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Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth

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EXPLORING DEPLOYMENT AND RESILIENCE THROUGH THE EXPERIENCES OF ARMY NATIONAL GUARD YOUTH

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The Global War on Terror utilized Army National Guard soldiers at unprecedented rates, drastically changing their reserve role and the lifestyle of their families. This qualitative study explored what the adolescent children of Army National Guard soldiers experienced during the deployment of a parent and how they conceptualized and demonstrated resilience. Through individual interviews with nine participants, who collectively have experienced over 17 years of deployment during adolescence, and email survey results of their primary caregivers, the following three themes emerged to capture the essence of deployment for Army National Guard youth. Deployment can be viewed as “a mixed bag” as it brings added complexity to adolescent relationships, functioning, emotional expression, and development. Adolescents feel that “nobody understands,” showing how the context of a deployment, including the specific circumstances, an adolescent’s surrounding environment, and interactions with others, serve to either help or hinder adolescent functioning. Finally, adolescents relate an attitude of, “We can do this!” demonstrating how they actively construct meaning from deployment; it becomes that which adolescents make it to be in their own minds and understandings. The results suggest that families, military service providers, educators, and community members can support Army National Guard adolescents during
deployment by helping simplify their lives, being part of a supportive context, and assisting youth in constructing value from the experience. Additionally, understanding how to approach youth during deployment builds trust and qualifies others to be supportive in the eyes of Army National Guard adolescents.
To my military family- your sacrifices, service, and devotion tear my heart…and inspire me all the same. It is an honor to be counted among yours.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Dedication ......................................................................................................................................... iv

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... v

Table of Contents ............................................................................................................................ vii

List of Tables ....................................................................................................................................... viii

Chapter 1: Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 2: Literature Review .......................................................................................................... 13

Chapter 3: Methodology ................................................................................................................ 45

Chapter 4: Results ............................................................................................................................ 58

  Complexity Theme: “Deployment is a Mixed Bag” ................................................................. 61

  Context Theme: “Nobody Understands” .................................................................................... 81

  Construct Theme: “We Can Do This” ......................................................................................... 98

Chapter 5: Discussion .................................................................................................................... 117

References ....................................................................................................................................... 137

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter ................................................................................................. 148

Appendix B: Individual Interview Recruitment Letter Sample ................................................ 149

Appendix C: Parent/Guardian Consent Form ............................................................................. 150

Appendix D: Youth Assent Form ................................................................................................. 152

Appendix E: Young Adult Participant Consent Form ................................................................. 154

Appendix F: Youth Demographic Form ....................................................................................... 156

Appendix G: Individual Interview Protocol Form ...................................................................... 157

Appendix H: Primary Caregiver Online Survey Questions ...................................................... 160
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Age Summary of Deployments Table........................................................................49
Table 2: Theme Development Table .........................................................................................59
Table 3: Examples of Positive Self-Talk in a Variety of Contexts ..............................................108
Table 4: Examples of 6 C’s of Desired Outcomes in Study Participants .................................125
Chapter One: Introduction

The time period of adolescence is marked by significant events physically, mentally, and socially. Young people experience puberty, develop the ability to think abstractly, and may enter into initial romantic relationships. However, for thousands of adolescents, this time period is also marked most notably by the absence of one of the most significant people in their lives at some of these important milestones. Missing from a first date, first change in voice, and first time driving the car may be Dad or Mom, deployed overseas in support of ongoing United States military operations. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, over 2.5 million armed service members have been deployed in support of the Global War on Terrorism (Adams, 2013), including Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan; Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation New Dawn (OND), and Operation Noble Eagle (ONE) in Iraq (Harnett, 2013); and numerous other contingency operations overseas in places such as Kosovo, the Sinai Peninsula, and Kuwait. Never before in its history has the United States attempted to sustain such a significant all-volunteer fighting force for such an extended period of time (Huebner, Mancini, Bown, & Orthner, 2009). Never before has the United States Army relied so heavily upon its Reserve Component forces, composed of Army National Guard and Army Reserve soldiers (Gewirtz & Davis, 2014). The brunt of this burden falls directly upon the men and women of the United States Army, who have been deployed in numbers far greater than all the other military branches combined (Baiocchi, 2013), and upon the families of these soldiers, who have never before experienced such long separations, fears for the safety of their soldiers, or rapid successions of deployments (Paley, Lester, & Mogil, 2013). Caught in the middle of this often under-recognized
national sacrifice of service are nearly two million children of military personnel, 25% of which are youth already experiencing the oftentimes tumultuous period of adolescence (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2014).

Prior to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, adolescents growing up in Army National Guard families throughout the United States were privileged to be considered part of a military family without experiencing most of the strains military life demands. They gave up one weekend a month with their father or mother due to drill and may have spent two weeks in the summer separated for annual training (Harnett, 2013). Occasionally there might have been some periods of extended training or required courses where their parent would be absent for a few weeks, but the worst it might have been was a 6-week deployment in a foreign country for multi-national training or extended duty in the event of a national emergency (Harnett, 2013). Army National Guard adolescents were able to embrace the civilian portion of their father or mother’s citizen-soldier status, growing up in civilian communities, maintaining residence and firmly establishing social roots for extended periods of time, and living far removed from the threat of war and hazard to their parents in the line of duty. One fateful September morning forever changed this experience of growing up as the son or daughter of an Army National Guard soldier.

Today, Army National Guard youth are well-acquainted with the fourth Army value of Selfless Service. As the Global War on Terrorism, by necessity, has transformed the Army National Guard from a strategic reserve to a fully-integrated operational force (Committee on Armed Services, 2010), the sons and daughters of these soldiers have been suddenly thrust into the reality of a military lifestyle, complete with the unprecedented demands and sacrifices of this enduring conflict, the longest in American
history (Hampson, 2010). Army National Guard youth now know about readiness orders, military installations around the world, and the significance of the combat patch on their father or mother’s uniform. What remains to be known, however, is what these young people truly experience as they, too, face deployment and the demands of growing up Army National Guard. Uniquely military and distinctly civilian, the sons and daughters of America’s citizen-soldiers are most often isolated from the services and camaraderie available at military installations, yet, they too, have displayed a remarkable amount of courage and selfless service in the face of the extraordinary demands having a parent serving in the current wartime context has thrust upon them.

Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the phenomenon of military deployment through the eyes of the adolescent sons and daughters of Army National Guard soldiers. Specifically, this study’s aim is to discover what Army National Guard youth experience during the military deployment of their father or mother and explore how these adolescents conceptualize and demonstrate resilience in the face of deployment adversity. As the United States Army continues to maintain an integrated force, utilizing National Guard soldiers as key components in the rotational cycle (Committee on Armed Services, 2010), not only will Army National Guard children continue to grow into adolescence and adulthood with the present reality of deployment, but they will also likely face multiple deployments and cumulative effects from their extended separations, especially in the environment of other stressors and normative developmental changes (Masten, 2013). Army National Guard adolescents personally experience how deployment radically changes their daily lives, adding complexity to
their ability to function, within a setting where few can relate to exactly what they are experiencing. Better understanding what deployment is like for these adolescents may assist families, military service providers, educators, and community members in supporting these youth throughout the deployment cycle and meeting their unique needs. As military families are often considered “strong,” and youth actively construct meaning from their deployment experiences, exploring the concept of resilience through the perspective of Army National Guard adolescents will not only add to the understanding of resilience but will also provide insight and direction for practitioners who work to promote resilience in military youth, especially those living among the civilian population and apart from military installations.

**Key Terms**

**Deployment.** Deployment is a military term that, according to the Department of Defense (2014), refers to the “rotation of forces into and out of an operational area.” Initiated by the issuance of official orders, a deployment is a period of time in which a military service member will be sent to another location in the world to fulfill their contract of service (U.S. Army, n.d.). Deployment lengths vary depending upon the branch of service and nature of the mission. After September 2001 and prior to the January 2007 policy for the “Utilization of the Total Force,” Army National Guard deployments typically lasted 16-18 months, including four months of unit training and 12 months of deployed time in theater (Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, 2007). In 2011, the U.S. Army limited most deployments to nine months in the operational area; despite this new policy, however, total mobilization length of Army National Guard units
can still extend 12 or more months due to required train-up away from home prior to “boots on the ground” in country (Bacon, 2011).

**Army National Guard.** The National Guard is one element of the Armed Forces of the United States Reserve Component (Department of Defense, 2015). Originating from state militias, the National Guard is a state-based military reserve force most typically deployed to assist during state emergencies; however, National Guard units may be federalized by presidential authority (Harnett, 2013). This activates these units under the Active Component of the U.S. military for use in operational missions, or deployment, to locations throughout the world. Both the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force support state National Guard units, but they contrast greatly in how service members are deployed, the nature of their service, and the length of deployments. Because of these unique differences, this study will only focus on the experiences of adolescents with a parent serving in the Army National Guard. During the ongoing Global War on Terrorism, over 384,000 Army National Guard soldiers have been activated for service (Department of Defense, 2015).

**Military Youth or Army National Guard Youth.** These two terms will be used in this study to refer to the adolescent children of military service members, or more specifically, of Army National Guard soldiers. Most commonly, dependent offspring of military personnel are referred to as military children or military kids. However, since the term child is defined as “a young person, especially between infancy and youth” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 2000, p. 198) and kid is typically used as a “generalized reference to one especially younger or less experienced” (*Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, 2000, p. 640), the terms military children or military
kids fail to encapsulate this study’s desired focus on adolescents. The term youth refers to a “young person” and pertains to the “period between childhood and maturity” *(Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary, 2000, p. 1369)*. Therefore, adding the descriptor of military or Army National Guard specifies the population of interest in this study, the adolescent sons and daughters of Army National Guard soldiers.

**Primary Caregiver.** The designation of primary caregiver will be utilized in this study to describe the person mainly responsible for the daily care and rearing of the adolescent youth participants. Most commonly the non-deployed parent, primary caregivers could also be grandparents, stepparents, other relatives, or legal guardians.

**Resilience.** The concept of resilience can be captured by a variety of closely-related definitions. Werner (1995) describes resilience as “good developmental outcomes despite high-risk status, sustained competence under stress, and recovery from trauma” (p. 81). Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker (2000) emphasize the ongoing nature of resilience by defining it as a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p. 543). Masten (2001) simply states that resilience is the manifestation of “good outcomes in spite of serious threat to adaptation or development” (p. 228). All of these ideas will be utilized to develop a working concept of resilience as expressed in the lives of military youth, to be expanded upon by the thoughts and conceptualization of the participants themselves. Most importantly, though, is to clarify that resilience will be viewed in this study as a process rather than a trait and will likewise be distinguished from the term resiliency (Luthar et al., 2000). According to Masten (1994), resiliency can be misinterpreted as a personality trait or attribute that an
individual either possesses or does not possess, leading to the misconception that some individuals simply do not have what is needed to overcome adversity.

**Significance of Study**

As the Global War on Terrorism earned the distinction as the longest American conflict (Hampson, 2010), research is just beginning to focus on what those associated with the military have recognized for decades. In the words of the Army’s 38th Chief of Staff, General Raymond Odierno (2011), “The strength of our Nation is our Army; the strength of our Army is our Soldiers; the strength of our Soldiers is our Families. This is what makes us *Army Strong*.” Military families have evolved from being merely tolerated during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars to their status today as an integral partner in the military mission (Harris, 2013). The price military families have had to pay and the toll the operational tempo (OPTEMPO) of the past decade has had on their wellbeing prompted a new professional focus on military spouses, children, and families as subjects for researchers across areas of specialization. Although military children under the age of 12 have garnered the greatest attention, adolescents have been “vastly understudied” by researchers (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013, p.275), only examined specifically by a few quantitative studies (Barnes, Davis, & Treiber, 2007; Crow & Seybold, 2013; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Reed, Bell & Edwards, 2011; Weber & Weber, 2005) and one qualitative project (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). However, these studies have focused upon adolescent youth from active duty military families living on or near military installations. This mold simply does not fit Army National Guard youth embedded in the civilian world, so much so that scholars studying issues relevant to military families and attending a symposium sponsored by the Military Family Research Institute identified the National Guard population as a subgroup
deserving of greater attention by the research community (Willerton, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Riggs, 2011). Scholars can only hypothesize that adolescents in National Guard families are more at-risk during deployment because they lack access to services and are isolated from other military families (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Harnett, 2013; Mmari et al., 2009).

The Army National Guard lifestyle is unique in that soldiers traditionally work civilian jobs and their military service is on a part-time basis; soldiers and their families “straddle” both the civilian and military worlds without entirely belonging to either (Harnett, 2013). Families established in civilian communities lack a shared military culture that can provide a sense of identity, understanding, and support (Harnett, 2013) and do not have access to military resources, such as counseling, peer support, and child care, to the same extent as active duty families living near military installations (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). Army National Guard soldiers are on average older than their active duty counterparts and are more likely to have adolescent children, especially lower-ranking enlisted soldiers (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2014). Thus, the Army National Guard distinctively features a large population of adolescents who are typically isolated from their military peers, lack access to resources and support, and are usually unprepared to deal with the realities of deployment (Harnet, 2013).

This study seeks to address the knowledge gap by uniquely focusing on adolescents who experience deployment as sons and daughters of Army National Guard soldiers. By adopting a qualitative approach to this phenomenon, this study gives these courageous young people a voice to tell their stories and share their experiences with
deployment. Furthermore, this study strives to enhance our understanding of resilience by hearing from a population of young people who know all too well the requirement of selfless service and pressing on in spite of the challenges set before them.

**Limitations**

A qualitative design was chosen for this study in order to explore the deployment of Army National Guard soldiers from the perspective of their adolescent sons and daughters. Little is known about what life is like for these young people during deployment and much can be gained by learning firsthand from them. Although a qualitative approach provides significant insight into their experiences, the information gained is limited by the design itself. Because the participants constitute a small, purposeful sample, findings from this study cannot be generalized to the population of Army National Guard youth as a whole (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). While information gathered can help better understand the phenomenon of deployment, this knowledge is not necessarily representative of all adolescents who experience the deployment of their Army National Guard parent.

This study may also be limited by the specific timing of interviews conducted. The sample consists of sons and daughters of Army National Guard soldiers who were deployed within the past four years; participants must have been an adolescent aged 11-18 at some point during that deployment. Some participants may be in the midst of a deployment while for others, several years may have passed since they experienced the deployment. For interviewees currently experiencing deployment, their perspective may change considerably if they are interviewed on a different day in a different week. At a micro-level, one’s perspective of deployment and emotions can vary greatly from day-to-
day. There are good days and then there are very challenging days, depending upon a multitude of circumstances. In order to maintain some measure of consistency, all interviews of youth currently experiencing deployment were conducted during the sustainment period of deployment, extending from the second month after departure until one month before homecoming; this stage is marked by families establishing new routines and sources of support and feeling more independent, confident, and in control of their situation (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001).

Data collected from Army National Guard youth participants currently not in the midst of deployment may be limited by their ability to recall their experiences with deployment. For some youth, memories of this period of deployment may be very vivid and easy to discuss. For others, it may be more difficult to remember specifics. However, through careful deliberation, the researcher chose to conduct this study with the belief that although time may dim some memories, time passed also provides perspective and allows participants to develop and gain understanding of their experiences with deployment. Therefore, both youth currently experiencing deployment and those who recently went through a deployment are included in the sample.

Data will be collected in this study through semi-structured individual interviews. Although this format offers a rich understanding of each individual’s lived experiences (Galletta, 2012), data collected is also subject to the unique interpretation and perspective of the experiences provided by the individuals interviewed.

**Personal Reflection**

The military lifestyle was as foreign as a distant country for me prior to joining the Army National Guard on February 20, 2010— a new military bride. As a civilian, I
considered myself very patriotic and supportive of our troops, but I only understood military service and sacrifice in the very limited terms of a service member laying down his or her life in the line of duty. Never considering the experience of deployment from either the service member's or family’s perspective, I was promptly thrust into this uncontrollable experience a few weeks into marriage.

Deployment is the most difficult thing I have ever had to do. It comes with more psychological challenges than anything else I have experienced in life. Deployment is overwhelming; the length of time until my husband returns home is inconceivable. I carry an emotional burden throughout the length of deployment that can surface at any time. I must accept operating at a different level in my daily life, allowing for merely being okay most days, with a few good days, as compared to being mostly good and having great days. Good does come from deployment, though never enough to make deployment “worth” it. I need to proactively seek ways to make good come from deployment and look for things that could only happen because of deployment. Only through my faith do I find meaning in deployment and assurance of a greater good to come from the hardship and pain of it. My deployment experiences “qualify” me to reach out to others experiencing similar challenges and encourage them.

In conducting this study, I will attempt to “bracket” my personal experiences with deployment, or put aside my understanding of the phenomenon in order to more accurately allow my participants to tell their stories and construct knowledge based upon their perceptions (Ahren, 1999). By acknowledging the ideas I bring into this study, I will set them aside so as not to influence the data collection or analysis processes (Richards, 2009). However, I embrace the opportunity I have to enter into the world of
those I study as I will also be experiencing the deployment of my husband and serving as the primary caregiver of our two children during the time period of this research. I recognize my unique responsibility as an instrument in this study (Galletta, 2012). In accordance with the feminist tradition, who I am matters (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), and in this case, I am also part of a military family, holding down the homefront, loving and supporting my service member overseas, and longing for his return.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Life for military families is uniquely defined by the era in which their service members serve. Just as military technology and tactical operations are constantly evolving and changing, so is the way of life for the parents, spouses, children, and siblings of our men and women serving in the U.S military. September 11, 2001 devastatingly marked a change in modern warfare, and the effects of this terrorist attack on the United States are still being felt among U.S. military families throughout the world. No change may be more significant than the one experienced by Army National Guard families as the U.S. Army relied on National Guard units at unprecedented rates and mobilized troops faster than any time since the Vietnam War (Gewirtz & Davis, 2014). Deployments increased nearly fourfold for these citizen-soldiers as the Army National Guard was transformed from a strategic reserve to a fully operational force (Committee on Armed Services, 2010). As one spouse laments, this role was not what she had understood the Army National Guard to be:

You sign up for one weekend a month two weeks a year…And we didn’t really bargain for this. If he wanted to do this, he would have stayed active duty. In that way it is frustrating. This is what has frustrated me the most. It is not what he signed up for. (Wheeler & Torres Stone, 2010, p. 550)

Current restructuring and downsizing of the active component of the U.S. Army means that the Army National Guard will continue to be an integral part of military operations. According to General Raymond Odierno, Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, cuts will force the Army to rely more on National Guard and Reserve units, who must be kept at a high level of readiness (Baldor, 2012). In the volatile Middle East where Operation Inherent
Resolve currently supports the fight against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), approximately 25% of U.S. forces belong to the Reserve Component; in addressing Army National Guard soldiers, the Senior Army National Guard officer in Kuwait predicted slight increases in these numbers, stating, “We are definitely not going home” (Leiva, 2015, para.2). Growing up in the midst of this new, highly operational Army National Guard are over 294,000 children, 32.3% of whom are co-experiencing the pivotal period of adolescence (Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of Defense, 2014). It is becoming increasingly important, then, to understand the unique way Army National Guard youth experience deployment as these adolescents and their families will likely continue to play a key role in U.S. military strategy.

