned from women in their families, but in addition they reported strong connections to men in their extended families, usually uncles.

Gendered attributes. In general, fathers expressed strongly gendered views of the key elements of their role, focusing primarily on themselves as authority figures, and/or as the providers for their families. Several fathers focused explicitly on disciplining children and their ability to be more effective than their wives:

That's the way my son is, my wife doesn't have that voice, and he'll look at her, you know, challenge her on whatever she tells him to do and the only thing I do is call his name out and he goes right to where he's supposed to be, you know. No matter how long you've been gone or anything like that, you know, your kids are well-mannered at all times, but I think they're more well-mannered when the father figure is around. F5:440

Fathers also clearly saw themselves as providers for their families, both of economic and other resources. Consistent with military expectations of careful preparation by families for deployment, this father focused not only on making arrangements for financial stability, but also preparing his family interpersonally for the impending separation:

My method was before I left I was trying to make, put things in place so things can go smoothly while I was gone. I would spend more time, I would switch, you know, maybe this Sunday... allow her to go away with her friends because then she can get used to me not being around her a lot. Then when it came down to the financial side of the house, that's when I dug in and saved money so you know, I didn't have to worry about, you know, what's not getting paid at home. And then I can focus on what I'm doing here so I

can get back. So I set myself up in a way that everybody can be comfortable when I am gone. F1: 345

Despite their somewhat traditional views about the authority and provider elements of their roles, fathers also acknowledged flexibility in gender roles in their families. In part, this was imposed by the need for wives to take on many elements of the father's role during deployment. But gender roles varied within families over time, as the following father describes.

During my first deployment I was pretty much the person that did everything as far as paying the bills, because uh, when we married she was pretty young, she was 19. So, um, I was like, I was basically doing everything. And then after that first deployment I showed her how to pay the bills and take care of everything and when I came back that I found my wife was more mature after I had gotten back after that first deployment. She had the kids' school work and she'd paid all the bills so she had grown up. She was a more mature woman when I came back and was able to handle things better. So, when the second deployment came up it was no problem for her as far as taking care of the household and running things. F1: 356

Fathers also described changes over time in their view of their parental role, toward greater involvement in traditionally feminine tasks:

Everyday I would pick up from the sitter's, I come home and I cook dinner, you know feed the kids and give them their baths, you know, just the routine everyday,...I give them that quality time outside, we play around for a while,... big joke about me being the house mom, but you know I'm proud of that house mom role, I ain't going to lie. Its just spending time with them, because, just because of the last deployment we did, you know, I wasn't even, with my son, I wasn't really involved too much, you know...as far as

spending the time that I wanted to spend with him, I didn't get a chance to do it, you know because the deployment came up real fast. So I'm proud of myself with the last one, that I was going to be more with him and spend a lot more time. F5: 330

During deployment, fathers depended upon their wives for support and assistance. Several fathers commented that supportive spouses could make things much easier – and unsupportive ones could cause great difficulty. One way that this played out was in wives' actions to support or limit communication with children. Some wives acted as 'stage-setters.'

Everybody has been very supportive...My wife makes sure if I would call or communicate that they [the children] would be there or they would be up, you know I would usually let her know when I was gonna call, and so she would prearrange with them you know with the boys would be by so I could talk with them. F2: 549

Fathers also reported, however, that wives acted as 'gate-keepers,' purposely withholding information about children's problems to avoid distracting or worrying them.

The only thing I have a problem with her is, she don't want to tell me everything what he's not doin' you know he's like staying up like 15, like 14 (years old) staying out till 1 or 2 o'clock in the morning and she didn't tell me, you know, I have a problem with that. F2: 533

Fatherhood discourses. The discourses that contributed to fathers' understanding during deployment were those that occurred with their children and with other soldiers. It is perhaps not surprising given fathers' attention to discipline that the soldier role sometimes flowed over to shape fathers' approaches to parenting; we label this "soldier as father."

Just on the discipline part of it. I don't have to raise my voice but the discipline part of it. You can use the soldier part of it but use it in terms we all know how to be disciplinarians.