**Deployment**

Deployment is not a new phenomenon for military families as the prospect of a service member going off to war is as near as the next news report or headline. However, for most military families, the OPTEMPO of the 21st century has resulted in significantly more, much longer, and more frequent deployments than ever anticipated. No matter the length, deployment can be divided into five distinct stages for military service members and their families: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, and post-deployment (Pincus et al., 2001). Despite the lack of empirical evidence, this Emotional Cycle of Deployment model developed by Pincus et al. (2001) provides valuable insight into better understanding the time frame and emotional challenges experienced by military youth. Failing to deal with the emotional challenges of each stage can result in significant strife and even crises for service members and their families.
The pre-deployment stage begins with the warning order for duty, which may precede the actual departure date anywhere from a few months to over a year in advance. Notification of deployment is often met with a mixed-reaction as service members may be excited to utilize their training and serve their country but also recognize it represents an immediate threat to the security of their family (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Pre-deployment is a busy time of getting affairs in order, long training, and trying to fulfill high expectations for the “best” holiday or event together, often characterized by conflict and arguments as the service member and family members instinctively pull away and try to create mental and physical distance in anticipation of the long separation (Pincus et al., 2001). Family members ride this roller coaster of emotions as they experience denial, anger, sadness, and anticipation of loss (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

The deployment stage begins when service members leave their families and extends through the first month of separation (Pincus et al., 2001). Family members may feel numb, disoriented, overwhelmed, sad, and alone. Again, mixed emotions are common as the actual separation may be sort of a relief to see pass. Sleep difficulties and concerns about security typically occur, but reconnecting with service members through communication provides a stabilizing effect.

Sustainment is the longest stage of deployment, beginning one month after a service member leaves and lasting until one month before he or she returns (Pincus et al., 2001). During this time, families establish new routines and sources of support. As they adapt and develop new ways to function, military families gain confidence in their ability to do what they have to do during deployment and feel more in control. However, as this stage can last for seven months or longer, families inevitably feel the strain; according to
a National Military Family Association (NMFA) (2005) survey, 29% of military families experience the greatest stress during the middle of deployment.

Re-deployment marks the time period one month prior to the scheduled return home of a service member (Pincus et al., 2001). This stage is characterized by great anticipation, excitement, and bursts of energy as family members prepare to welcome their service member back into the home. At times, family members may feel apprehensive as they anticipate the homecoming, considering all the changes that have occurred over the deployment and wondering how the service member will fit back into the family.

The final stage of deployment is called post-deployment, and it begins upon the service member’s arrival home (Pincus et al., 2001). Typically lasting three to six months, this stage starts with a honeymoon period as families are overjoyed to be together again. However, this can quickly lead to a great deal of conflict and challenges as families need to renegotiate routines, service members attempt to reassert their role, and some family members may be required to give up independence or responsibilities gained during the deployment period.

The OPTEMPO of the past fourteen years for both the active component and reserve component of the U.S. Army has been demanding to say the least. Whereas Army National Guard soldiers typically were limited to six months of deployment for every five years of regular training (Gewirtz & Davis, 2014), since 2001, this deployment time has now increased to 24 months during a six-year enlistment period (Committee on Armed Services, 2010). Researchers note that these Army National Guard soldiers and families are much less equipped with experience and support to deal with the issues
surrounding deployment (Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008). Military families express great concern in their ability to maintain this pace and worry about the physical, emotional, and mental health consequences of multiple deployments; many find it very difficult to truly reintegrate as a family as the prospect of a subsequent deployment looms (NMFA, 2005). The time home between deployments, referred to as dwell time, has been decreasing (Franklin, 2013), and Lemmon and Chartrand (2009) have warned this may predispose military children to operate at the end of the stress spectrum, in the tolerable to toxic range. Rather than experiencing a cycle of deployment stages where families return to where they started, unresolved issues cause many families to operate in more of a spiral fashion as they carry these anxieties and expectations into the next deployment (NMFA, 2005).

**Adolescent Development and Deployment**

Because of the numerous changes that occur as children mature into adults, adolescents experience deployment much differently than children. Parents are no longer able to shield their adolescent sons and daughters from many of the realities of the situation. Since adolescents are able to think abstractly and consider multiple perspectives (Harold, Colarossi, & Mercier, 2007), they can cognitively understand what it means to have a parent stationed in a war zone, at risk of injury or death (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007). Advances in their thinking, reasoning, and understanding also mean that adolescents consider the future, make plans, and develop an idealistic viewpoint for themselves, others, and the world (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). Out of these growing cognitive skills comes the awareness for military youth that adverse life experiences, such as a deployment, will significantly impact their present life as well
as their future (Masten, 2013). As adolescents have an increasing ability to generate options in decision making and anticipate related consequences (Harold et al., 2007), how much control they believe they have in stressful deployment-related situations strongly influences their reactions, whether they master situations or merely tolerate them (Compas, Banes, Malcarne, & Worsham, 1991).

A defining characteristic of the period of adolescence is the increasing independence and autonomy of youth (Harold et al., 2007). While this may be a strength for many military youth experiencing deployment because of their independence and ability to care for themselves, many adolescents may not receive adequate adult care and guidance during the time of separation from their father or mother (Mmari et al., 2009). As Milburn & Lightfoot (2013) emphasize, successful adolescent development hinges upon the accessibility of parents, and to the extreme, deployment could be viewed as a periodic case of an absentee father or mother (Franklin, 2013). Adolescents experience vast physical changes as their bodies undergo puberty and may need to talk to their service member parent as questions or issues arise concerning their development (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). With their growing independence, adolescents may be asked to take on more responsibilities than their developmental capabilities allow, and parent-child boundaries may become blurred (Paley et al., 2013). Along with increasing autonomy, adolescents are more exposed to the media (Mmari et al., 2009), which may exacerbate concerns for their parent’s safety and challenge the significance of armed service.

In addition to their expanding mental capabilities and developing bodies, adolescents also experience significant changes in their emotional and social abilities. A
growing awareness of others expands adolescents’ social network to include many relationships beyond the family, the most significant of these being friendships (Collins & Laursen, 2004). In spite of the support friendships provide, adolescents may also experience new difficulties as they compare themselves to their peers (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013), especially non-military ones, and attempt to create and maintain these relationships. Adolescents have developed more emotion-focused coping skills that enable them to regulate the negative emotions accompanying stressful events, such as deployments (Compas et al., 1991). However, they may not be comfortable communicating or discussing sensitive topics, especially with their parents, if they feel like they will not be listened to empathetically (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). Roles may even become reversed within families as adolescents can be good listeners but may become burdened with concerns they are not equipped to handle (Paley et al., 2013).

Optimal adolescent development depends on healthy parenting from both parents (Franklin, 2013), and deployment presents a significant challenge to the healthy attainment of developmental milestones during adolescence (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013).

**Deployment Impact on Adolescents**

A growing body of knowledge examining the impact of deployment on adolescent military youth is slowly emerging as the current OPTEMPO and its effects on service members and families have captured multidisciplinary research attention. Although this work primarily focuses on youth from active duty families, it provides a framework from which to begin exploring the deployment experiences of Army National Guard youth. In reviewing this literature, it is exceedingly important to remember that every military young person experiences deployment in a unique manner. The same experience can
impact adolescents very differently depending on when it occurs; the timing of separations and reunifications along the life course trajectory within military families makes a big difference (Masten, 2013). This is especially true when youth go through multiple deployments as the positives and negatives of previous experiences accumulate and drive subsequent expectations and ways of deriving meaning for each individual (Paley et al., 2013). On the whole, most military adolescents seem to emerge from deployment with positive developmental outcomes (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013), but it has become clear that some individuals are more vulnerable and at-risk for maladjustment (Masten, 2013). Even for those who appear to adjust, this does not mean they remain unaffected by the experience (Card et al., 2011).

**Parent-Child Relationship.** The greatest concern military youth have during a deployment is dealing with life without their deployed parent; likewise, their second concern is helping their primary caregiver, usually the non-deployed parent, deal with life without the deployed parent (Chandra et al., 2011). Even though the period of adolescence is characterized by more autonomy and conflict between youth and their parents (Steinberg & Morris, 2001), the parent-child relationship is still the most significant relationship and source of influence for adolescents (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Furthermore, the quality of this connection is the greatest determining factor of adolescent functioning across all developmental domains (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Because of their ability to consider multiple perspectives (Harold et al., 2007), adolescent military youth are acutely aware of the impact deployment has on the closeness of their relationship with their deployed parent as well as how the long separation and increased burden affects their non-deployed parent. Military youth have shared that missing their
deployed parent was the hardest part of deployment but also indicated that they were equally concerned for their parent at home and how to ease the emotional burden (Houston et al., 2009). Even though research provides little evidence that the physical separation of deployment results in long-term negative consequences in the parent-child relationship (Willerton et al., 2011), the phenomenon must be viewed in light of what is known about bonding in parent-child relationships.

Attachment theory suggests that children, based upon their natural need for survival and security, form bonds with primary caregivers who are reliable and care for their needs responsively; secure attachment bonds enable healthy socio-emotional development (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). These primary caregivers, or attachment figures, function as 1) a secure base providing comfort and reassurance for children to reach out and investigate their world; and 2) a safe haven to which children can retreat when they experience distress (Paley et al., 2013). The stressful nature of deployment, including repeated and prolonged parental absences, poor parental emotional health, fear of parental loss, and financial troubles, threatens these attachment bonds and a child’s sense of security (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). A primary attachment figure, the deployed service member, is no longer physically available, and another primary attachment figure, the non-deployed parent, may be operating at a highly compromised state. Deployment may challenge a child’s ability to perceive their deployed parent as a reliable source of comfort and reassurance, creating doubt in the status of their relationship with that attachment figure (Paley et al., 2013). Despite little research into attachment theory among adolescents, Scott, Briskman, Woolgar, Humayun, and O’Connor (2011) found that secure attachment bonds with parents independently
predicted better youth adjustment, measured by antisocial behavior, expressed emotion, and peer problems, thus demonstrating attachment theory’s valid and important application to adolescent development. When a parent deploys, military youth lack their normal resources for handling stressful circumstances or emotionally disturbing events (Paley et al., 2013), situations proliferated by the deployment itself.

Because of the extreme importance of parent-child relationships and their impact on developmental outcomes, Palmer (2008) has proposed a theory of risk and resilience unique to the situation of military service. In this model, parent-child interactions function as a potential means by which military risk and resilience factors influence military children (Palmer, 2008). In essence, the parent-child relationship may serve as a buffer to the stressors of military life and a dispenser of resources in developing resilience. Paley et al. (2013) expand upon this concept as they observe that “much of the impact of deployment experiences on parental and child well-being is likely mediated through relationships within the family- namely the couple’s relationship…, the co-parenting relationship, and the parent-child relationship” (p. 246). Riggs and Riggs (2011) further comment that secure bonds between a child and non-deploying parent will mitigate the impact of a deploying parent’s departure.

**Psychological Effects.** When service members deploy to conflicts overseas, they leave behind adolescent children who suddenly become engaged in their own fight, mainly on the battlefield of the mind. Research continues to suggest that the greatest measurable risk to military youth during deployment is experiencing an elevated level of psychological symptoms (Willerton et al., 2011). Deployment immediately impacts a young person’s wellbeing, level of stress, and mental stability (Larson, Mohr, Lorenz,
Grayton, & Williams, 2014). Approximately 30% of military youth report increases in anxiety symptoms, compared with only 15% of the general population (Chandra et al., 2011). Military youth worry about potential injury or death to their deployed parent, feel concerned about their non-deployed parent’s stress and worry, mourn over the departure, long separation, and events missed by their deployed parent, and even feel threatened by antiwar sentiments (Mmari et al., 2009). Adolescents with deployed family members report significantly higher levels of posttraumatic stress, and their heart rates are considerably higher than their civilian peers (Barnes et al., 2007). A recent study in California discovered that 12% of military-connected youth had attempted suicide during the previous year, as compared to only 7% of the civilian population; high school students with a parent in the military are at a greater risk for suicidal ideation, plans, attempts, and attempts requiring medical care (Gilreath et al., 2015). Finally, in a non-self-report, quasi-experiment, Larson et al. (2014) found that the number of users of anti-anxiety and sedative medications among youth age 12 and older increased by 19% during deployment.

Researchers find it challenging to accurately determine the psychological impact of deployment on adolescents, partly due to adolescents’ tendency to deny problems and worries (Pincus et al., 2001) and their preference for confiding in friends and seeking peer support (Collins & Laursen, 2004). Furthermore, school personnel observe that military adolescents struggle to express their emotions and repress many of their thoughts and concerns (Mmari et al., 2009). The difference between what adolescents truly experience and what they allow others to see them experience is especially clear in a survey conducted by Chandra et al. (2011) that interviewed both military youth and their
caregivers. Fifty-one percent of youth reported having emotional or behavioral difficulties while their parent deployed, most commonly manifested in feeling sad or lonely, having trouble concentrating on schoolwork, or being more anxious. However, in the same survey, only 34% of caregivers observed these issues. This suggests that many military youth may suffer mental and emotional anguish alone, unknown even to their closest caregiver.

**Adolescent Behavior.** As much evidence supports psychological issues with deployment among adolescents, findings truly are mixed concerning how deployment impacts adolescent behavior. Despite the expectation that teenagers will be irritable, rebellious, and prone to fight or engage in other attention-getting behavior (Pincus et al., 2001), there is a lack of evidence to support this claim. In their study of military youth with a deployed parent across all branches of service, Chandra et al. (2011) found no difference in the occurrence of problem behaviors, such as suspension, stealing, and cheating, among military youth when compared to the general population. Even though school personnel observe that boys with a deployed parent externalize more into behavior issues (Mmari et al., 2009), a meta-analysis conducted by Card et al. (2011) concludes that there is little if any consistent association between deployment and adolescent aggression or rule-breaking behavior. Military youth do seem to struggle more with externalizing problems and behavioral symptoms during the actual deployment stages in relation to the pre-or post-deployment periods (Pfefferbaum, Houston, Sherman, & Melson, 2011). However, on a positive note, adolescents often take on new household responsibilities and grow in maturity and dependability during the absence of their deployed parent (Mmari et al., 2009).
Trends. Although each individual experiences deployment in a unique manner, several trends have emerged from research examining how deployment influences adolescents. Girls are much more affected emotionally by the experience and display lower levels of effortful control (Morris & Age, 2009). Boys struggle to connect emotionally with their deployed parent (Reed et al., 2011) and have more issues with academics (Chandra et al., 2011) and behavior (Mmari et al., 2009). Older adolescents may be especially at-risk for negative outcomes, such as academic struggles, suicidal thoughts, and depression (Chandra et al., 2011; Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011; Reed et al., 2011). Research has also shown that youth who experience more total months of deployment and the children of lower-ranking soldiers tend to have more difficulties with deployment (Chandra et al., 2011).

Deployment Impact on Families

Growing up in a military family, even an Army National Guard family embedded within the civilian world, can be viewed as having a unique culture in and of itself. With one or more parents committed to military service, this way of life requires sacrifice from not only the service member but the entire family unit (Westphal & Woodward, 2010). This sacrifice, in big and small ways, is rarely understood by civilians, and as Harris (2013) notes, presents a challenge in identifying with military families who view the world differently and have unique issues and concerns because of their service. Military families can be characterized by their interdependence, shared experiences, and the way in which world events, national policy, and military culture shape their lifestyle (Westphal & Woodward, 2010). Adolescents who grow up in military families and experience deployment cannot be understood apart from the context of their families,
who walk with them every step of deployment and continuously influence their development.

**Theoretical View of Families.** Family systems theory offers a great deal of insight into the functioning of a military family, inclusive of all family structures (e.g., two-parent, single parent, and step-family). This perspective includes the following foundational principals:

- Together, military families function greater than the mere sum of their parts. Synergy occurs, and the family becomes more than the simple combination of individual characteristics.
- Individual family members continuously and reciprocally impact one another.
- Individual family members must be examined in the context of the larger family system.
- Military families undergo processes of adaptive self-stabilization and self-organization to adjust to changing conditions or challenges to the family (Cox & Paley, 1997).

Deployment and its related stressors act as a threat or disturbance to the functioning of the family system. As Masten (2013) notes, the interconnected nature of the family system means that challenges to one system, such as the strain of deployment’s long separation on the marital relationship, can also disrupt the functioning of many other systems, such as the parent-child relationship or sibling relationships. Deployment represents a series of transitions for families to undergo as they must adapt and reorganize around the changes, especially to accommodate the presence or absence of the deployed parent (Paley et al., 2013). The established rules and patterns for life
within military families must change in order to restore equilibrium (Cox & Paley, 1997), and these reorganizations can be especially challenging as families also deal with other major developmental transitions, such as having a baby or moving closer to extended family (Paley et al., 2013). Simultaneous life-changing transitions, which occur for adolescents experiencing deployment, may become overwhelming not only for these military youth but also their families.

Military youth and families must also be studied in consideration of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, which views individuals as embedded in a series of environments that impact their development. Adolescents are shaped by the settings of their daily life (microsystem), the interconnections between these settings (mesosystem), the community in which they reside (exosystem), and the larger culture and society (macrosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Not only do these systems influence development, but they also carry the potential of being a strength or weakness for individuals and families experiencing deployment. In an extensive survey conducted by the National Military Family Association (2005), military families gave a clear message that they cannot make it through a deployment alone, nor should this be expected of them. This represents one of the key differences between Army National Guard and active duty army families. While active duty families live near military installations that provide a variety of support services, such as child care, health care, and mental health services, Army National Guard families must rely upon their civilian counterparts and communities for the majority of assistance. The readiness of the community to engage Army National Guard families and form partnerships in response to
issues with deployment is crucial to the development of a strong support system
(Huebner et al., 2009).

Each military family brings unique capacities and vulnerabilities into deployment based upon the broader context in which they live, and the manner in which military families interact with the multiple systems of their environment characterizes their deployment experience (Paley et al., 2013). Based upon family systems and attachment theories, Riggs and Riggs (2011) have identified three variations of military families: (a) fit-for-duty families; (b) closed-rank families; and (c) open-rank families. Fit-for-duty families represent well-functioning systems that have open and flexible internal and external boundaries that allow family members to support one another and utilize resources outside the family. The non-deploying parent demonstrates strong leadership while roles and responsibilities are temporarily redistributed among family members. Fit-for-duty families practice open communication and retain comforting family routines or create new ones to replace lost rituals. Even though the deployed parent exists outside the functional family system, individual members maintain strong attachments with this service member over time and distance and reinforce them through frequent contact. In contrast to fit-for-duty families, closed-rank and open-rank families are unable to function in a secure, protective, and effective manner during deployment. Closed-rank families build rigid boundaries that prevent open communication and limit the flow of support from each other and outside sources. The non-deploying parent is characterized by attachment avoidance, strict discipline, shut down of emotions, and no patience for weakness; he or she may also limit the contact other family members have with the deployed parent. On the other extreme, open-rank families establish neither internal nor
external boundaries and are at risk for role reversals in parent-child relationships. These families are overly dependent on the deployed parent, fail to reassign roles and responsibilities, and experience high attachment anxiety.

**Parenting.** Parents, whether deployed or caring for the family stateside, take the lead in establishing how their family functions during deployment and greatly influence each individual member’s experience during the separation. However, this may be the very manner in which adolescent children are affected the most as deployment has a detrimental impact on parenting practices (Palmer, 2008). Military youth experience constant shifts in parenting due to the departure and reentrance of their service member parent, which often leaves them confused and stressed, not knowing what to expect (Mmari et al., 2009). Adolescents develop the best under authoritative parenting, when parents are “warm and involved, but firm and consistent in establishing and enforcing guidelines, limits, and developmentally appropriate expectations” (Steinberg, 2001, p. 7).

Deployed parents report more challenges with emotional regulation than do civilian parents, including how they experience, express, and manage their emotions; the way that parents regulate their emotions therefore explains a significant degree of variance in their parenting practices (Gewirtz & Davis, 2014). Non-deployed parents may struggle to set appropriate limits and provide consistent discipline during deployment as their children are already distressed; consequently, it may simply be easier to give up on issues (Paley et al., 2013). Nearly 42% of parents experience clinically significant levels of parenting stress during deployment, which is more than twice the national norm (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). This parenting stress thus impacts practices as care giving quality decreases as perceived stress increases (Posada, Longoria, Cocker, & Lu, 2011).
Furthermore, as difficult as parenting is during deployment, the challenges often increase upon the service member’s return home and reintegration back into the family system. Either the deployed parent feels the need to be strict and re-establish their authority figure or feels guilty for being gone and does not set any limits, inadvertently undermining the other parent’s authority (Paley et al., 2013). Neither service members nor their families remain in the exact state as prior to the deployment, and adolescents who were bonded and grieved the separation loss may ignore their returning parent and remain detached (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Parents returning home from a combat zone and wartime experience may be unable to provide care or may be severely compromised in their parenting ability due to traumatic exposure and subsequent mental health problems, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Paley et al., 2013).

**Family Functioning.** Primary caregivers report that taking on more responsibilities at home caring for children is their greatest challenge associated with deployment (Chandra et al., 2011). The prolonged absence of one parent requires the remaining family members to assume additional roles and responsibilities in order to keep the family functioning. This shift in structure and organization of families tests their flexibility (Riggs & Riggs, 2011) and is likely why 25% of military families experience the greatest amount of stress at the beginning of deployment (NMFA, 2005). Adolescents are usually expected to shoulder a larger burden of household duties and care for their younger siblings, often adding to their busy schedules and increasing their stress and anxiety levels (Mmari et al., 2009). Non-deployed spouses report difficulties adjusting to the changing roles in their marriage and growing more distant from their spouse relationally (Chandra et al., 2011). As family members are concerned about the
wellbeing of their service member, day-to-day hassles with child care, school, the workplace, and home maintenance can become overwhelming, and 53% of military families report not receiving family support throughout all phases of deployment NMFA, 2005). Issues with these adjustments in the way military family systems function are furthermore exacerbated as they must be negotiated at an unprecedented pace and frequency in today’s OPTEMPO climate (Paley et al., 2013).

**Psychological Challenges.** Because of the interconnectivity of military families, individual symptoms likely stem from problems within the family; the emotions and behaviors of one member have a reciprocal effect on all other family members as well as the system as a whole (Esposito-Smythers et al., 2011). Deployment profoundly impacts adolescents’ mental and emotional health, which naturally flows from psychological challenges faced by military families. The emotional wellbeing of military youth is a direct reflection of how their caregiver manages the emotional challenges of the long separation and burden of care. When caregivers do well emotionally, youth experience higher emotional wellbeing and are more likely to function well; in contrast, individuals and families confront more challenges with deployment when the caregiver demonstrates poorer emotional wellbeing (Chandra et al., 2011). Depression and anxious behaviors in military youth can be predicted by their mothers’ symptoms of depression (Kelley, Finkel, & Ashby, 2003). The harms of deployment are lessened when adolescents securely bond to a non-deployed parent, most often their mother, who effectively copes and maintains consistent parenting practices (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Greater levels of maternal support are associated with less emotional symptoms in girls and fewer behavioral issues in both boys and girls (Morris & Age, 2009). How family members
respond to the difficulties of other family members either alleviates or aggravates those challenges as “family members collectively navigate each deployment experience” (Paley et al., 2013, p. 246).

Military families may also struggle with ambiguous absence during deployment, when the service member is present in the family psychologically but is absent physically (Faber et al., 2009). This likely stems from boundary ambiguity, as families fail to clarify who is in and who is out of the system (Boss & Greenberg, 1984). Family members may want to deny the absence of the service member by trying to keep everything exactly the same as prior to his or her deployment. However, this prevents the family system from reorganizing and restructuring, keeping it in limbo and unable to function effectively; it is in fact the degree of boundary ambiguity rather than the deployment itself that contributes to the levels of stress and dysfunction experienced by individuals and families (Boss & Greenberg, 1984). Boundary ambiguity is demonstrated when families do not reassign the tasks of the deployed member and non-deployed spouses are restrained from making daily decisions without the approval of the deployed member (Faber et al., 2009).

**Influencing Factors.** Several factors have been found to influence how intensely military families experience the challenges associated with deployment. Simple characteristics of the military family, such as the length of a couple’s marriage, the number of prior deployments, and the number of children in the family, play a role in how the service member and family handle the separation (Franklin, 2013). Establishing secure attachment bonds within families prior to deployment better enables adaptation and the continuation of positive relationships once a service member returns (Riggs &
Riggs, 2011). Open communication within families is especially critical as household difficulties lessen when the quality of family communication increases (Chandra et al., 2011). Stronger community support systems help sustain military families throughout the deployment (Franklin, 2013), and clear communication among service members, families, the unit command, and family support providers help alleviate some deployment-related problems (NMFA, 2005). National Guard and Reserve caregivers report poorer emotional wellbeing and greater household challenges (Chandra et al., 2011), and being part of the reserve component of the U.S. Army also likely increases a family’s vulnerability to experiencing ambiguous loss and boundary ambiguity upon deployment (Faber et al., 2008). Finally, having experienced deployment previously as a family can be a help as well as a hindrance. Each individual family member and the family system as a whole bring strengths and difficulties, assets and liabilities into each deployment experience; not only do these capacities and vulnerabilities carry-over from previous deployments, but they are also products of transitions members and families undergo and functions of the broader social context (Paley et al., 2013). Some families report that the first deployment experience helped them come together and be more cohesive, which gave them more confidence in their abilities to cope with subsequent difficulties (Crow & Seybold, 2013). Yet, in Chandra et al.’s (2011) survey, families indicated that their challenges escalated the more total months of deployment they had experienced.

**Resilience**

Evidence continues to abound in research, statistics, and anecdotes- the demands of the military lifestyle in the 21st century for service members and their families are as
complex and intense as ever and not likely to disappear. In response to the myriad of issues and challenges surrounding deployment and ongoing military involvement overseas, the U.S. Army unveiled their “Ready and Resilient” campaign on February 4, 2013, aimed at improving the readiness and resilience of what the army considers the Total Force- Soldiers, Army civilians, and their families (Sheftick, 2013). Building the physical, emotional, and psychological resilience of soldiers and families is the U.S. Army’s answer to the rigors and challenges of military service (Sheftick, 2013). But, what exactly is resilience? What about resilience enables it to address such wide-ranging challenges as missing Dad at a baseball game to dealing with PTSD while trying to parent? And most important to this study, what does resilience mean to Army National Guard adolescents who have experienced deployment?

**Definition.** As established earlier, resilience can be thought of as a process in which good or positive outcomes emerge from adverse circumstances (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten, 2001; Werner, 1995). Masten and Coatsworth (1998) emphasize that in order for resilience to occur, two conditions must be met; first, the context must present a significant threat to the individual, and second, good adaptation or development must materialize from the situation. In considering the phenomenon of Army National Guard youth experiencing the deployment of a parent, research has clearly shown that these adolescents are faced with significant threats to their relationships with parents, psychological health, and behavior. Furthermore, their entire family system is at-risk for negative outcomes in parenting, functioning, and psychological condition. The adversity of deployment meets the first condition and sets the stage for resilience to transpire.
Determining whether good adaptation or development occurs in the context of deployment is slightly more challenging to establish. No set criteria exists for deeming outcomes “good,” as this measure can vary (Masten, 2001). Researchers point to achievements in normative developmental tasks as evidence of “manifested competence,” or successful adaptation (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Some of these milestones of adolescence include developing more mature relationships with peers, becoming emotionally independent from parents and other adults, preparing for a career, adopting a set of values and an ethical system for guidance, and demonstrating socially responsible behavior (Perkins, 2007). Within the context of deployment, adolescents who successfully transition to secondary school, achieve academically, stay involved with extracurricular activities, maintain close friendships with both genders, and develop a cohesive self-identity could be considered demonstrating good development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998).

Achieving good development can be further understood through the framework of positive youth development. Ascribing to the philosophy that guiding youth through adolescence should be based upon developing resilience and building competencies, positive youth development views adolescents “as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p.94). At the foundation of positive youth development lie the six Cs of desired outcomes for youth—competence, confidence, connections, character, caring/compassion, and contribution (Lerner, Fisher, & Weinberg, 2000; Pittman, Irby, Tolman, Yohalem, & Feber, 2003). Therefore, as Army National Guard youth demonstrate attainment of these desired outcomes, such as competence in social relationships or compassion towards someone else going through a
difficult situation, they could be considered resilient. Furthermore, youth who grow to exhibit concern for entities greater than themselves, expressed by contributions to self, family, community, and the civil society, can be viewed as thriving youth (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003). Considering how military youth uniquely understand selfless service to their country by sacrificing time and lifestyle with their service member-parent for a period of deployment, the possibility exists that many military youth may not only be surviving the challenges of deployment or demonstrating resilience but may in fact be thriving.

**Resilience Theory.** Theories of resilience seek to explain how the two components of resilience, significant threats and positive outcomes, manifest in the lives of individuals. One way to conceptualize this process is by identifying the presence of risks and assets, or protective factors. Oftentimes, individuals who possess high assets experience fewer risks (Masten, 2001). Risk factors increase the likelihood that problems will occur but they do not guarantee the presence of a specific negative outcome, such as depression (Jenson & Fraser, 2011). Youth experience different vulnerabilities at different ages; adolescents may be especially devastated by the loss of a friendship or doubts of the government’s wise use of force (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). On the other hand, assets, or protective factors, are personal resources that enable individuals to overcome the risks present in their lives (Jenson & Fraser, 2011). These protective factors exist at an individual, family, and community level (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), and an individual’s capacity for resilience depends on both internal functions and external resources (Masten, 2013). Resilience research has shown that risk and protective factors seem to transcend ethnicity, geography, and social class (Werner, 1995).
Resilience was once considered some kind of magical property, a secret power that enabled some individuals to thrive while others barely survived the same circumstance. However, this simply is not true. Resilience is not a trait that one innately possesses but a process of becoming strong, healthy, or positive again after experiencing adversity. According to Masten (2001),

What began as a quest to understand the extraordinary has revealed the power of the ordinary. Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities (p. 235).

Resilience is thus the demonstration of natural human adaptation systems at work, securing and retaining key resources, protecting the individual, and counteracting the threats to development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Resilience is not necessarily global, as one individual can be especially able to overcome adversity in one area of life, such as academics, but struggle in other domains, such as relationships (Luthar et al., 2000). Parents can also mediate the adaptive behaviors of resilience, either undermining or enhancing it in their child by their own personal risks or assets (Masten, 2001).

The danger emerging from resilience research is when an individual experiences threats beyond their capacity to adapt. According to Lemmon and Chartrand (2009), threats are considered tolerable stressors if they can be mitigated by supportive adults who provide safe environments to help adolescents cope with these experiences that have the potential for great harm. In the case of deployment, this might be the emotional toll of extended separation from a parent or even the injury or death of a parent. However,
tolerable stressors can become toxic if the adversity seems unending and the young person does not have a safe and dependable support system to draw upon (Lemmon & Chartrand, 2009). Extended deployments, multiple deployments, the current OPTEMPO, deployment experienced in the midst of adolescent transitions, and fears of injury or death to a service member-parent—all these conditions may have the potential of becoming toxic stressors in the life of a military youth if experienced in a compromised context. Masten (2001) warns against circumstances that severely hamper or damage the basic human adaptive systems, such as cognition or parenting, as this may result in major or lasting effects in the life of the individual.

**Protective Factors.** Just as all youth experience adverse events or risks, all youth also possess resources that their basic adaptation systems need to overcome these risks and be resilient (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Most often referred to as protective factors, these assets are associated with higher levels of resilience. At an individual level, young people who are intelligent, competent academically, believe in their own effectiveness, communicate clearly, display good problem-solving skills, possess a talent valued by others, and are engaging to other people are more equipped to adapt positively to severe threats (Werner, 1995). Having an easygoing disposition and high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-efficacy are also protective factors (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Youth who are inner-directed, which means they have a high degree of trust in their own decision-making abilities and power to act upon them, are more likely to be resilient (Murphey, Barry, & Baughn, 2013). Having faith also serves as a protective factor (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998) as religion provides a variety of beliefs, practices, and resources to deal with life’s mental, emotional, and interpersonal
challenges (Smith & Denton, 2005). Resilient youth appear to be proactive, placing themselves in healthier contexts, seeking opportunities, and making key choices at crucial junctures in their lives (Masten, 2001).

Family systems theory underscores the interconnectivity of all family members, so as can be expected, youth possess many critical resources facilitating resilience within their own families. The greatest of these assets can be the relationship youth have with at least one adult who is competent, emotionally stable, and attuned to their needs (Werner, 1995). The attachment relationship between an adolescent and his or her parent or caregiver is fundamental to adaptation as parenting protects development (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Parents or caregivers who practice authoritative parenting further encourage resilience through their warmth, firmness, and psychological granting of autonomy (Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

The family itself is arguably the most resilient organization throughout history, and a family-strengths perspective offers much in understanding how families can help youth endure and grow from the difficulties of life, including deployment (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). Cross-culturally, strong families demonstrate appreciation and affection toward one another, stay committed to each other, practice positive communication, enjoy time together, show spiritual well-being, and possess the ability to manage stress and crisis effectively (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). These family strengths can serve as resources to help youth process the challenges they face through deployment and adapt in a healthy manner. Family strengths theory further contends that strengths are forged through the daily stressors and significant crises faced in life (DeFrain & Asay, 2007),
especially relevant to military families who come together and endure the challenges of repeated deployment cycles.

Other protective factors within the family include high expectations, socioeconomic advantages, and connections to supportive extended family members (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998). Boys especially benefit from consistent structure and rules, encouragement to express emotions, and a male who serves as a role model (Werner, 1995). Likewise, girls gain by having reliable support from a female caregiver, especially in taking healthy risks and being independent (Werner, 1995).

Resources also exist outside the family system that can help enable resilience, which is especially warranted in the event of family dysfunction. A common theme across all studies of resilience is the importance of having close relationships with supportive adults (Luthar et al., 2000); while these adults are often parents, youth who connect with competent, pro-social adults in the wider community have an expanded wealth of support at their disposal. These relationships with caring adults or mentors encourage trust, autonomy, and initiative while also providing excellent role models in addition to their part in promoting resilience (Werner, 1995). Attending effective schools (Luthar et al., 2000), connecting with pro-social organizations in the community (Masten & Coatsworth, 1998), and observing cultural traditions and practices (Masten, 2013) also serve as protective factors. Consistent with ecological systems theory, adolescents who interact with their broader environment in a way that enables them to access these necessary resources will be more equipped to adapt to the severe threats they face.
Coping with Deployment

At first glance, many Army National Guard youth and families may appear to be resilient in the face of all the changes and stressors they experience during deployment. As research shows, this is not because of some magic strength or mysterious characteristic they possess but because of the normative functioning of their basic adaptation systems. At a theoretical level, this may make sense, but what does this really look like on a practical level? Pamphlets and brochures abound with deployment recommendations and advice, but very little research has identified what helps military families cope with deployment individually and collectively. Oftentimes Army National Guard youth and families are left with nothing but the determination to forge on because they understand the only way out of a deployment is through it.

Communication. A U.S. Army Soldier perhaps said it best by articulating that “successful deployments are about communication” (NMFA, 2005, p. 6). While communication encompasses many ideas and likely differing perspectives for service members than their families at home, good communication is still the baseline for coping with deployment. Communication enables service members and families to connect and serves as a stabilizer throughout the separation (Pincus et al., 2001). Modern technology, such as email, video chat, and instant messaging makes communication easier and can help ease the difficulties caused by separation and distance during deployment (Paley et al., 2013). Frequent contact through communication helps maintain strong dyadic attachments within the family, such as husband to wife and parent to child (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Emails and video chats can make a deployed parent seem closer and may even enable adolescents to create a new, special bond with their father or mother overseas.
by deepening their level of communication and transparency (Mmari et al., 2009). Even clear communication from the command level helps ease the fear of the unknown for families and facilitates better adjustments during all stages of deployment (NMFA, 2005).

**Connections.** Resilience literature abounds with the importance of being connected with a caring, competent adult; similarly, having the right connections as a military youth or family can make all the difference during a deployment. Adolescents and their non-deployed parent yearn to commiserate with someone in the same situation as having personal contact with someone who understands deployment makes one feel less alone (NMFA, 2005). Talking with someone who has already experienced deployment or who is going through it at the same time is mutually beneficial (Houston et al., 2009), and adult mentors who have been involved in the military can make a significant difference in the deployment experience of adolescent mentees (Mmari et al., 2009). In fact, having access to peers who have experienced deployment may be the clearest difference between Army National Guard and active duty military youth (Houston et al., 2009) since Army National Guard families are typically spread out in a multitude of communities surrounding a drill location. Military youth seek emotional support from others who understand their situation (Faber et al., 2008) and feel more comfortable talking with military peers about their anxieties, worries, and experiences (Mmari et al., 2009). Being involved with the unit Family Readiness Group (FRG) helps adolescents and their families connect with others in the same situation and receive support through problems (Faber et al., 2008). Establishing a strong support system within the community through both formal and informal networks promotes the
adaptation and wellbeing of military families (Huebner et al., 2009). This support system, which involves requesting and accepting help and maintaining connections with family and friends, is so vital to coping with deployment that strengthening it is the greatest recommendation to other families facing deployment given by caregivers in the midst of deployment (Chandra et al., 2011).

**Routines.** Successful coping with deployment is further enhanced when adolescents and families are able to reorganize their daily lifestyle around new routines, responsibilities, and roles. Routines help families stabilize after significant changes and establish a new normal; structure within daily life facilitates adaptation to these social changes (Mmari et al. 2009). Authoritative leadership by the non-deployed parent is crucial for instituting adjustments to help the family continue to function while also providing responsive parenting to the insecurities change also provokes (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). Military youth who develop effective skills to solve problems and cope with changes learn what Weber and Weber (2005) call self-righting behaviors, which enable them to adapt more quickly the more times they face life-altering changes.

**Perspective.** Coping with deployment is largely a matter of perspective and choosing one’s attitude. How a family reacts to deployment partly determines whether or not military youth will experience severe emotional distress or have behavior issues (Mmari et al., 2009). Families that maintain a positive outlook on military life and feel a sense of pride and purpose in their service member’s service are more able to withstand the challenges brought by deployment (Riggs & Riggs, 2011). The non-deployed parent’s attitude is especially important as he or she can help create meaningful memories and fun throughout the time of deployment by having an optimistic view (Mmari et al.,
Maintaining a positive perspective is further enhanced by having a sense of mastery over situations, believing in spiritual philosophies, and expressing hopefulness for the future (Riggs & Riggs, 2011).

**Research Question**

U.S. military involvement in the 21st century has utilized Army National Guard soldiers at unprecedented rates, but these cycles of deployment have also resulted in unmatched gaps in our understanding of what it truly means to be an adolescent growing up in an Army National Guard family. While existing literature mainly focuses on the effects of deployment on active duty military children, Army National Guard adolescents have been profoundly ignored. This study seeks to explore the following research questions from the perspective of Army National Guard youth aged 11-18:

- How do adolescents of deployed Army National Guard soldiers describe their deployment experiences?
- What does it mean for Army National Guard military adolescents to be resilient in the midst of deployment?
Chapter Three: Methodology

Each year, hundreds of Army National Guard youth miss out on their father’s or mother’s presence during the pivotal period of adolescence. They are not merely statistics in the Army’s database but are real young men and women with stories to tell, who must go about their daily lives and find ways to cope with the very intense challenges deployment brings. This study not only gives these courageous military youth a voice but also allows us to join with them in this journey and give credence to their sacrifice and service to our great nation.