Not like the old movies where you have your son/daughter marching and all that. It is just the discipline part of the lessons instilled in you, you can convert that into everyday discipline of your kids or praise your kids. F5: 860

We were more surprised by the degree to which fathers were able to articulate instances of their experiences as fathers influencing their actions as soldiers. Sometimes this was an uncomplicated positive experience, such as when fathers felt that they had been able to be especially supportive of a younger soldier because of the patience and understanding that comes from being a parent. In other instances, the juxtaposition was much more complicated, presenting fathers with simultaneous but competing urges to ‘care for’ young Iraqi children, soldiers under their command, and their own children (by preserving their own safety).

I used to separate the two. It’s like when you leave, call it the wire over there and you go out on a mission, now you’re a soldier. Now you’re responsible, if you’re a gunner, you’re responsible for those two inside the vehicle. And when you would drive out there you would see them little kids, that hit you like ‘that’s the same age as my son.’ He’s like 4 and he’s standing there in the hot sun, I can’t even take the heat 145, barefooted on the black tar, just standing there, ‘mister, mister, mister, mister, food?’ Now you’re like you’ve got to play a little father role and go back to the soldier and be like, you gotta do a flip like real quick. Because then you can’t buy into it. Because from when, it never happened to me, but they were saying that they were using the kids to distract you and then they got you. So I would look around real quick and MREs [meals-ready-to-eat] that nobody was eating I would give it to them and it’s like “thank you, thank you” and they would run. They don’t eat it right there, they take it home and I guess they share it.... So you had to flip those two roles, father role, soldier role, you just can’t get caught up out

there, out on the wire, being a father in a situation like that. You just, you're going to be in trouble. You're going to cost everybody their life. F1: 1058

The fathers we spoke with approached their roles with perspectives that contained multiple elements of their socialization. Their military training and often stern parental figures appeared to contribute an interest in respect, responsibility and authority that they sought to teach their own children. They also expected to lead and provide for their families. In contrast to these traditionally masculine attitudes, many of these fathers had been trained by female relatives during childhood to be competent at traditionally feminine tasks like household work and child care. The shift schedules of their civilian jobs and the repeated deployments of their military jobs demanded that fathers and their partners display some flexibility in allocating their gender roles over time. Several of the fathers spoke of becoming more invested in spending time with their children over time. For most participants, the roles of father and soldier tended to flow into one other, challenging fathers to monitor and manage a boundary between them for their own safety and the quality of their relationships with their children. .

Coming Home: Transitional Elements

In contrast to fatherhood experienced in discrete physical settings, transitions explore how men negotiate fatherhood when moving from one site to another. Such transitions involve not only change in physical space, but change in psychological and interpersonal space (Cowan, 1991).

The deployment experience and the reunion that follows are examples of normative transitions in military family life. When fathers return from deployment, the whole family needs to readjust to changes and new expectations associated with the return to civilian life. One of the biggest challenges faced by military fathers is how to re-establish a relationship and close bond

with their children. As one soldier put it “each time we see each other it’s like a getting back to know each other again.” Fathers in this study employed a number of strategies to reconnect with their children, depending on the age of their children, their deployment history, how long they had been away, and the nature of the father-child relationship(s) before and during deployment. Fathers with infants reported the most difficulty since many of them got deployed before they had an opportunity to establish any type of attachment relationship with their children.

My son had just came home my wife had just had him and we got home I got deployed. So the only thing he had to remind him of me was I went out and took a picture of myself in uniform and I let her hang in on the refrigerator so when she walks past she just says “there’s daddy” so when I got home, well ...when I walked in the door, my son like flipped. He saw a ghost. He started screaming. It was a whole month before I could touch him F1: 270

Fathers acknowledged that it would require considerable time and patience and that the process of gaining their children’s trust could not be rushed. Fathers talked about “letting them come to me” and “not forcing myself onto my children...but let them feel comfortable enough to come, come to me.” Or, as another father described, “he didn’t want to come close to me he just stayed away from me for like the whole [time]. You just stay back and stay back until I took him to the toy store and that’s how we got back.”

Overseas deployments and their accompanying reunion represent one type of major transition that fathers and their families experience. Perhaps equally stressful however, were the frequent moves that these injured and ill fathers made back and forth from their private lives at home to their public role as soldiers at the Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Even though their

short-term leaves were appreciated, fathers described their children as having difficulty with the ambiguity and anxiety associated with the multiple arrivals and departures.