Study Design

This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological design featuring semi-structured interviews of adolescents. A qualitative approach provided the best means for understanding the deployment experiences of Army National Guard youth by addressing the need to explore this issue from the perspective of adolescent military children. Qualitative research developed a detailed understanding of their experiences and permitted these youth to share their stories (Creswell, 2013). Personal rather than detached, qualitative research allowed the researcher to learn what matters the most to participants through the retelling of what they have seen, heard, and experienced (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Consistent with Creswell’s (2014) strengths of qualitative research, using this approach focused on the meaning Army National Guard youth gave to their deployment experiences rather than on what the researcher hypothesized.

A phenomenological study design concentrated on finding the commonalities (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010) among what individual Army National Guard adolescents experienced during the deployment of their father or mother. The researcher
discovered what individuals encountered during deployment and the meaning they ascribed to those experiences (Seidman, 2006). The phenomenological approach then allowed the researcher to identify shared experiences and meanings and culminated in a description of the essence of deployment for Army National Guard youth (Creswell, 2014). Since very little knowledge existed about deployment from the perspective of adolescents with a parent in the Army National Guard, a phenomenological design provided the best way to develop a deeper understanding and generate beneficial practices or policies to assist these youth (Creswell, 2013).

A semi-structured interview format allowed the researcher to collect detailed information about deployment and resilience by introducing the topics and guiding the discussion through specific questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A versatile approach to collecting data, the semi-structured interview incorporated enough structure to address explicit topics related to deployment while also leaving space for the participants to offer new insights and understandings (Galletta, 2012). Semi-structured interviews balanced the researcher’s need to document and record data with the opportunity to interact and engage participants in sharing their stories; this format gave credence to lived experiences while also addressing topics of interest emerging from prior literature and theories (Galletta, 2012).

Participants

Consistent with qualitative research, this study used purposeful sampling to select adolescents who could best provide understanding into what Army National Guard youth experience during deployment (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2010). Nine adolescents and young adults who were of the ages 11-18 when their parent deployed with a state Army
National Guard since 2010 made up the sample. Demonstrating the technique of criterion sampling (Creswell, 2013), all participants met the criterion of having experienced the phenomenon of deployment and being able to articulate their lived experiences.

The Family Readiness Groups (FRG) of the state Army National Guard assisted by distributing information about the research study (See Appendix B for a sample of the recruitment letter). A Family Readiness Group is a voluntary organization at the unit level that provides mutual support and assistance and establishes a network of communication among the family members of soldiers, unit chain of command, and community resources (Iowa National Guard, n.d.). State FRG Assistants, who aided in forwarding on study information, work as civilian contractors to the Army National Guard and serve as points of contact for the distribution of information and training (Iowa National Guard, n.d.). Invitations to participate in the study were emailed through the FRG chain of communication, instructing interested youth and caregivers to contact the researcher directly. The researcher then arranged an interview time and location convenient for each participant as well as provided information about consent forms. Study participants remained confidential as only the researcher knew their identity or contact information. Additionally, participants were recruited through a snowball sampling method. Interview participants were asked to share study information with other Army National Guard youth they knew who might be interested in participating as well. These potential participants were also instructed to contact the researcher directly to join the study. Each participant received a $15 gift card in appreciation of their time and input.
Nine Army National Guard youth participated in this study, three males (33%) and six females (67%). Participants completed a demographic form prior to the interview, which collected data regarding their age, deployments experienced, ages during deployment, and parent’s employment status with the Army National Guard (See Appendix F for a sample). Collectively, these youth have experienced over 26 years of deployment. Seventeen of those deployment years occurred during the period of adolescence, between the ages of 11 and 18. On average, youth each experienced 2.9 deployments, with a minimum of one deployment and a maximum of four deployments. Three participants were currently experiencing deployment during the time of the interview while three other participants were currently separated from their Army National Guard parent due to extended training. Eight of the participants (89%) had a parent employed fulltime with the Army National Guard.

Table 1 provides a summary of participants’ ages during the various deployments they experienced. The table specifically focuses on the period of adolescence, from 11-18 years old. Of particular note, most study participants (seven or 78%) had prior experience with deployment before co-experiencing deployment and adolescence. Only two participants were initiated into adolescence and deployment at the same time. Most participants (78%) also experienced a deployment during the first two years of early adolescence (ages 11-12), a time of rapid physical, social, and intellectual changes along with the average onset of puberty (Arnett, 2013). Also worth noting is that three participants began the transition to adulthood at ages 17-18, during a time of deployment.
Table 1

*Age Summary of Deployments Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AGE DURING</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
<th>16</th>
<th>17</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First Deployment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second Deployment</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third Deployment</td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fourth Deployment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Ages tabulated reflect the participant’s age at the beginning of the deployment experienced.

The current age of participants also contributed to differences within the data collection process. Younger adolescents were very straight-forward in their responses to interview questions, often providing concise and direct answers. Older adolescents and young adults were more descriptive in their responses and elaborated on their experiences. They tended to share more dialog, provide analogies, and retell particular events to illustrate their responses. Older participants were more reflective and able to place their deployment experiences within the wider scope of their adolescent years. The diversity within this sample illustrated how experiences, both lived and retold, vary significantly based upon the age of the individual.

This study was conducted in a professional and ethical manner with careful consideration to safeguard the rights, trust, and confidentiality of participants. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln granted approval to conduct this study on March 2, 2015. The IRB Approval Number for this research is #20141214490EP. (See Appendix A for a copy of the approval letter). The researcher communicated with the legitimate gatekeepers, a parent or guardian, of
adolescent participants currently under the age of 18 concerning participation in this study. Participants and parents/guardians received consent forms upon invitation to take part in the research. These forms provided detailed information about the study and how participants were to be involved. Consent forms discussed the rights and potential risks to participants as well as how they would benefit from joining the study. Consent forms also addressed the confidentiality of the records and dissemination of study results. For adolescent participants under the age of 18, both the participant and a parent/guardian needed to provide consent in order to participate in the research (See Appendix C and D for samples). For young adults age 18 and older, participant consent alone was adequate (See Appendix E for a sample).

The researcher also implemented safeguards to address any emotional or upsetting memories triggered by discussing experiences related to the combat deployment of a parent for youth participating in this study. Participants were instructed to only tell as much as they were comfortable sharing, and the researcher provided information to each participant on how they could connect with additional resources in dealing with issues related to deployment.

**Data Collection Procedures**

The researcher conducted nine separate semi-structured interviews of Army National Guard youth. Each interview occurred in a public place, such as at a restaurant or school study area. Using a one-on-one interviewing format, the researcher addressed questions to the participant and recorded the responses using a digital recorder. Interviews lasted 15-60 minutes, typically depending upon the age of the participant. Early adolescents usually answered questions in a few sentences while older adolescents
and young adults provided longer responses as they elaborated upon the questions and provided more details. The researcher also took notes during the interview in the interview protocol form (See Appendix G for a sample). At the completion of the interview, the researcher recorded a reflective memo following Galletta’s (2012) guidance to include central ideas from the interview, additional questions prompted by the discussion, and thoughts about the process itself.

The interview protocol began by stating the research purpose and discussing the consent form. After participants and parents/guardians (if necessary) provided their consent, the researcher thanked participants for their participation in the study as well as extended personal thanks for their service and sacrifice for our country. Interview questions began with a broad, open-ended focus to allow participants to convey their deployment experiences and narrate their stories before moving into more abstract questions concerning their understanding of resilience, according to Galletta’s (2012) recommendation. Topics discussed allowed Army National Guard youth to reconstruct and reflect upon what they had experienced during deployment while placing their thoughts and behaviors within the context of their lives (Seidman, 2006).

Interview questions addressed to Army National Guard youth included the following:

1. What do you think about having your mom/dad serve in the Army National Guard?
   - What is unique about being a military youth, especially from the Army National Guard?
• What does your mom/dad’s service typically involve outside of deployment?

2. What are some of the challenges you faced during the deployment of your mom/dad?
   • What are some changes you had to make during deployment?
   • What did you miss about your mom/dad being around for you?
   • How did having your mom/dad deployed affect other things about you, such as school, sports, friendships, jobs?

3. What helped support you and your family during deployment?
   • Who understood what you were going through?
   • Who were you able to talk to about what you were going through?
   • What were some things that helped make for a “good day” during deployment?
   • What were some things that contributed to you having a “bad day” during deployment?

4. How has going through a deployment changed you?
   • Would you say those changes are mostly positive or negative? Why?
   • What is it like going through more than one deployment?

5. What do you think it means to bounce back from the tough things of deployment?

6. Do you consider yourself to be a strong person?
   • What made you strong during deployment?
   • How did you show that strength?
How did you share your strength with others?

When was it the hardest for you to be strong?

7. Do you think you have any control over how a deployment affects you? Why or why not?

- How have you been able to make something positive come from deployment?

- How have you struggled to find something positive?

In addition to collecting data from Army National Guard youth, the researcher also conducted a confidential, open-ended online survey of the primary caregivers of the interview participants (See Appendix H for a sample). Questions asked primary caregivers to reflect upon their son or daughter’s deployment experiences from the perspective of an observer with the intent of gaining further insight into these lived experiences. Primary caregiver online survey questions included the following:

1. What were some of the greatest challenges your son/daughter faced during the deployment of his/her mom/dad?

2. What helped support your son/daughter and your family during deployment?

3. How has going through a deployment changed your son/daughter?

4. Would you say those changes are mostly positive or negative? Why?

5. Do you consider your son/daughter to be a strong person? If so, how did your son/daughter show that strength during deployment?

6. Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding your son/daughter’s deployment experiences?
**Data Analysis**

Preliminary data analysis occurred during the preparation stages of listening to recorded interviews, transcribing the interviews, rereading the transcripts, reviewing interview notes, and reflecting upon the information. The researcher personally transcribed the recordings as a way to become completely immersed in the data (Seidman, 2006). During this process, the researcher also recorded memos to make note of thoughts prompted by the data and responses to the data (Richards, 2009). Documenting the short phrases, ideas, or key concepts that occurred to the researcher at this time served as an initial exploration of the database (Creswell, 2013).

The coding process was guided by Seidman’s (2006) recommendation to allow codes to emerge from the data rather than entering into the process with a set list of categories. Using NVivo 10 software to help organize the data, the researcher began the coding process by marking concepts within the data, typically simple words and phrases that reflected the underlying ideas relevant to the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Then the researcher organized the data by segmenting these key words and phrases into categories (Creswell, 2014), looking for the interaction of quantity with quality in the dataset (Seidman, 2006). Some categories grew from topics asked during the interviews while the reviewed literature established others. Categories mainly emerged from the data itself upon reflection of the coding process. The researcher then assigned labels to the categories, occasionally using terms based on the language spoken by the participants (Creswell, 2014). The coding process progressed from the initial descriptive categories to more analytical categorization as the researcher interpreted and reflected upon the data, carefully considering meaning in context (Richards, 2009).
researched winnowed the information through purposeful reviews of the database (Creswell, 2013), reducing it to the significant ideas that captured the essence of deployment experiences for Army National Guard Youth. Memos once again were kept to record the process, researcher’s thoughts, and emerging ideas.

After a thorough coding of the entire database, the resulting categories were combined into themes that reflected the major ideas of the data (Creswell, 2013). This process of clustering categories under wider themes revealed relationships among codes that occurred frequently and carried deeper meaning (Galletta, 2012). First examined within, then across existing codes, similar ideas were grouped together; themes emerged from dramatic statements, compatible and contradictory ideas, and similarities in how discussion participants interpreted their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). As specific evidence and diverse quotations supported emerging themes, the multiple perspectives captured by the study combined to reveal a general description of the phenomenon of deployment (Creswell, 2014).

As data continued to be analyzed and synthesized, the researcher explained the findings of the study by combining themes, looking for how they related to one another, provided conclusions, or offered explanations, causes, and consequences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Firmly grounded in the experiences and understanding of the participants, these emerging explanations offered a rich description of the phenomenon of deployment. The interpretation process extracted the larger meaning of the data, beyond individual codes and themes, to divulge what Army National Guard youth experienced during deployment and how they experienced it (Creswell, 2013), explained through three overall themes of the study. The data analysis process culminated in a written discussion
of the findings, linking thematic relationships, insight from the data, the larger research literature, and the researcher’s own autobiographical roots (Galletta, 2012). This final written representation of the data became the first to capture the essence of deployment through the eyes of adolescents with a parent serving in the Army National Guard.

Validation Strategies

Validation of this study considered the research process to assess how accurately the findings reflected the experiences of the participants and the report represented the researcher; a strength of qualitative research, multiple validation strategies supported the legitimacy of this study (Creswell, 2013). To clarify the researcher’s bias, this final report included a section (see the heading, “Personal Reflection”) detailing the researcher’s experiences and perspective at the onset of the study with commentary on how the findings of the study were shaped by the researcher’s background (Creswell, 2014). The researcher implemented reflexive bracketing as a process to understand how personal experiences influenced data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Ahern, 1999). Documented via memos, these reflections allowed the researcher to play an active role in the phenomenon being studied (Richards, 2009). Triangulation occurred as the researcher supplemented data from the adolescent focus groups with insight gained from online surveys of their primary caregivers. This observer perspective brought a different viewpoint to the same question while adding to the validity of the study (Richards, 2009). Converging data from the youth and adult responses established themes, and the multiple data sources provided justification for codes, categories, and themes (Creswell, 2014). The researcher also instigated a process of member checking, where study participants gauged how accurately the study findings reflected their own understanding of their
deployment experiences (Galletta, 2012). All nine interview participants volunteered to participate in this process of member checking. Due to the length of the final report and the age of study participants, the researcher prepared and emailed a simplified, shortened summary of the findings to each participant for review. Participants also received a copy of the final results draft which highlighted instances where their direct quotations were featured. Three interview participants verified that the written report accurately described their experiences and concurred with the findings of the study.
Chapter 4: Results

Solemn bagpipes play while a unit of soldiers marches into the gymnasium, prepared to face the unknown in one of the most volatile areas in the world. The brave sons and daughters of these soldiers stand silently in the audience, choking back tears with that ever-present, sinking feeling in their stomachs as they anticipate the final goodbye. Just like their deploying fathers or mothers, these adolescents prepare to enter the unknown, the dreaded deployment.

I know these feelings all too well as I, too, have been in this audience twice, dying inside while trying to put on a brave face for my family and others in the unit, the reality of my husband leaving on deployment nauseating me and beckoning me to just bury myself in a hole until the year passes. Even though I kiss a different family member goodbye, I am able to enter into this world and relate to what the adolescent sons and daughters of our Army National Guard soldiers experience during deployment. Often during my times spent interviewing these youth, their words stirred something in my own heart as they struck a chord with what I had experienced during deployment as well. As family members of deployed soldiers, we often feel alone and rarely understood. Perhaps for the first time, something connected deeply within me as they retold their experiences. I could almost complete their sentences, and as we shared slight chuckles, we knew that between us, we “got it.”

I set out with this study to explore what Army National Guard adolescents experience during deployment and what it means for them to be resilient. My unique position as a fellow Army National Guard family member who has experienced multiple deployments allowed me to build trust and camaraderie with each study participant while
also bringing clarity to the words shared and connections to the ideas presented. This data means something to me, too, and as I treasure each word, my experiences lead me to interpret it with unique understanding and draw conclusions that may be less apparent to one outside the Army National Guard family. I understand the tension of deployment being a mixed bag where both good and bad, pain and growth intermingle and leave me confused and barely holding on. I have also declared that “nobody understands” what I am going through during deployment and feel the frustration of wanting to connect with others but just ending in hurt. I also am inspired, though, by the words of these youth who share a “We can do it!” attitude, beckoning me to strive for what lies beyond the limitations of deployment. I invite you to journey with me as we enter into the deployment world of Army National Guard adolescents and explore these three overall themes of complexity, context, and construct.

Beginning as the very words and phrases spoken by study participants, these themes capture the essence of deployment. Table 2 demonstrates how data progressed from descriptive in vivo codes to the abstract concepts that now form the foundation of this study’s findings.

Table 2

*Theme Development Table*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In Vivo Code Examples</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“bond,” “my dad,” “he’s not here”</td>
<td>Soldier-Child Relationship</td>
<td>Relationships become more complex during deployment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“my mom,” “understood,” “help”</td>
<td>Primary Caregiver Relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“oldest,” “sister,” “close”</td>
<td>Sibling Relationships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“best friend,” “fun,” “talk”</td>
<td>Friendships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key Words</td>
<td>Concept</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“adult-child,” “worst-case,” “personal”</td>
<td>Personal Processing</td>
<td>Individual and family functioning become more complicated during deployment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“step up,” “work,” “chores”</td>
<td>New Responsibilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“dynamic,” “different,” “change”</td>
<td>Family Dynamics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“get along,” “capacity,” “motivator”</td>
<td>Decreased Family Capacity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“bad,” “sad,” “depressing”</td>
<td>Internal Struggle</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“sad,” “cry,” “feel”</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Emotional expression becomes more complex during deployment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“look at,” “their dad,” “worse”</td>
<td>Comparisons</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“understand,” “now,” “mature”</td>
<td>Adolescent Development</td>
<td>Deployment complicates additional aspects of adolescents’ lives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“college,” “missed,” “completely different”</td>
<td>Transitions</td>
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<td>“normal”</td>
<td>Normal</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“positive,” “negative,” “neutral”</td>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Overall impact of deployment is multifaceted and sometimes unidentifiable.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Context: “Nobody Understands”</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Iraq,” “dangerous,” “peacekeeping”</td>
<td>Specifics of Deployment</td>
<td>The circumstances surrounding a deployment can help or hinder functioning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“outsider,” “didn’t live,” “different points”</td>
<td>Life Course</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>“letters,” “internet,” “see him”</td>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“miss,” “roles,” “easier”</td>
<td>Family Rhythm</td>
<td>The surrounding environment contributes to how youth process deployment.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“grades,” “teachers,” “classmates”</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>“support,” “cool,” “going on”</td>
<td>Community</td>
<td></td>
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<td>“nobody understands,” “no one”</td>
<td>“Nobody Understands”</td>
<td>Interactions with others can serve to either isolate or support adolescents during deployment.</td>
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<td>“understand,” “understood”</td>
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<td>“talk,” “I really didn’t talk”</td>
<td>“I really didn’t talk”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“same thing,” “knows,” “trust”</td>
<td>Qualification</td>
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**Construct: “We Can Do This”**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“strong,” “deal with,” “choose”</th>
<th>Resilience Conceptualized</th>
<th>Youth have their own understandings of what it means to be resilient.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“positive,” “gets back,” “think”</td>
<td>Perspective</td>
<td>Adolescents function well by focusing on what works for them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“busy,” “routine,” “don’t think”</td>
<td>Structured Busyness</td>
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<td>“encourage,” “other people,” “helping”</td>
<td>Helping Others</td>
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<td>“Christ,” “trust,” “pray”</td>
<td>Faith</td>
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<td>“I’m,” “Ok,” “remind”</td>
<td>Self-Talk</td>
<td>Adolescents express their understanding of what it means to grow up Army National Guard.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“weird”</td>
<td>Army National Guard</td>
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<tr>
<td>“independent,” “mature,” “better”</td>
<td>Maturity Level</td>
<td>Deployment’s impact becomes that which youth determine it to be in their individual lives.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“unite,” “relationship,” “family”</td>
<td>Family Prioritized</td>
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<tr>
<td>“empathize,” “connection,” “closeness”</td>
<td>Relate to Others</td>
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<tr>
<td>“tougher,” “stronger”</td>
<td>Resilience</td>
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<tr>
<td>“life,” “rational,” “positive”</td>
<td>Other Development</td>
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The following detailed descriptions of this study’s findings tell the story of deployment through the eyes of Army National Guard youth, represented by their chosen pseudonyms and supplemented with survey responses from their primary caregivers.

**Complexity Theme: “Deployment is a Mixed Bag”**

“So this one has been really hard, just like him not getting to be here, not getting to do life with us at this like critical time. It’s been really hard.” (Barbra, age 18)

Hard, tough, really hard, struggle- all of these are words used by Army National Guard adolescents to describe what it is like to go through a deployment. Most commonly referred to as *hard*, deployment impacts all areas of adolescent functioning,
bringing with it a complexity that is often challenging for adolescents to navigate. The first theme to emerge from this study, therefore, is that an increased complexity to life impacts Army National Guard youth in small and large ways, in routine day-to-day functioning and in monumental life changes and events. Furthermore, deployment is a mixed bag, impossibly confined to either positive or negative descriptors as both emerge from the experience and intermingle in complex ways in the lives of adolescents.

**Relational Complexity.**

**Soldier-child relationship.** Deployment most profoundly affects the relationship adolescents have with their deploying soldier due to the long physical separation and limited communication. In this study, all participants experienced the deployment of their father, so references to the soldier-child relationship in this discussion will pertain to a father-child relationship. Because Army National Guard soldiers have a variety of training commitments in addition to deployment obligations, they are often leaving and re-entering their adolescents’ lives, especially during a deployment cycle. One research participant mentioned her father being gone three out of the past nine years of her life; a primary caregiver detailed how her son’s father was absent for 4 ½ years out of ten due to deployments. These frequent transitions of present and then absent make it difficult to maintain continuity in the soldier-child relationship. As Victoria described, “And of course, I’m still close to him but it makes it just like a tad bit harder because I’m just like, ‘You weren’t there.’ Like, and I know it’s not his fault, but he wasn’t there during those times.” Despite all participants expressing a great deal of pride in their fathers’ service, they are also aware of the costs to the relationship and difficulty in sustaining closeness. Jessica shared that “the only bad thing about [her father’s Army National Guard service]
is that he doesn’t like- we don’t get to see him as much as like you want to.” Barbra transparently stated, “Well, when he’s here, I love it, and I think that it makes him really cool. When he’s gone, I usually hated it.”

*Army National Guard adolescents react to these interruptions in the relationship with their soldier-parent in a variety of ways, which also reflect the complexity added on by deployment.* Jon recognized the additional weight of his father’s guilt upon their relationship:

> “Like uh I know he always says he feels bad like “The Cat’s in the Cradle” song where it’s like the dad who’s always gone and the son just ends up not caring. So…I think that’s probably the hardest thing for me, is like when he comes back, he always feels guilty for having to leave. So that’s probably what hurts me the most about it is like knowing that he has a job he needs to do and like that he’s hurting from it.”

Victoria acknowledged how she wants to measure up to her father’s example:

> “When he’s not here, I just, I feel like I’m trying to do the best I can, to be the best person that I can to like prove to him, prove to him that I’m like, I’m trying to be as good as he is. Because he’s probably the best man I’ve I could ever look up to.”

Joseph, who is following his father’s example by commissioning into the United States Army, indicated the challenges deployment has placed on his father’s and his ability to understand one another as he explained, “Uh…hell, maybe I’ll be the one getting deployed and he, he gets to be the one sitting by and my brother and I will be gone. He’ll be like, ‘Oh, now I get it.’”

Through online survey responses, the primary caregivers of these interviewed adolescents also indicated how deployment adds complexity to the soldier-child relationship. One mentioned “maintaining the emotional/relational connection with their dad” as a primary challenge of deployment, adding that “it takes a long time upon his return for them to really feel re-connected.” Deployment introduces new dimensions to
the parent-child relationship that otherwise would not have to be explored, both positive and negative. As one primary caregiver summarized, “There probably is more distance between them and their dad than there would be otherwise. We have been through multiple deployments now and the missed milestones are hard to make up for. I’m sure there is some underlying resentment on the kids’ part, but it also allows them to see their dad in a new way and to appreciate the service and sacrifice he has given.”

*Primary caregiver-child relationship.* All the participants in this study experienced deployment with either their mother or stepmother serving as their primary caregiver. With both the adolescent and primary caregiver experiencing a multitude of emotions and stressors at the same time, in their own unique ways, this inevitably results in complications to the relationship. As Haley, age 19, recalled, “Uh, I guess I just miss having- sounds bad- but I miss having two parents because sometimes I love my mom, but she would annoy the crap out of me. But I mean, what do you expect? I was a teenager girl. And she was- we both were going- you know how you need to get at it a lot. But I feel like that’s also what brought me closer to my mom”

The Army National Guard adolescents interviewed often expressed a deep empathy and concern for their primary caregiver dealing with the hardships of deployment. Barbra said this about her mother:

“She is like…incredible. I don’t know how she does it. I don’t know how she did eighteen months in Iraq with a 2nd grader and 4th grader. Like, oh…, yeah, it’s been not until this deployment that I’ve realized how strong she has been.”

However, most youth also felt an added sense of responsibility for the wellbeing of their parent remaining at home, relationally, emotionally, and physically. Eleven-year-old Jessica recognized the solitary experience of the primary caregiver and explained that she had to “help with my mom because she was alone…. I really had to help her.” Todd, twelve, acknowledged that he had to help his stepmom through tough times and tried to
cheer her up. Adding to the challenges of their own deployment experiences, feeling concern for the needs of their primary caregiver was sometimes a burden beyond the adolescents’ capacity. Victoria shared:

“It’s just like when he’s not there, it puts like I feel it puts like an extra stress on my mom, which I don’t like because I feel like she’s already working hard enough. She’s working a nine-to-five job and, I don’t know, I feel like that’s- I always try to take a little bit off from her but it’s kinda hard when you’re only in eighth grade.”

Haley, therefore, felt pressure to do well emotionally, so as to lessen her mother’s load:

“I think a lot of it, the stress, was because my mom had to do a lot by herself and by being able to be strong for her made her not worry about it. ‘Cause when I was sad, then obviously she was thinking about it, too. And I think with her- her worst, seeing us sad.”

Further adding to the complexity of the adolescents’ relationships with their primary caregiver was feelings of guilt at not being able to do more. As Jon shared,

“Uh, a bad day I think…just uh, seeing my mom and my brother hurt. That’s uh, like I said, I feel kinda ashamed I wasn’t like more like, I mean I’d definitely go and like be there for them as much as I could like, say like you know, ‘I’m here for you,’ shoulder to cry upon but at the same time, just uh seeing it affect my family in a bad way, that was, that’s how it got to me.”

Although strengthened by the experience, sometimes the primary caregiver-child relationship can develop role ambiguity as adolescents try to fill the void left by their deployed parent. As one primary caregiver reflected on her daughter’s experience, “She was my rock during deployment.” She went on to say “The biggest issues [with deployment] was reintegration when a teenager, going from being moms best helper and confident [sic] to then being demoted once dad got home;” she also noted her daughter “struggles to share her mom with the dad.”

Sibling relationships. Eight of the nine study participants had siblings living at home with them during deployment. How Army National Guard youth experience
deployment along with siblings seems to be very different, depending on one’s birth order. Oldest siblings approach deployment with an added sense of responsibility and accountability that is entirely unmentioned by younger siblings. Barbra declared:

“Being the oldest child of two is kind of a unique position because I feel like I need to like step up and fill in that like extra role and help my mom out. And then I also need to like be there to be strong for my sister and to like show her kind of a role model.”

Being strong is an idea also mentioned by other oldest siblings. Zohra, age twelve at the time of deployment, thinks the time was harder for her as the oldest child and remembers “trying to act like everything was okay” for her younger sister. Haley, self-identified as more emotional than her sister, shared:

“I had to change the way I carried myself. Even when I was sad or not feeling it, you had to put on a smile because you know that there are other people going through the same thing in the house. Um, I didn’t want my emotions to affect Sara, my sister…I knew that you had to be strong, like hold up the whole house.”

Not only does the “margin of emotional error” seem smaller for oldest siblings, but they also sense an added duty of helping regulate the emotions of other family members. Jon, aged fifteen and eighteen during deployment, recalled:

“I would always ride with [my mom and brother] to like his hockey practices like every night. I think they really took their emotions out on each other like expressing their stress of the situations, and they’re both super like, have the same stubborn personality so. I think for the first like six months, like I just kinda tried to like calm them both down ‘cause the stuff was hard…. So that was probably like the biggest struggle for me.”

Jessica, another oldest child, shared that although she would talk about deployment-related things with her sister, she needed to protect her even-younger brother: “He’s younger so I didn’t really wanna make him emotional or bring it up again (chuckles). So yeah, just had to think about it more.”
Younger siblings seem more oblivious to the added responsibility their older counterparts experience during deployment. They, however, seem more able to recognize and appreciate the support provided by their older brother or sister. Victoria said, “I’d always talk to my sister, and I still can.” She went on to share:

“[My sister] always made it to my games no matter what. She’s always there. So I feel like that, I feel like that really kinda helps me ‘cause I’m, I see a lot of my dad in her…. She’s the sister that like wants you to be the best that you can be.”

Joseph also reflected on experiencing deployment along with his older brother:

“My brother is 14 months older than I am so we’re pretty similar in age…. And that helped, too. Like if we were five years apart, I wouldn’t have had anyone to…uh help with it but we weren’t. We were close.”

**Friendships.** Since adolescence is a period in which peer relationships enjoy increasing amounts of importance and influence, friendships play a key role in the deployment experiences of Army National Guard youth. For most of these adolescents interviewed, however, *simply being the son or daughter of a deployed soldier made it more difficult to be understood by their peers*. Joseph described what most experience in the unique Army National Guard lifestyle:

“And it wasn’t that many other people who had parents that were deployed where I was from. ‘Cause…obviously I wasn’t on an active duty base where all the other kids there would have had. It was the National Guard, so maybe a couple of other students? But not really.”

He later added, “I didn’t really know anyone else that was going through the exact same thing at the same time.” Even though several research participants mentioned having friends with a parent also in the Army National Guard, only two seemed relationally close enough to share with them.

A deployment impacts the ability of both Army National Guard youth and their friends to relate to one another. Sometimes this means a lack of authenticity, as one
youth recalled: “I always had a smile on my face. Huh, and I was always happy like around my friends. Then when they were- like when I got home, I always just went downstairs.” Another adolescent stated:

“The only other thing it really affects is like my attitude, which affects like friendships I guess. ‘Cause like, my friends like can tell something’s wrong, so if I’m just like- sometimes it’s just like there’s days where you really like understand that he’s like gone and he’s- you just get like all depressed and stuff.”

Civilian friends are often limited in their ability to comprehend deployment or provide meaningful help:

“Like my friend who I was telling about…, she didn’t actually understand that it was like that hard at that time. Like she didn’t know that like you just had to expect like maybe your dad wasn’t coming home. And she’s like, ‘I never realized that.’ I’m like, ‘Yep.’ Like he’s in combat. He maybe wouldn’t come home.” (Zohra, 17).

“Even if my friends realize if I’m gonna cry or something, they’re like, ‘Oh, what’s wrong?’ If I’m like, really feeling it, I’ll tell them like, ‘I just like miss my dad and stuff.’ And they’re like supportive but it’s just like weird ‘cause you can tell that they don’t really know what to do. And you know that they don’t know what to do. You know that there’s like nothing they can do really.” (Joann)

Some friendships, however, grow and become a tremendous asset to Army National Guard youth during deployment. For Barbra, “My friends at school are really good about like, I can talk to them, and they’ll help me in the best way that they can.” Todd said, “I have a bunch of friends at school that help me out through it, and if I’m havin’ a rough time, they’ll help, they’ll help me through it.” Jon agreed: “Friend-wise, I almost thought it was like more. My friends were like more like there for me, you know what I mean? Like especially their parents, too. They were like, ‘Oh,…if you have anything going on, call us.’”

**Functional Complexities.** Even as Army National Guard adolescents are surrounded by relationships that are suddenly more confusing and difficult to maintain,
deployment also brings great challenges to regular daily functioning. Overnight, youth are thrust into new territory where something even as simple as going to school becomes much more complicated.

**Personal Processing.** Some of these complexities can be attributed to how deployment affects youth personally. As Barbra described:

“I would just get like kind of closed-off I think, and I was just really about- like I’ve kind of been like survival mode. Like put my head down and do what I got to do and get through this. And so I got really like- I’ve just like no-nonsense, very adult-child.”

Jon had this to say about how deployment affects each personal individually:

“You can try to prepare yourself, but it’s just something that you’re gonna have to handle on your own that’s gonna affect you in a personal way. So…I said how I felt about it, but like I have no idea how it truly affected my mom or how it truly affected my brother so. I think uh it’s just gonna be your own personal struggle no matter who you are or how you’re related to that loved one.”

The fear associated with a parent serving in a combat zone often adds an additional mental burden to daily functioning as different youth process it in their own way. Haley said that “the challenges I had were that I always would worry about the worst-case scenario.” Whereas Joann stated: “I never like, I don’t know, like imagine it, like the actual like fighting and stuff that they do. I just imagine like him at a desk and stuff.” Another adolescent shared that she always had the thought on her mind that her father may not come home or that she may not hear from him again. She described functioning with this burden:

“It was- it was really hard. Like I can’t believe that I had like that thought the whole time, but like I just wanted to be prepared so like it wasn’t a surprise. And losing my dad at that age (gets emotional), it would have probably hit me really hard.”

**New responsibilities.** The prolonged absence of an Army National Guard parent usually results in more responsibilities for adolescents as they need to help fill the void in
order to maintain household functioning. These added responsibilities include providing transportation to younger siblings, doing yard work, caring for younger siblings and pets, cleaning, cooking, and fixing things. As Joann detailed:

“It’s just my mom and I so like I have to like pick up a lot of like more slack around the house and stuff. And I can’t just like go home all the time and like start watching TV and sleep…. I’ll like go home and clean and like make dinner and stuff.”

These added responsibilities sometimes disrupt how adolescents would normally prefer daily life to be. Jon described “working my schedule around being able to be around my mom and my brother when my dad was gone” as the biggest change he had to make while Jessica shared that “it was definitely harder for me ‘cause I had to like step up and do a lot of other things that he would do around the house.” Haley also had to adjust her lifestyle to take on more tasks during deployment. She recalled:

“It really changed me again with the being independent aspect. I had to help- I felt like I really had to help a lot with [my sister] like transportation and stuff ‘cause a lot of the time she wasn’t able to drive.”

**Family dynamics.** Establishing a new family dynamic and finding where one belongs within that also complicates adolescent functioning during deployment. Zohra shared: “…we’d always like do fun stuff together, and then when he was deployed, we didn’t. We kind of just stayed home. So, that was kind of hard.” One participant who was away at college during a deployment observed:

“And it’s just my mom and my sister and the house is here so, I’ve noticed when I’ve come home that they have a completely different family dynamic. Like everything is so much different and then it’s like doing their own things here, and they’ve bonded a lot.”

Haley shared how her family dynamics underwent multiple changes because of deployment:
“I missed how perfectionist he was. He- our house was so like clean when he’s here because he doesn’t like anything on the counters…. And it’s funny ‘cause like my mom will rearrange the whole house, and he’ll come back and put it exactly how he wants it. And Mom’s like, ‘You’re killing me!’ (laughs).”

Joann added:

“I think changing is just like little things like family dinners and stuff. Like it’s just like my mom and I eating for like ten minutes together and getting take-out. So, I don’t know, it’s like little stuff just like spending time as like the family that’s like not anything anymore I guess.”

**Decreased family capacity.** In addition to changes in the family atmosphere, Army National Guard adolescents note how deployment diminishes the overall family capacity. Barbra recognized this as she described others helping around their house:

“Guys come over and shovel our deck during the winter and like little stuff like that is- it means a lot when that’s Dad’s job, and we just don’t really have the capacity to take care of it.” Adolescents described how this decreased family capacity impacted their schoolwork:

“He like always helps me study and like is like my number one motivator for like school and stuff. So, I think like studying like so many times, when I’m studying for like a history test where I’m like, ‘Oh, like I need like Dad to do like these flashcards with me.’” (Joann)

“I didn’t have somebody to kick my butt as much as I should have been. Like uh high school grades pry dropped a bit. I think I- ‘cause I didn’t have like uh I think motivator who’d be like, ‘Hey, your grades are slipping. Get on that.’” (Jon)

Study participants also described how deployment diminishes their available parenting resources. Victoria spoke about mentally thinking of her father, “What would he say to me?” as she faced various decisions because she could not access his input as readily during his absence. Haley described how she “missed having him there to relieve the pain- like not the pain but like the arguing” in her household. One primary caregiver also acknowledged having fewer parenting resources as she recalled that her daughter “at
times had to be refocused as there was only one set of eyes on her…which was to her advantage.” A sixteen-year-old participant characteristically summed up what it means for adolescents to experience this decreased family capacity:

“If I wasn’t like getting along with my mom, I could like get along with my dad. And so now if like I happen to like fight with my mom or like not get along with her, like there’s no one else to get along with.”

**Internal struggle.** Even with the complications deployment brings to adolescent functioning, all of the adolescents interviewed in this study found their own way to work through the difficulties and go about their daily lives in the midst of deployment. Yet, even adjusting well and functioning is not without its own set of complexities. *Several Army National Guard youth indicated an internal struggle with being able to function well while their parent was deployed.* Victoria stated: “I remember when like the second deployment was like, ‘Well, I’m kinda used to it.’ Like which is bad because I’m like I’m used to not having my dad here.” Haley also described her functioning strategy negatively: “Another, a good day would be when, it’s kinda sad, but when you were busy. A busy day would be a good day ‘cause you didn’t have time to think about it.” Jon especially indicated a degree of guilt in how he was able to adjust and function with his father gone:

“That’s pry the biggest thing I take away from everything was like have your routine and getting used to life without somebody, which is and like pry like the most like depressing weird way to put it ‘cause it sounds like they don’t matter. But you just, just what it is. Like they’re gone, and you gotta get used to it ‘til they get back.”

**Emotional Complexity.** Understanding what Army National Guard youth are feeling during deployment is a difficult task for anyone, even those to whom they are the closest. The youth interviewed used the entire gamut of emotions as they told their deployment stories, including anger, worry, sad, scared, jealous, happy, stressed, excited,
grumpy, depressed, giddy, mad, annoyed, lonely, ecstatic, and hurt. Some youth felt like they could control their emotions, including Jessica who said, “Like the emotions, I kinda had control over those,” and Joann who shared, “Like I could choose to like just be sad all the time or like grumpy and mad about it.” However, others viewed their emotions as a response to things outside their control. Zohra stated, “Cause deployments are really hard, and so like you can’t control that he goes overseas. And you can’t- well I don’t think you can control your sadness….”