...when you're overseas they know you're over there there's no chance of you coming over for a week or a couple of days, over here like they release us like on Friday and we have a pass, or we go home for that certain amount of days and we come back, or we go leave and come back. So that gives the kids mixed emotions too, its like you're leaving then you come back you're leaving then you come right back, so and I know that bothers my daughter tremendous, she always says, 'Daddy well, why don't you just stop coming and going, either stay or leave.' F2: 266

A number of fathers reported that even after they had been home, children repeatedly kept asking “are you going back, are you going back” and despite reassurances, from one father it took them about two weeks to realize that he wasn't going back. In another case the father was unable to reassure his child stating “I don't know. I ain't trying to go back but you know I can't say yes, I can't say no.” Consistent with other research (e.g., Bell & Schumm, 1999) short-term leaves, while appreciated, were also stressful.

In addition to the need to reconnect with their children, the transition of returning home also demanded that fathers reassume the parenting role. Not surprisingly, the ease or difficulty of doing this depended on many factors, but particularly upon the child's developmental age. Those who were more successful generally had more deployment experience and older children.

I just eased back into it. Mine she's 15 and ...I've been through several deployments too. Just had to change tactics a little bit, couldn't just step back into it, kind of had to ease. She's going through those changes as a woman, young female things of that nature. I just let her tell me what's going on. I approached it from that angle as far as easing back into

it and not just stepping back in, instead of just jumping back into the role and taking over.

F3: 520

Typically, however, fathers stated that re-entry into the fatherhood role was not achieved immediately. Rather, the process unfolded over time, ranging from two weeks to several months, depending on what factors were involved. Lengthy deployments and lack of opportunities for good communication while away seemed to make some fathers unprepared for the physical and emotional changes that had taken place in their children during their absence.

I found my daughters had grown up...I've been deployed for about two-and-a-half [years] and you wasn't, no boy wasn't around and you wasn't dropping no notes off at no boy. Now I'm like "what happened?" I done missed two years of something. ... They've moved from, these are my little girls and then they're menstruating now and I'm like, oh. You know there's a big difference now...and they talking more out of their mouth and there's a big difference if you're with girls and you left and they wasn't menstruating two and half years ago and you come back and they're menstruating now. F6: 155, 179

One of the reasons for difficulties with the reunion/readjustment process, particularly after a lengthy deployment, might be fathers' style of interacting at home. Some fathers reported that they had to be reminded by their wives that they "weren't talking to any prisoners,...any punks,...[or] any soldiers." Fathers mimicked their children's comments and questions: "Dad's back home, he's still in the bossy mood, he's used to ordering people around so it'll take a while for him to get out of that again ...Dad why you gotta be so mean?" or "Dad's back, what's wrong with Dad?"

Despite the frequent challenges in navigating the reciprocal transitions between military and civilian life, not all transitions were stressful or problematic. Nor were all children reluctant

to interact with their long-absent fathers. Indeed, as one father states “once I got back I couldn’t even sit and rest because they wanted me to go everywhere and do everything with them.” Many reunions were happy joyful events where “kids were all over you, basically just running up to you, hugging and stuff.”

Discussion

This small study offers a new window into the experiences of deployed military fathers, a group that has received relatively little prior attention. The study has significant limitations. We spoke with only a small number of fathers, most of whom were military police serving in the Army. The focus group methodology we used may have resulted in fathers placing greater emphasis on some points of view than they may have indicated in private interviews. And of course we have only fathers’ retrospective perspectives, with no evidence of the degree to which their wives or children might agree with their characterizations of their behavior.

One of the goals of this chapter was to document the experiences of deployed fathers as a function of the physical, temporal, and social elements of their settings. The fathers in this study were deployed great distances away from their families, for long periods of time, with limited and unpredictable access to communication with their families and limited ability to speak freely even when they were in contact. Many fathers devoted considerable effort to maintaining communication but at the same time expressed ambivalence about its effects on their ability to concentrate on their military duties.

Military culture conveyed mixed messages to fathers about the importance of their families, but the key messages of concern were those from fathers’ commanders. Some commanders were very supportive, interpreting family problems as threats to the performance of military duties, but others admonished soldiers to keep family issues out of the workplace.