Regardless of one’s level of control over emotions, the sheer intensity of the emotions adolescents feel upon the deployment of a parent is staggering, for which they have little to no experience. As Jon described, “I think the first one, it’s almost like breaking the seal…or ripping like the band-aid off I should say.” He later added, “I think I can only imagine like the first deployment for anybody is gonna suck no matter who you are.” In Barbra’s words, “When you’re in the deployment, you feel- so like at the beginning, it’s just like absolute heartbreak, and it’s so hard and you’re so sad.” Jessica recalled the hardest time for her to be strong was when her father first left:

“‘Cause we had to say goodbye to him, and he was a little bit emotional. It kinda made me a lot emotional ‘cause he was leaving for a long time. We didn’t know if he’d be returning or not and if he had to go somewhere else after that.”

Expressing emotions in healthy manners, already a challenge during the stage of adolescence, becomes even more complicated for Army National Guard youth during deployment. One primary caregiver made special note of this, stating that her youth had a “hard time communicating the feelings they were having.” Todd struggled with this as he interacted with others:

“Like I might get like a little angry at some people and uh, like when I’m feelin’ sad. And they don’t understand what it’s about. They might like ask me why I’m sad, and it might make me a little angry about like what they say.”
Barbra noticed differences in how she and her sister expressed what they were feeling:

“She’s very, very reserved, and so like while I’ll be like ‘I really miss Dad right now’ and then I’ll start crying and like talking to them about it. Whereas she’ll never, she would never out loud like talk about any of that. And so it’s really easy for me sometimes to be like, ‘I’m the only one who’s struggling, I’m the only one who’s hurting just ‘cause I’m the only one who’s showing it.’”

Sometimes youth become emotionally hardened and do not provide any clues to how it affects them:

“I think uh from the first beginning of the deployment…I just kinda got like, I wouldn’t say emotionally drained but like emotionally hardened where I just was like…you just take all the bad stuff and you do like, don’t like acknowledge it anymore…. It’s not like it doesn’t hurt you but like you just don’t, you like shutdown the hurt I guess. It’s hard to explain, but it’s just like you get uh desensitized almost where it’s just like of course you miss ’em but…your subconscious or something just is like, ‘Nope, don’t feel bad.’” (Jon)

The Army National Guard youth interviewed also indicated a subliminal conditioning that not crying equates to strength. Jessica recalled, “I didn’t like cry very much. When I, when he was gone, when inside I would tell my friends that I was strong because they knew how tough it was to not have their dad.” Haley was quick to correct that her admission to crying was not a sign of weakness: “I definitely cried (laughs). But. I don’t think I was- I think I was stronger, too.” Joann revealed: “I think I’m strong like saying that I don’t like break down and cry like whenever somebody like brings that up. I’m like, ‘Oh, yeah, he’s good. He’s here. Like, we’re fine.”

The study participants also spoke about deployment complicating days or issues already difficult to manage emotionally. The emotional burden associated with deployment seems to be like an ever-accessible woe upon which they can fall. Joann shared, “But, I don’t know, like I said, like there’s some days where just like it hits you and like it doesn’t really get better for like a day.” She went on to say, “Sometimes you
just can’t shake it,” further describing the challenge it is to get out of this mode. Barbra talked about a similar experience:

“I think the biggest like time when I struggle isn’t like a part of the deployment… but like when I just like start to throw myself a pity party. And I just like dig myself into that hole. And then I’m like, ‘My life is horrible. I hate this. Like, why me? Why do I have to go through this? Why now?’ Um, it’s really hard to…to keep yourself from doing that. And then once you do that, to like snap out of it.”

Jon also vividly described this emotional spiral downward:

“So like really burrow in if uh I was having a bad day ‘cause of school, ‘cause of grades, or anything like a bad day at work or anything. It was almost like the final like little pin was like, bad day- think about it, think about it, and my dad’s deployed. So it was almost like uh, I don’t know, kinda like that final like, ‘Ooh, yeah, that kinda hurts’ when you think about it, too (chuckles).”

Additional complexities.

Comparisons. While adolescents spend a majority of their concentration and energy on making it through a deployment, Army National Guard youth revealed a very powerful tool in their psychological possession- the art of comparison. Unquestionably complex, making comparisons can serve to both help and hurt adolescents experiencing deployment. Often, when adolescents lift up their heads and look around them, they find stark reminders of their separation situation. As Victoria related:

“This is kind of funny but uh we had a ‘Donuts for Dads’ day, and I remember everyone had their dad there. And I had FlatDaddy…. Everyone else was like taking pictures with their dad, and I had to take pictures with a cardboard figure.”

Several youth shared such poignant instances where they were without their father for a special event. As Haley described:

“And just the fact knowing that he’s miles away when you feel like it comes down to like being jealous that their dad was there. You know, I would always think, ‘Why my dad? Why does it have to be my dad that’s gone? Everybody else has their dad.’”
Youth struggled when other family members or siblings were able to spend time with their deployed parent on leave or travel to meet with the soldier while they had to stay home due to school or athletic commitments. Sometimes the act of comparing pitted one parent against the other, placing the primary caregiver in the difficult position of trying to help but never being able to measure up to an adolescent’s expectations. As one participant shared:

“And it’s just like my mom would try to like recreate that and or like try to find like another way to comfort me when it’s like, ‘That’s my dad’s thing.’ Like, ‘That’s his thing’. . . . It’s just like hard to feel like, ‘You can’t do that.’”

However, comparisons are not always negative, and some youth explained how comparing their situation to others actually helped them gain perspective. Barbra referred to such a comparison as helping her get out of pity party-type moods:

“I think probably like a lot of times I look at my mom, and I’m like my mom is like…doing like five times as much as me right now. And like, she’s doing great and like looking at her and saying like, ‘Ok, we can do this.'”

Jon would use comparisons to help him not think about how bad deployment was:

“I think it just helped me realize that like life sucks for everybody in their own capacity so…. My dad may be deployed, but if I talk to somebody else who their dad’s not deployed, their mom’s not deployed but their like parents hit ‘em or their parents like say that they’re worthless or they have something really bad happening and like maybe. It really opened my eyes to like uh whatever hardship you’re going through, there’s someone else that’s going through something much worse.”

Adolescent Development. The majority of youth interviewed in this study have experienced multiple deployments during a variety of stages in their lives. They provided an inside look into how adolescence further adds to the complexities of deployment. In the words of one primary caregiver, “Preschool years were easy, grade school years easy, deployment with a preteen and teenager is a whole different thing.” The greatest change
during adolescence for these Army National Guard youth was a growing ability to understand the situation. As Barbra described:

“I understand more of what’s going on. I understand um that it is not a good place over there, and that he is in a lot of danger sometimes. Um and so that makes it a lot harder you know. And the other deployments, I’ve just thought like, ‘My dad is superman, and he’s invincible.’ And so I’ve had nothing to worry about because well…I didn’t know that there’s anything to worry about.”

Joseph acknowledged that he worried more about his father in combat as he’s grown in awareness of the situations overseas:

“The older I’ve gotten, the more worried I’ve gotten about it because- I mean when you’re younger, you’re kinda like, ‘Oh, nothing’s gonna happen.’ You’re too young to really think about it very much. And then the older I’ve gotten, uh….”

Adolescents’ growing understanding and awareness also may result in their inability to innocently dismiss hurtful situations during deployment. As Joann reflected:

“Like I remember when I was younger…I was in Girl Scouts and there was like a father-daughter day at the bowling alley…. I think like back then, it’s just like, ‘Oh, my dad’s gone. Like I’ll still go and just like play with my friends.’ But I think if that happened now, like when I kind of understand more, I would just be like, I don’t know, like stay in bed and cry probably.”

However, this growing awareness does not always have to affect adolescents negatively. As one participant described, it helped him accept deployment better: “We get it. You gotta go off and be deployed. That’s understandable.” It also helped another selflessly give up her father:

“And I feel like it’s because I grew up, and I realized- and I became more aware of like current events and just getting more smart. I feel like because I realized what was going on that it was just a need more than- they needed him more than we did so.”

**Transitions.** Army National Guard adolescents shared that some of their most challenging deployment experiences occurred as they were also experiencing major life transitions. Coupled with the monumental changes of puberty or transitioning to college,
the complexities of deployment become that much harder to process. Even smaller
transitions such as changing schools or adjusting to a divorce add new dimensions to the
experience. Barbra detailed how difficult deployment was while leaving for college:

“It has probably been the hardest because he left a week after graduation, and he missed basically the whole summer…. Then he missed my eighteenth birthday, and then he missed move-in day for my first year of college. And then he missed my entire first year of college…. And so this has been really hard, like I feel like my life has done a complete one-eighty, and I feel like I am a completely different person.”

Haley also attended college for the first time while her father was deployed:

“It was the first time I was away from my direct support system and because of that- that was also why I grew up but. I also feel like because I was gone, and that’s why I took it hardest. But I remember it like I was texting my grandma and being like, ‘I have no one here.’”

Zohra recalled how difficult it was to undergo puberty while her father was deployed and then try to reconnect:

“Ew, this is like a flashback kind of. Um…it was like the time when like going from like a tomboy to like a girl. Like, so when my dad was gone, I was a tomboy. And like, I did, I was like Daddy’s girl. Like I went kayaking, I went camping. We do so many fun stuff. And then when he came back, I was completely different. And I think that kind of hurt him. So. That was kind of hard…. ‘Cause he didn’t recognize me when I- when he got home.”

Victoria also indicated how difficult it was to mature while her father was gone:

“It’s just like, ‘I don’t get to take a picture with my dad.’ Like for prom. And that’s what I really- I like. I enjoy his presence, and I enjoy his approval of everything. But without him being there, I just, I don’t have like a father approval.”

“Normal?” One interesting and multifaceted concept that arose from interviewing Army National Guard adolescents was the idea of “normal.” Two-thirds of the participants used the term, but even then, they ascribed various meanings to what “normal” represented to them. For some, it was a way to differentiate themselves from civilian adolescents who did not have a parent deployed with the military. According to
Jon, enduring long separations was “pry the biggest thing that separates uh military kids from normal kids.” Victoria saw the distinction but also thought her father being part of the Army National Guard led to a more normal life than her active duty counterparts: “And then I also get to say I’m, I’ve had a normal life, well, somewhat normal life, but yet my dad has also been able to help our country.” Even as they recognize what having a parent serve in the Army National Guard means for their lives, these youth want to remind us that they’re still “normal.”

Adolescents also used normal to refer to a state of accepting deployment and separation. Zohra shared, “Sometimes it was like normal that he was gone, and I was fine with it. But um other days, it would be like really hard, like I just couldn’t go through the day.” Joseph acknowledged it was part of the way of life with his father: “It’s just it was more normal to me than I guess it would have been to other people who didn’t have parents who had ever done military service.” It seems like the more experience youth have with deployment, the easier it is to establish normalcy during the separation. Jon referred to this in talking about a subsequent deployment:

“Actually I saw it wasn’t as harsh on my brother and my mom ‘cause I think they were both really used to it and just kinda more in the, in the flow of things of like how things go. It’s almost like your family life is normal so when they leave, or when my dad left, like, ‘Ok, we’re going to go back to-,’ like switching gears so.”

This acceptance of deployment taken to the extreme, such as in experiencing multiple deployments in succession, though, may produce a mental state of reversal in which separation and deployment now becomes the new normal. Joseph, who has experienced four deployments in a decade referred to his father’s military service as “my normal.” He went on to say the following:
“It doesn’t really bother me any to not talk to someone for a while and then just kinda pick back up ‘cause I mean, he was gone for over a year at a time. And like, oh well, that’s almost normal to me now (laughs).”

Youth in this study moreover saw normal as a distinction between life during deployment and life upon their parent’s return home. Barbra consoled herself by saying, “And I know that once we get back in the summer everything’s going to be back to normal.” Joann furthermore viewed a return to normal as overcoming deployment: “I think it’s like getting back into a normal routine like, instead of me emptying the dishwasher every night, he’ll do it. Like just start like going back to normal I think.”

Yet, Zohra provided a sobering reminder that this normal may be forever gone: “But it wasn’t normal, like going back, but we tried to make it as normal as possible…. It was always something different.”

With all these differing concepts, achieving “normal” seems to be an important task during deployment but yet one that is characterized by complexity. What really is normal? It appears to be esteemed by Army National Guard youth, but can it even be realized during deployment… or afterwards? Barbra discussed her thoughts on normal in the midst of her third deployment:

“And so during- like at this point in the deployment, I feel normal but then like once he gets back, and like everything is back to normal, then I’ll realize like that’s normal and that I’ve just kind of like coping and living through that whole time all time. So it’s like…I like have good days and I feel normal and like I still have a bunch of fun and stuff but then it’s like once he’s back, I’ll realize like, oh, that wasn’t as good as it could be, you know?”

**Complexity of deployment’s impact.** Those of us who care about Army National Guard youth- parents, teachers, researchers, family members, adults in the community- all really want to be able to understand what deployment is like for these adolescents in one neat, step-by-step manual so that we can better help. However, after
listening to over 300 minutes of adolescents sharing their deployment stories, only the first step to understanding is truly clear— it is not simple. Deployment is a mixed bag, multifaceted and complex. It is not all positive but neither is the experience all negative. It is hard and has some really bad parts, yet it can be good. It is often challenging to even identify or grasp the impact of a deployment. As Joseph struggled to evaluate deployment’s impact on his life, he said:

“It’s kind of neutral. Um…it’s not necessarily good or bad. Like the negatives are obviously he’s gone and all that. And then it’s kind of positive because he’s doing his duty for his country and all that…. You don’t really have too much of a choice. Uh, it’s just more of neutral like. Just kinda how it ended up.”

Joann, nine months into her third deployment, also indicated conflict in finding meaning until she was able to make it through the experience:

“I think like if you try and find anything positive, it’s always like, at least like present, like while he’s gone, it’s always gonna be like overruled by the fact that he’s gone. Like, ‘Oh, it’s making me stronger’ but my dad’s gone for a year, like in a war. So I think like that’s hard like no matter what the positive outcome is like…the negative is so much bigger I think. So I don’t know, it’ll be like better to find positive things once he’s home, you know like he’s like safe and stuff but, I think it’s hard to like find positive since the negative is so big.”

**Context Theme: “Nobody Understands”**

“People say like, ‘Oh, I understand like what you’re going through’ but it’s like, you’re always kinda like in the back of your head. You appreciate it, but at the same time you’re like, ‘You don’t understand’ so. I think…that’s probably the biggest hardship about it, especially not understanding it.” (Jon, 23)

Deployment can be a lonely existence for Army National Guard adolescents as the predominate feeling of those interviewed was that they are surrounded by others who do not understand. However, no matter how isolated they may feel, Army National Guard youth always experience deployment within the context of their surroundings. This context includes the circumstances influencing the deployment, the series of environments in which they are embedded, and the relationships they have with others in
their environment. For better or worse, context profoundly impacts the deployment experience for Army National Guard adolescents, sometimes helping these youth function but also sometimes hampering their adjustments. Thus, the idea of context emerges as the second theme from this study, a key idea that helps add understanding to the complexity of deployment as youth attempt to function in a world where nobody understands.

**Circumstances.** *The specific location and timing of a deployment partially defines what kind of experience adolescents will have* with their parent being overseas.

The Army National Guard youth interviewed in this study have gone through a variety of deployments to different locations around the world, and these circumstances do matter. Joseph described what it was like to talk to his father one deployment: “He was in Iraq, so surge-Iraq, when everything was kind of going nuts. He was (chuckles) talking to me on the phone, and all of a sudden…he just says, ‘Ope, gotta go! Rockets are incoming!’”

The level of danger and fear of the unknown can make a deployment much more terrifying for adolescents. As Victoria remembered:

> “I always got really scared in Iraq because…I never really knew what happened. And uh, part of me, I don’t want to know what happened. And I don’t wanna- I just don’t ask him questions about it because I know that he doesn’t wanna talk about it.”

Even the mission set for the soldier-parent can make a difference for how adolescents experience the deployment at home. As Jessica shared, “Well, I felt safe because he was just flying airplanes. He wasn’t like on the ground. That made me think he was more safe but it was still dangerous ‘cause [the enemies] were right outside the fence.” Jon recognized how the circumstances of his father’s two deployments during adolescence changed the impact on him:
“And then, the second deployment, it was a relief to know he was going somewhere safe. I think um, just that like- part of it is you don’t end up so much worrying about them every single day. Like when he was in Iraq, like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ You see the news, so saw stuff happening. It’s like you’re more like missing them than you are worried about them, at least for me.”

When the extended separation of deployment occurs along the life course for Army National Guard adolescents also makes a difference in how they experience it. As previously discussed, major transitions such as entering college and puberty add to the complexity of the deployment experience. However, one can also view a deployment’s timing within the context of these transitions and adolescent development as establishing parameters for how the deployment will affect individual youth. Haley noted how this restrained her sister’s and her ability to connect through the separation: “Even though I think me and [my sister] were kinda going through the same thing, I think we were at two different points in our lives that we actually didn’t understand.” Barbra described how being away at college sometimes limited her ability to be included by the rest of her family: “Last night they were like, ‘Who invited you home?’ And I was like, ‘Okay, bye!’ (laughs) But, no. I understand that they need to do what they need to do. So sometimes I kind of feel like an outsider.” Victoria recalled having fewer personal resources in her new middle school setting than previously:

“In elementary school I could talk to my teachers. I’m very open to talking to my teachers so then in like middle school and stuff, I just transitioned to a new school so I wasn’t like really comfortable talking to them yet.”

While those are all examples of context hampering deployment functioning, Joseph shared how deployment occurring after his parents’ divorce actually made the experience somewhat easier:

“It might have helped some because I didn’t live with him fulltime. If I would’ve, it would have been a really big change of pace, but it wasn’t. It was like, ‘Oh, I don’t get to…see him as much as I would have otherwise. And it sucked, but…I
still go to the exact same school and I still do the exact same things most of the
time. And that helped.”

Closely intertwined with the specific circumstances of a deployment, the ability of
a soldier to communicate with his or her family during a deployment also becomes part
of the context for Army National Guard youth. Having limited access to internet service
puts even more distance between soldiers and their adolescents at home. Haley
described: “I remember how horrible the internet was…. There were just some times that
I would have to wait like three days before I could tell him how the game went. And that
sucked. Um, that was probably the hardest part.” Often soldiers are deployed to areas on
the opposite side of the world which also hampers finding a time to communicate. As
Todd related, “I haven’t like been able to talk to him a lot since uh we have such different
times so normally when I’m able to talk to him, he’s normally in bed.” However, with
increasing technology and access to communication becoming a greater part of the
circumstances of recent deployments, adolescents at home noted the difference it made.
Victoria, who has experienced three deployments, explained: “I feel like with the
communication and stuff like it’s gotten easier…. Just knowing that he’s proud of what
I’m doing and that he’s seeing me grow up because of the communication and sending
pictures and stuff like that.” For Jessica, age eleven, this communication also helped her
understand what her father was experiencing:

“I really stuck out that like he said that he was having fun over there but and he
always sent like pictures of like the weather over there ’cause it was like really
hot and it was like winter over here so. It was different, and then he’d always like
tell us what was going on and everything. So that made me feel really good.”

Communication with a deployed parent overwhelmingly correlates with Army
National Guard youth having a good day or bad day during deployment. Although not
always possible on a consistent basis, communication does seem to set the tone, or
context, of daily experiences for adolescents. Having some form of contact with a deployed parent was a highlight of the day for these youth and helped the rest of their day go better. Haley recalled, “We all sat down and we’d just Skype and webcam- FaceTime him back. And I thought that was probably the best days.” Zohra described a good day as “hearing from my dad in the morning.” She went on to say, “That always made me happy…I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ I’d be so happy.” Joseph agreed: “Yeah, definitely getting phone calls and letters was good.” Victoria treasured every letter she received from her father:

“All every now and then there’d be a letter just waiting for me on the countertop. And it was sprayed with his cologne. And the envelope, and I’d open it and it was on the yellow paper. And I have every single one of them upstairs. I kept every single one.”

Even if communication, especially using advanced technology, did not occur very often, it was still meaningful to Jon as he described a good day as “having my dad call.” He added, “That’d always be cool…. We could do some video chats and that was uh a rarity but a pretty, pretty cool rarity, seeing him and hearing his voice.”

Conversely, not having communication with a deployed parent provides the context for having a bad day during deployment. Barbra described how her mood digressed when this happened:

“A lot of times when I haven’t talked to him in a while, I’ll start to like miss him more. And then it’s like more on my mind and so I’ll be like more sad about it. So then if something small happens, I’ll be like really sad.”

Jessica agreed that not talking made dealing with deployment more difficult: “I guess not being able to talk to him on the video cam, which…we had like six days where we didn’t see him, which was kinda really hard.” Victoria especially hated not being available when her father was able to communicate: “I feel like that’s probably the worst where
like you had an opportunity to talk to him and like he was free, and then you had like something interfering and you couldn’t.” Haley recognized how a lack of communication negatively influenced her overall perspective on deployment:

“Struggling to find something positive would be…when… (long pause) on the days that you just couldn’t. I don’t know, it goes back to the days when you couldn’t talk to him. I felt like when you didn’t have communication, I felt like it was hard to find anything.”

Maintaining communication with a deployed parent not only sets the context for a good day during deployment, but it also helps provide the framework for Army National Guard adolescents’ resilience. According to Haley, “I think communication made me strong. I think without communication, it would have been way harder.” Jessica agreed, stating, “Probably uh just getting to see him made me stronger.”

Environment.

*Family rhythm.* Utilizing the phrase “family rhythm” to describe how a family operates, an Army National Guard family’s rhythm involves the dynamics, lifestyle, traditions, and routines of the family. It helps define the family and how members relate to one another. Family rhythm is normally a strength of a family, providing comfort, security, and expectancy for individual members. However, the adolescents interviewed during this study most often mentioned aspects of their family rhythm as being some of the most difficult things to do without during deployment. Family rhythm provides major components of an adolescent’s daily life and makes up their most immediate environment. *Deployment, therefore, represents a monumental change to this comfortable family rhythm, thus disrupting the natural environment of each Army National Guard young person.*
Youth mentioned both big and small deficiencies to their family rhythm as impacting them. As one participant said, “I miss mostly everything (laughs). But like you miss everything but like the littlest stuff is like the hardest stuff for me.” Sometimes this is part of the daily routine, like Jessica shared: “I missed like giving him hugs and then always when he comes home, I always get to go jump in his arms.” Sometimes this is a shared tradition as Todd described, “I miss like hanging out with him…like me and him used to go do a lot of movies and uh just go out and do stuff that we like to do.” Any special custom alone with the deployed parent becomes a large, difficult void during deployment. As Barbra articulated:

“The biggest thing that I probably miss is like me and my dad’s thing has always been going to the races in [somewhat distant town] during the summer every Friday…’cause my mom and my sister both don’t like it…we just bond over it and um it’s like our fun thing that we do together.”

Joann mentioned how her father being deployed changed a part of her lifestyle: “Just having him around is different. And like I don’t watch as much football or sports or anything…. People talk about like football and like, ‘Oh, the game last night.’ And I’m like, ‘See, usually I would watch that.’” Often simply the absence of a parent’s presence represents the greatest deficiency in an adolescent’s immediate environment. Haley provided this very concrete example, “I really missed the way he smelled. He always had this really good…cologne. And I remember we would buy bottles…and we’d spray everything in the house so it would smell like him.” For Victoria, the lack of her father’s presence carried with it a deeper meaning: “What I miss about him being around is just constantly knowing that he’s here…. Just like having him as security…. It’s just he’s always there, and I know that he’s there. And then he’s not there.”
The context of this family environment may imply that having a more defined family rhythm makes it more difficult for Army National Guard youth to adjust to the massive disruptions to that rhythm that deployment brings. Although the adolescents interviewed provided numerous descriptions of what they miss about their father’s presence in their family rhythm, they also gave insights into how they were able to adjust and reestablish a rhythm for the time being, with a goal of being as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. *Primary caregivers took the lead in revamping the family environment for their adolescents.* One mother shared, “As my son’s father and I were no longer married for three of his four deployments, my son’s grandparents and I were able to keep and maintain the family traditions that he has with his father.” Barbra acknowledged her mom’s key role in this:

“My mom is really the one who makes the most changes so that…she takes on all of his roles and all of her roles. And she really tries to do her best to make sure that like she can ease the changes as much so that we don’t have to deal with as many changes while he’s gone.”

Victoria also noted how her mother stepped in to provide comfortable reminders of her father within their family rhythm:

“I feel like no matter what, they were always there if I was ever missing…my dad. My mom would spray his cologne on my pillow, and we made Build-a-Bears before he left for Iraq. And uh has like a recording that says, ‘I love you.’ So. She would, my mom would always go to great extents to make us still feel like…we’re still normal.”

*Experiencing multiple deployments seems to help Army National Guard families navigate the changes to their family rhythm.* Haley, who has gone through three deployments commented, “By going through more than one deployment…I feel like you just become used to- you don’t become used to but you become comfortable.” Jon noted the difference in the second deployment for his family’s rhythm as he said, “It was easier I
would say. Smoother.” Barbra also described how developing a deployment family rhythm helped her adjust to the changes:

“But then once it starts, you’re like, ‘All right, let’s do this, like we can get through this. We’ve gone through this twice before. We know, like me and my mom and my sister, we know our roles, we know what, where we need to step up. And we know how to function while he’s gone.’”

**School.** The majority of an adolescent’s waking hours are spent at school, so the school environment can greatly influence how Army National Guard youth function during deployment. The school environment does naturally represent some sense of stability and normalcy for these young people since their deployed parent usually does not have a prominent role at their school, especially when compared to the home environment. *Schools can provide an atmosphere that encourages and supports Army National Guard adolescents as they adapt to the changes brought on by deployment.*

Many youth in this study found the context of their schools to be helpful. The school routine may allow adolescents to momentarily escape from deployment. As Joann explained, “Like even with school, like I hate being busy with school but it keeps my mind off of it a lot.” *Teachers seem to be the most powerful aspect* of the school environment. Jessica appreciated her teachers’ interest in her father’s deployment: “And then they’d always like ask how he’s doing and stuff. I get to tell them that, which is kinda fun. ‘Cause it was always different every day (chuckles).” Victoria found a trusted, listening ear in one of her teachers: “So I can talk to her about anything, no matter what. And I can just explain to her my situation, and then she’ll give me like the best, unbiased um advice.” Haley also valued the sensitivity of her teachers:

“I felt like teachers understood a little bit more. And they…could tell if you were having a hard day. Like some days I just didn’t wanna- I don’t know, like especially like when birthdays and stuff came around…. I didn’t like get excused from class but I feel like they’re a little more lenient. And they understood.”
However, in what appears to be the exception rather than the norm, one participant confessed to taking advantage of his teacher’s understanding nature towards his deployment situation:

> “Uh, admittedly, I did in some of those cases. I had very understanding teachers and at one point, I kinda took advantage of that because if I was like slipping in class, I used the excuse like, ‘My dad was gone. Like, I’m kinda stressed about it.’ So they’d like loosen up on me, which was definitely not the right thing to do but um.”

One primary caregiver affirmed teachers’ roles in providing a supportive context:

> “Teachers at school who would check in with my kids and let my kids send emails to their dad from school. By discussing it, they allowed the openness to deal with it while still not allowing the deployment to define my kids. I was grateful for the extra eyes and ears to watch for troublesome behavior or things of a concerning nature that I could then address with my kids at home.”

**Community.** Although the Army National Guard adolescents interviewed in this study seemed more attuned to their immediate environments and how those affected them during deployment, they did recognize instances where the larger community intersected with their own individual experience. This provides a glimpse into how the larger context provides a backdrop for them in deployment. Many youth felt embraced by the community for their fathers’ service. Victoria said, “And then I have parents that are always like, ‘Bless his soul,’ and they’re so thankful. They always say, ‘Tell your dad thank you.’ And it’s an honor to have him in there.” This approval in turn then affects how these military youth view their situation. Jessica declared her father’s service to be “kinda cool ‘cause everybody thinks it’s like really cool that my dad’s in the National Guard.” Army National Guard youth described *meaningful interactions with the community that significantly encouraged them during the long stretch of deployment.*

Victoria greatly appreciated others who helped bring her father home for Christmas prior to going overseas:
“Someone also made it very positive for me because people were able to sponsor busses to get them home for Christmas. But it was only for a couple of days but. It was great because...without those people, I wouldn’t have been able to see him on Christmas.”

Haley noted how the Army National Guard community stayed involved with her family while her father was deployed:

“I feel like that whole group of people that my dad works with is really open. And if they saw you, or like some days we’d go up to the [unit] office, they’d talk to you and they wouldn’t just like ignore you. I feel like everyone was really friendly. I felt like that was nice. And like even when they did come back, everyone was there...to welcome them home.”

However, the comments of a few can also produce the very opposite effect. Zohra felt even more isolated because of others’ unawareness of current military involvement:

“Like a lot of people didn’t really believe that my dad was like overseas. And I was just like, ‘Yeah, my dad’s not here. He’s been gone for like a year.’” A primary caregiver also noted the damaging impact of others’ words on her adolescents: “Also people often say hurtful things- about their dad being a killer, or fighting an unjust war, or recently about ISIS coming after our family. Those are difficult to hear!” As adolescents become more aware of the larger context of US military involvement, through exposure to media or school, they also may feel more frustration and negativity as well. According to Joann, “Now I definitely know what’s going on, not only with like him being gone but like what’s going on over there. I actually like know about that stuff and like politics now which makes it like a lot more annoying.”

Relationships. Army National Guard youth are surrounded by relationships with others, within their families, schools, peer groups, and communities. The nature of these relationships and the interactions Army National Guard adolescents have with them during deployment also become key aspects to the context in which they experience
deployment. Deployment seems to have a polarizing effect on these relationships in the minds of the youth interviewed, sharply divided along the lines of “nobody understands” or “understands.”

“Nobody understands.” Being understood is a longing and perhaps even a need for Army National Guard youth going through a deployment, but it is also frustratingly evasive for the adolescents interviewed. They commonly shared the idea that “nobody understands,” reflecting the vast majority of their interactions with other people during a deployment. In the words of Barbra:

“Like everybody knows that he’s gone so they think that they like can sympathize with you, but nobody understands. Like you can’t understand until you’ve gone through it, so they like think that they know what you’re thinking. And they think that they can help you, but you’re just like, ‘No, you don’t get it. Like you’re not helping at all.’”

Joann agreed: “No one really understands how to like make you feel better. It’s like no one really like goes through that, too.” When asked who understood what she was going through, Haley declared, “I always would say no one did.” Victoria voiced similar thoughts: “I don’t even think they understand really what’s, what’s going on.” Zohra, too, experienced loneliness resulting from this lack of understanding: “I felt like no one would understand. So I just kept to myself.”

In addition to feeling isolated, the comments of people who tried to claim they understood could be extremely hurtful to these adolescents in the midst of deployment. The interviewed youth distinctly remembered such statements. For example, Barbra recalled:

“And like there’s always people like even though they can’t really…they’re not ever the best at emotional-supporters because it’s like they think they understand. And then they say something like, ‘Oh, my gosh, the time has gone by so fast!’ And then you’re like, ‘I think I’m going to slap you!’”
Jon could see through the attempts of others to relate to his situation: “Oh, that was the one that always got me. It’s like, ‘I know what you’re going through’ like. I think that’s where like senioritis, teenage angst was like, ‘No, you don’t!’ (laughs).” Although not so much hurtful as annoying, Joann found the probing questions and perhaps pity of others to be further evidence of nobody understands:

“Like every time I got to a friend’s house or something like their parents are always like, ‘Oh.’ Like my friends don’t really do it a lot unless I’m like sad…. It’s like, ‘What, they want to know all the time?’ I’m like, ‘Oh my gosh!’ I have it like rehearsed in my head like what to say each time. But it doesn’t like make me like super sad every time they ask but it’s just like annoying. I don’t know, probably just ‘cause I get it a lot.”

**Undertands.** On the opposite end of the spectrum, study participants did mention *a few select people whom they felt understood what they were going through during deployment.* The most commonly mentioned person was the primary caregiver of the Army National Guard adolescents. Haley stated, “I think the one person that actually understood would be my mom.” Zohra agreed, “Probably my mom but no one else would understand except my mom.” Barbra experienced the same support: “My mom is really the only one who can like say the right thing because she’s going through it, too.” Siblings close in age were also described as understanding. Joseph said, “My brother got it (chuckles). He was going through the same thing.” Jon declared, “Uh, I think besides like my brother or my mom, I don’t think anybody like [understood],” and Joann shared, “For me, I don’t really have like anyone who understands except for like my mom and sister.” A few close friends also received the distinction as understanding as well as other family members. Jessica listed “my family and then like my best friend in school” as those who understood while Todd talked about his steppmom, paternal grandparents, and extended family in a neighboring state. Victoria’s friends also played a prominent role
during her father’s deployment: “With some friendships I got closer, like especially people who understood what was going on. I’ve had a friend since first grade who I still hang out with to this day. And she really understood what was going on.”

“I really didn’t talk.” Extending from the dichotomous concepts of not understanding and understanding are the additional descriptions of who adolescents will talk to about what they are experiencing during deployment and when they will avoid talking about it. This further helps define the context in which Army National Guard adolescents experience deployment by identifying which environments are relationally rich and which are devoid of relational connection.

Those to whom youth confide during deployment can be viewed as valuable resources, crucial to the wellbeing of youth during the absence of a deployed parent. As can be expected from the results described thus far, Army National Guard youth described their mother, sister, family, maternal grandmother (living in the same house), teachers, and best friend as those whom they felt comfortable talking to about what they were thinking and feeling during deployment. Todd had many people to whom he could turn: “Pretty much my family. Uh here and [neighboring state] um. I don’t really have a hard time talkin’ to ‘em about it. It just gets it off my mind. So I’m not up thinking about it and stuff.”

Perhaps more can be gained, though, by examining when and why these adolescents would not discuss what they were experiencing. For some, it was more of a personality issue and part of their individual makeup. Joann shared, “So that’s kind of hard sometimes for me when I’m like having those days ‘cause I’m not one to like talk about my problems or anything with my mom and sister.” Zohra related to this: “I didn’t
really talk to anyone. I just kept it to myself. Like I had a little journal, and I would just write in there. But I didn’t really talk to anyone.” An independent and self-sufficient person, Jon felt like he did better managing on his own: “I guess I was just like so like in the zone that like, ‘Yeah, I’m fine.’ Like on cruise-control kinda thing so it’s like, opening up to anybody I feel like pry would have like interrupted that so.” Others described the reactions of others as being a detriment to talking to them about what they were experiencing. Haley recalled, “I really didn’t talk too much- any people ‘cause I didn’t want people to feel bad for me. I guess. I would hate that…. I hate when people feel bad for me.” She went on to add, “Also I feel like it’s a sign of trying to get attention. And I don’t want people to think that.” Another participant was concerned that talking about his issues might affect those whom he told:

“So it’s not like you don’t have to worry about you being a burden for other people by coming to them with your problems, especially family members who are experiencing the same thing…. Having like one more thing thrown into there, that’s not going to help anybody.”

**Qualification.** “Understands,” “nobody understands,” “talk,” “I really didn’t talk”- all of these key phrases from the mouths of Army National Guard adolescents who have collectively experienced over 26 years of deployment bring us to the pinnacle of this relational context of deployment. What emerges is the concept of qualification- who is qualified to understand what Army National Guard youth experience during deployment? And conjunctively, who and in what capacity, is qualified to help Army National Guard adolescents during deployment, such as by listening or offering tangible assistance? The explanations offered by these interviewed youth, behind the specific names of those who understand, provide valuable insights into these ideas of qualification.
Army National Guard adolescents see instant credibility in others who have also experienced a deployment or who are currently going through a deployment. Jessica offered this explanation of who she felt comfortable talking to about it: “But also like my mom ‘cause she was going through the same thing so we could talk about it together. And my sister. We’re really close so we would talk about it.” Victoria appreciated this shared experience with her mother and sister: “We could just talk about it, and we didn’t have to explain it to others. They could help explain things to me.” Zohra, who previously shared she struggled to talk to anyone about deployment, changed her mind after attending a monthly outreach event for families with soldiers deployed with her father: “There’s always people to talk to if you want to talk to them. Like, I didn’t think that there was people who would understand until we went to the like help-supporting group.” Haley felt very confident in the potential camaraderie and understanding available from a few other girls she knew whose dad used to serve with hers: “I know who they are….I bet if I ever like texted or called one of them, they would immediately answer.” Even though he never really found anyone in whom to confide, Jon indicated what he really wanted was someone who truly knew what it was like to experience deployment: “But I guess I never felt like anybody was like, ‘I really understand how you feel, like I know what you’re going through.’”

Adolescents feel safe talking about deployment with people who are in very close relationships with them, where they are truly known by the other person. Barbra shared this about her mom: “She knows, like when I say something like little she knows the big emotions behind it. And so she’s really good about being there.” Haley agreed, “My mom of course knew what to say but no one really knew.” Jessica had a close friend who
was truly there for her: “She knows a lot about me so it kinda- she supported me a lot during school and afterschool…. I could talk to her so that kinda felt good to have somebody to talk to.”

*Other people also proved their qualification through their actions and responses to the adolescents interviewed.* Being an available listener without passing judgment invites youth to share. Zohra had this to say about her friendships: “Some of them got stronger but some of them I just didn’t care about. Like I was just really sad.” She went on to offer this explanation:

“Probably ‘cause the ones I didn’t care about much, they thought I was just getting attention. And they didn’t actually know that my dad was like gone. And then the ones who…were there for me? Like I could just tell ‘em how I was feeling.”

Haley, too, was very selective in whom she confided because she did not want to be seen as garnering extra attention or pity: “I became really close with a couple people because they understood what I was going through. But I also felt like I would keep that from some people. Like I wouldn’t advertise that my dad was deployed.” She went on to cite trust as being indispensible in the relationship with her closest friend:

“I feel like her dad reminded me a lot of my dad. And our parents- they have a really unique personality like my parents. And I feel like that’s why I confided in her because her dad wasn’t like a fatherly figure but like he had the presence and carried himself the way my dad did. And I trusted- I trust her family.”