Fathers attributed a variety of social disparities related to rank, gender, and active vs. guard or reserve status to the organization and policies of the military. Some fathers struggled with their inability to control events in their families.

Fathers came to their roles with strong socialization by mothers, aunts, and uncles. In many cases, relationships with their own fathers also were important, but many fathers also had experienced serious disruptions. Although deployed fathers expressed strongly gendered views, emphasizing their roles as authority figures and providers, they also described flexibility and evolution in their roles over successive deployments. They relied heavily on children's mothers not only for access to children but also for maintenance of the household. Fathers often experienced complex juxtapositions of their roles as soldiers and fathers, which sometimes persisted into the transition home.

What were the implications of deployed fathers' experiences for their involvement with their children? Clearly, deployment imposed severe limitations. Using Pleck and Masciadrelli's (2003) definition of involvement, fathers were not easily accessible to their children and had very limited opportunities to engage in direct interaction with them. Fathers' circumstances varied a great deal, however, and fathers who had easier access often reported more frequent engagement with their children. Despite and perhaps because of their lack of accessibility and limited engagement, many fathers expressed a strong sense of responsibility for what was happening to their children during their physical absence. Of course this is not the same as being present and physically responsible for their children's welfare, but these deployed fathers appeared to be far from absent from their families, despite being labeled as such in prior research.

Deployment is a stressful experience for families. In part, this may be because so much about deployment is uncertain and unpredictable (e.g. Eastman, Archer, & Ball, 1990; Jensen,

Lewis, & Xenakis, 1986). Ambiguity associated with a family member's absence is a situation or event that Boss (2002) refers to as ambiguous loss; how the family perceives this ambiguous loss is called boundary ambiguity. Military deployment is a good example of ambiguous loss with the potential to cause boundary ambiguity. Families adjust to deployment by reallocating responsibilities and reorganizing boundaries. When the military member returns, families must "reopen" their boundaries, reallocating and reorganizing once again.

From fathers' accounts, the uncertainty and ambiguity associated with fathers' arrivals and departures were particularly stressful for young children who lacked the cognitive capacity to understand time (i.e., the difference between long and short absences) and space (i.e., the difference between deployment in Iraq and medical treatment at Walter Reed). Existing research suggests that children's well-being during deployments tends to be very much a function of the well-being of the parent at home (Jensen, 1992). But findings also show that fathers' deployments matter no less to children's outcomes than those of mothers (Applewhite & Mays, 1996). The social cultural environment of the military is similar to that of divorced fathers in terms of rule and regulations that limit the amount of control or involvement they may have with their children (Pasley & Minton, 1997). However, military fathers may have more motivation to remain involved in their children's lives than do divorced fathers. For military fathers, staying connected and involved in one's family may provide a source of support to combat the harsh physical conditions of war.

The final goal of this chapter was to assess the utility of the Marsiglio et al. (this volume) framework for considering settings. We found the framework useful, in part because of the detail it contains. Of course, the elements of any setting are very interconnected and any attempt to consider them separately will seem arbitrary at times. Nonetheless, we experienced some

difficulty in our coding with regard to the social/structural and institutional/cultural elements. In part this was because the military is both a society and an institution for deployed fathers. But we might be inclined to reorganize these elements as social/cultural and institutional/structural. Designations of properties as primary or secondary were not always intuitive, unlike the relationship between temporal dynamics – clearly a primary property – and transitional elements – clearly a subordinate secondary property.

Future Research

This study raises questions for future research about both civilian and military nonresidential fathers. There is an urgent need for studies of the cumulative effect of deployments on military children and their relationships with their fathers. We were also struck in this study by the disengagement of some fathers and wonder whether long gaps in communication with families early in deployment has a chilling effect on later interactions both during and after the deployment.

Clearly, the reunion journey of military fathers varies widely as a function of both fathers' and children's characteristics. Better understanding of these factors would help military policymakers and educators who design intervention programs and parent-training models to better prepare both fathers and children for deployment and reunion (Lamb, Chuang, Cabrera, 2003).

Future study of nonresidential military fathers may offer useful insights regarding the involvement of civilian fathers with their children, helping to better explain why some fathers abdicate their relationships with their children (Seltzer & Brandreth, 1995).

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