Victoria described her friend’s proven availability as making a difference in being qualified to understand:

“She really understood what was going on. Her family understands what’s going on, and uh they always like took me under their wing when one of us wasn’t having a good night or like if I just needed to get out of the house I could always…go over and hang out with her, get my mind off of things.”
Construct Theme: “We Can Do This”

“I think it wasn’t much of a struggle as much as like a realization like…’I gotta come out with something positive from it.’ I think um, when my dad came back, I never like realized it was a struggle at all until it was…almost like the end of like a really hard race where it’s like counting down the days. Almost like you go to like the finish line, then one it’s, you get there, everything that happened is like done so. If you like push yourself really hard in the race or you like…sprained your ankle and still pushed through or for the deployment, something bad happened or if you’re like stressed about something, like it all finishes like when they get back. It’s like a relief, like ‘Ope, it’s done’…. That sense of like the chapter’s closed now that you can move on.” (Jon)

Deployment becomes that which Army National Guard adolescents make it to be in their minds and understandings. As Jon shared, going through deployment was comparable to running a hard race that had a clear finish line. Once he crossed that line, all that happened before was done, and he was ready to move on to the next stage of his life. For other youth, deployment cannot be comprehended as such a discrete portion of life because even years later, they continue to experience changes and effects stemming from the long separation and military service. The Army National Guard youth interviewed in this study provided a rich understanding of what deployment meant to them. Interwoven in their experiences were a multitude of commonalities, yet each of them seemed to take away their own knowledge and understanding of the experience. Their reflections and interpretations unveil the third and final theme of this study, the idea that deployment becomes a construct in the minds of the youth who experience it. They actively formulate their own concept of the experience. While many aspects of deployment are outside their control, Army National Guard adolescents can choose their perspective, focus, and what they make of the experience, conveying an attitude of “We can do this!” How deployment changes an individual is partially dependent upon how they construct it to impact them. Often without even realizing it, these youth are
constructing their own unique military culture as they navigate through their deployment experiences. Deployment becomes what Army National Guard youth make it to be.

**Resilience conceptualized.** In telling their deployment experiences, Army National Guard adolescents provided a multidimensional picture of what it means for them to stay strong, or demonstrate resilience. When asked directly, they were often very humble in their own assessments of their strength but indeed revealed a steely resolve as they explained how they were able to persevere through a long deployment and for most, multiple deployments. *Being resilient for these youth incorporates the idea of overcoming.* In Jon’s view, he “just turned a hardship into a uh success.” Victoria described overcoming as making it through the separation from her father:

“So I feel like I can overcome like this experience- or these experiences have also made me stronger because I know what it’s like to not have a father figure, and I know what it’s like to um then get him back. And then like know how to deal with situations like that.”

Joseph also thought of overcoming in the sense of “dealing with” something as he said he “just kinda dealt with it and kept going on with life until he’s back.” Joann agreed: “I can like deal with more stuff I guess since I have to like deal with this like so many times I think…. So I think I can like handle stuff like that a lot easier than like other people.” She later declared, “I would say I’m strong, like ‘cause I have to deal with all of this.”

The idea of having a great capacity for difficulties factored into Zohra’s thoughts on resilience: “And like when things get tough, I’m just like, ‘Well it can always get worse’ (chuckles).”

*Other concepts of resilience centered upon the actions of the youth going through a deployment.* Haley proclaimed: “I didn’t stop my life. I kept living. I didn’t let one thing hold me back. I became more involved. I think that’s a huge sign of strength rather
than shutting everything down. I opened up.” Victoria thought of it in terms of the
negatives she avoided doing during the time:

“…Because throughout all that, I haven’t used it as an excuse. Um, not like if I
were ever to be doing bad in a class,… I wouldn’t be like, ‘Well my dad isn’t
here. That’s the reason why.’ Um, I’ve always found a way to- if I was feeling
angry or anything, I’d find a way to release my anger without taking it out on
anyone.”

Todd also saw his response to others as a demonstration of his resilience: “Like some
people ask me how I go through it without getting upset.” Jon extended the concept of
resilience to further include reaching out to others and helping them:

“When things get really tough, I feel like I get in like more of like a zone where I
see other people like hurting bad and then like I push myself more to like, ‘Ok,
‘cause it has a pact’ and help anybody else behind me…. Anywhere uh like I’d
see someone hurt. I know I’m like tired, or something hurts and all that
stuff…it’s like it almost takes all that away to go and help somebody else.”

Barbra eloquently described her understanding of resilience in terms of surviving,
thriving, and making positives:

“I can take this year, that I know is gonna be a year of trials, and I can just go into
coping mode and just survive this year and just get through it alive. Or I can take
this year, and I can thrive. And I can really take advantage of these trials as a way
to share how God is working in my life with others. Or to make my relationship
with my dad stronger or like make- make positives out of these trials. And so I
think that is a huge way. People look at you and they see, ‘Oh are you just
surviving, are you just getting through this? Or are you thriving and are you like
really…doing good things and becoming stronger out of this?’”

For the Army National Guard adolescents interviewed, resilience does seem to
incorporate a certain measure of choice, especially in their attitude and perspective.
According to Haley, “I think you can try to not let it affect you, but deep down it’s gonna
need to affect you. Whether you make it a positive or a negative, that’s up to you.”

Joann observed that despite having no control over the deployment itself, she personally
still had a choice: “And I think like there’s nothing, I mean there’s nothing, I can do
about him like being gone so I might as well like make things better, not make them
worse.” Jon agreed:

“Throughout my experiences, throughout my life, I’ve kinda like come to the
realization like when anything happens to you, like you don’t get to choose like
the bad things that happen to you but you do choose who you become from them
and like what you take away from them.”

Barbra further viewed choice as a decision as to what controlled her life:

“You can’t control anything that’s going on in a deployment but you can control,
how you let it- if you let it get to you or not. And you can control if you’re gonna
let it ruin your life or if you’re gonna take it and use it to make you stronger and
make you better. Um, kind of like the survive-or-thrive thing again. Like you can
just let… kind of let it rule your life and say, ‘I’ve just gotta get through it, I’ve
just gotta get through it.’ Or you can just like say, ‘This deployment doesn’t get
to control my life.’ Like it’s something that I’m going through right now, but it
isn’t my whole world. And I can have a life outside of it, and I’m not gonna let it
decide, or dictate my life.”

Focus. Not only do Army National Guard adolescents construct their own
c Oncepts of what it means to be resilient, they also develop their own understanding of
how best to carry on with their lives during the hardship. Herein lies one of the real
strengths of this study’s sample, that fact that all but one participant have experienced
three or more deployments. They each have had many opportunities to incorporate their
knowledge and understanding of how to function during deployment into their reflections
on this topic. Even though each participant has developed his or her own construct of
what works best, the common theme throughout is the concept of focus. As Jon
described, “But looking back on it, I just, I was just like focused on everything else
besides that I guess.” Joann also indicated that maintaining focus was important to
overcoming the hardships of deployment:

“And then like I said earlier, like being busy like even if it’s just like at school
like the more I like, just enter like conversations with my friends, like the less I
start thinking about that and stuff. So, I think it’s good to like talk, like not about
that problem, but just talking or just like trying to focus on something else.”
Another participant explained how staying focused sometimes meant avoiding situations which brought the reality of deployment to the forefront:

“Like Family Readiness Group especially like I avoid that like the plague just ‘cause I didn’t want to be around people that like wanted to bring you back to that world with like, ‘Your dad’s gone.’ Like, ‘Let me be here for ‘ya. Let me remind you about it.’ Like…just kinda like avoid that kinda of stuff that makes you realize the situation you’re in.”

Regardless of what specifically comprises the center of their attention, being able to focus on something other than the deployment situation itself seems to be central to adolescents functioning well.

**Perspective.** The way that youth approach a deployment makes a big difference in maintaining perspective throughout the course of the experience. This most often involves choosing to focus on the positives. As Zohra stated, “I’d just keep a positive attitude and say that he’s probably gonna come home. And just always keep my head up.” Todd realized this required a selective focus: “Like I think positive about ‘em. I don’t like think about all the negative things happening and stuff like that.” Even when things are difficult and discouraging, Zohra shared, “But you can always find something positive in everything. So that’s what I did.” Victoria made this positive attitude part of her daily mantra: “I’m kinda like, stand up for yourself and then always try to do your best. Like that’s just one thing he says to me, every single morning is, ‘Do your best and make someone smile.’” Sometimes focusing on the positives meant looking ahead to the end of the deployment. Haley recalled, “Whenever he was gone, one positive thing that we would look from it would be all the stuff we could do when he got back. We’d always make a list and then have a countdown.” Barbra found looking ahead to gain perspective helpful as well: “And also think about like this summer. Like my dad’s gonna be back this summer, and like it’s gonna be worth it when he gets back.”
perspective also means that Army National Guard youth focus on the larger scheme of things. As Haley shared, “I guess I look at it as the little pieces or you can look at it as the whole.” She further explained, “I think if you throw a hardship at me, I can just look at it through a new lens compared to what I did before. I’d look at a bigger picture rather than to a little piece.” Jon described seeing the bigger picture as “almost like clipping together film reels.” He theorized: “So my dad gets deployed, end of one. And then…nothing really matters until like you can connect to the next one. And it’s like life just picks up again.” One participant mentioned that remembering the greater purpose behind the separation helped keep a positive focus: “I think…making the positives out of it was…just realizing that what you’re doing it for, I think. Just realizing it.” Jessica clearly had this perspective in mind as she shared about her father: “He loves to fly helicopters and that’s just his, been his dream. And he loves doing it so. I wanna support him through it.”

**Structured busyness.** Army National Guard adolescents commonly mentioned the idea of staying busy as what helps them focus elsewhere during a deployment. In the words of Joann, “I think like being busy like helps me. I don’t know if that helps a lot of other people but for me, like just keeping myself super busy.” However, that busyness must also be managed in order to make it helpful rather than hurtful. As Barbra warned:

“Like schoolwork is really stressful. So if I’m like really, really overwhelmed with school, that can just like make a bad day. And then…I’ll be like, ‘Oh, dad’s gone, too.’ And then I’m just like worse.”

Therefore, it seems these interview participants are communicating the idea of structured busyness- keeping their lives full of activity while directing that activity with a routine.

Balancing busyness with comfortable regularity seems to provide youth with a focus that does not become overwhelming.
Staying busy gives Army National Guard youth positives upon which to focus.

As Haley learned:

“If anything I got out of it was when you’re busy, you’re havin’ a really good day. Because you’ve had no time to think. When you didn’t think, nothing came bad from it. But when you did think, nothing was good.”

Likewise, staying busy prevents adolescents from thinking about the challenges of deployment so much. Victoria stated that this worked for her and her sister: “We’ve both taken on a lot for responsibilities and uh just like always- I feel like I’m always trying to be involved in everything because like I want to keep my mind off of it.” Jon referred to this state as being “in the zone,” a mentality he also shared with his father:

“‘Oh, I miss my family but now I’m in the zone.’ And that’s how my dad describes it, too, is like when he was deployed. He said like you just keep yourself busy enough that you don’t have to think about home that much. I mean when you do think about home, it sucks, but you just like do your job and count the days (chuckles).”

Joann cited busyness as the most helpful way for her to stay focused:

“And so, I think even like keeping myself busy, like I could not keep myself busy and then think about it a lot or I could like take up as many hobbies and stuff as I want to and then not think about it a lot. And so yeah, I think I just do whatever helps me.”

She further explained how she has constructed her own version of activity, unique to deployment:

“I joined like two clubs this year. Which like, I’m not even a club person at school or anything…. Like I don’t even have an interest in like either of the things. So it’s like a school newspaper and then it’s student council, so like we make all the decisions for school and stuff. But, so that’s like fun and that keeps me pretty busy.”

As a balance to busyness, establishing a routine and sticking to that routine helps adolescents not only focus but also simplify some of the complexity brought on by deployment. Joseph gave routine as the explanation to how he has endured four
deployments: “I just kinda had my day-to-day schedule. That was it. That was how I spent my time.” Zohra also saw routine as a way to help the time pass, stating, “So I just went on with my day, every day, until it was over.” Haley noted how experiencing multiple deployments aided her in developing this practice: “By going through more than one...you don’t become immune, but you become used to the routine. Once you get the routine, you don’t wanna break the routine.” Jon, also a veteran of several deployments, warned against breaking the routine as well: “You have your routine. You don’t wanna like mess that up and take yourself out of like the mindset of it.”

**Helping others.** Several Army National Guard adolescents described how having an outward focus and helping others allowed them to construct positive meaning from their time in deployment as well as demonstrate their strength or resilience. In the words of Jon, “Looking back on it, it’s more like I think I showed the most strength in just being preoccupied with other people, like not really focusing in on how I felt as much as how other people felt.” Haley also viewed her willingness to interact with other people and help them as strength:

“A sign of strength would be showing... that I could be there for others in the situation. Like I was open to talk about it. I wouldn’t hold it all in if I needed to. And I think just by being able to...open up and talk about it is a huge.”

Often this focus on helping others starts right in the adolescents’ own homes with their closest family members. Victoria shared that for her, it meant:

“Just being able to be there, for if my mom or my sister and my grandma is just like not havin’ a good day. I’m always there, like I’m just like, ‘What can we do to make this better?’ And I’m always the one there if you need a hug!”

Another participant mentioned how she played a crucial role in helping her younger sister still share a monumental event with her father, even as he was overseas:
“Well, with [my sister], it would be being there to just listen to her vent…. I remember Facetiming him at state track just so…he could see her do it. And that was like her biggest fear, and I’d just be like, ‘Sara, I can do it!’ Like when she high jumps and stuff, I’m sittin’ there, sending updates.”

Youth also find that reaching out to help their friends brings some meaning to the deployment hardships they have had to endure or are in the midst of enduring. As Barbra described:

“But then you look at other people who are struggling and other people who are going through hard stuff and maybe I can relate to them or maybe I can’t. But you can say like, ‘I know what it’s like to really be struggling’ and just kind of like, be able to just empathize with them and to like maybe help them or maybe just encourage them.”

Zohra found ways to specifically use her deployment experiences to encourage other military youth in similar situations: “When they’re having a hard time with… coping with their dad or like they think their dads are stupid ‘cause they just got back and they don’t know anything. I just help them with that ‘cause I’ve been there.” The Army National Guard adolescents interviewed also seem to have credibility with their friends because of the way they have overcome their own deployment hardships, which makes them a valuable resource to others. Todd saw himself playing this important role: “I help ‘em through tough times, and I…just talk to ‘em when they’re uh, when they need help with stuff, and I try and cheer ‘em up.” Victoria shared, “And I carry that into my friends. If they’re having a bad day, I’m just like, ‘Alright. Well, let’s look on the bright side. Let’s figure out the problem, and then let’s change it.’” Jon especially experienced others confiding in him and seeking his support for major issues during one deployment:

“I had I think like four or five people that like I knew…they came to me and like some of them were saying they wanted to like commit suicide. Like somebody said they had been and like the fourth person said that they’re addicted to meth…. It was emotionally stressful, it was like, ‘Whoa! I’m just like a high school kid. You’re coming to me with all this stuff?’ But uh, I think being able to like be like, ‘Ok, my situation kinda sucks, but yours is worse. Let me help you.’ I think it’s
...just a good outsource of your emotion to put like your emotions into a positive uh thing.”

Helping others does not appear to be a burden to these youth during deployment but a way that they can construct value and understanding from the experience while providing a positive focus. As one participant summarized, “At least from my experience, uh, I think that’s the most proactive thing you can do for yourself and for everybody around you. It’s just, focus on them and being there.”

**Faith.** For one Army National Guard adolescent, faith became her focus during deployment, upon which she constructed meaning from the experience. In the words of Barbra:

> “I think that the reason not all the changes in me are [negative] is because like I center my life around Christ. And so like going through a hard time like this, I can let God use the suffering to make me better. And I think like if I wasn’t a Christian, and if I wasn’t living for Christ, then this would be a different story and that I’d be dealing with a lot more issues…. But I can just like trust Him in every situation. It’s made me a lot stronger and a lot better.”

Other youth also mentioned aspects of faith helping them through the experience. In discussing others not understanding her experience, Joann stated: “So if I have like a day, I’ll just like pray about it or something.” Zohra also referred to prayer in the context of staying focused on the positives: “But you can control that like your positivity and like knowing that he’s gonna come back. Or at least praying that he’s gonna come back.”

However, it seems that faith played a much larger role in Barbra’s life during deployment, upon which she built her understanding of the experience as a whole. She went on to explain her thoughts from the midst of her third deployment:

> “My dad and I have a really, really good relationship because of these deployments. But from like when he left this summer it made it really, really hard for me because I kind of like put him on this pedestal. And I kind of realized that like too much of a good thing can be bad, and I started to realize that I was kind of like idolizing my dad and my relationship with my dad. And so like this whole
year has been like a process of being able to lift that up to God and realize that I’ve been blessed with an amazing earthly father. But it’s my heavenly Father who is in charge of everything and it’s Him who is controlling all of this and His plan is perfect. But He’s the one that I need to like be putting my strength in and my trust in, not my dad.”

Self talk. Perhaps one of the most intriguing revelations of this study is how Army National Guard youth utilize self-talk in maintaining focus and constructing meaning from their deployment experiences. Although not addressed specifically by interview questions, seven of the nine participants gave examples of phrases they spoke to themselves within the course of the semi-structured interviews. These youth related examples of self-talk under a variety of circumstances and included both positive and negative phrases they would say to themselves. Negative self-talk typically centered upon the difficulties of deployment, such as “I can physically not do this,” “This is gonna be complete torture!,” or “I remember how like bad the last eighteen months were but he left in the last deployment, and now I’m gonna have to do that again.” Sometimes youth focused on the danger, such as “There’s a possibility that he might not come home” or on their soldier’s absence: “He’s not gonna be there.” However, the majority of self-talk was utilized by adolescents to remind themselves of how to stay strong in the face of the challenges. Table 3 details specific examples of positive self-talk provided by interview participants.

Table 3

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<tr>
<th>Participant, Age</th>
<th>Self-Talk</th>
<th>Context</th>
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<tr>
<td>Barbra, 18</td>
<td>“Well the faster I get this semester started, the faster my dad can come back.” “I’m really gonna make the most out of this.”</td>
<td>Hard second half of the deployment Demonstrate strength to others</td>
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### Haley, 19
“If you can get through this day, you can get through the next. And then once you get through the next, you’re gonna get through the whole year so.”

Push to keep going in bad days

### Joann, 16
“Oh, it’s another day like done.”

“Oh, it’s making me stronger.”

Staying busy to keep mind off of deployment

When struggling to find something positive

### Jon, 23
“Yeah, my dad’s really good at his job. I don’t have to worry about him.”

“Ok, it sucks, but let’s do this.”

Danger of deployment

After letting out emotions during first month of deployment

### Joseph, 20
“Ok, nothing’s gonna happen.”

“Alright, I get…why he’s gone, and he’ll be back in a month.”

Danger of deployment

Deployment after he had already been established away at college

### Victoria, 16
“Well then, I still have two more months. And then I get to see him.”

“Another month, one week.”

Disappointment at not being able to go see her father while other family members did

Constant reminder

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<th>Interestingly, note that self-talk seems to be a consistent strategy for both male and female adolescents. It also appears to be utilized more by older adolescents, but this trend may just be due to differences in how older and younger adolescents retell their stories and elaborate upon their thoughts. Self-talk seems to be an important way in which Army National Guard adolescents encourage themselves to implement their knowledge and understanding of how to best function during deployment.</th>
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<td><strong>Army National Guard cultural construct.</strong> What does it mean to grow up Army National Guard? Most of the youth interviewed in this study did not view themselves as especially unique or different. They more often recognized the uniqueness of their fathers’ service and connected their identity to that. As Victoria explained, “I’m just like one…of the few children that are able to say like that my dad has made our country...”</td>
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better.” However, for themselves, in the words of Joann, “It doesn’t like feel different.” As described earlier, Army National Guard youth strive to create the idea of “normal” within a deployment, even with all of its accompanying complexities. Yet one other in vivo term broadly shared by these interview participants, the word “weird,” reveals that even as they try for normalcy, they are actually constructing a subtle knowledge and understanding of what it means to be the son or daughter of an Army National Guard soldier. Through the changes, hardships, and victories during deployment, they develop a unique and very personal Army National Guard culture, often without even realizing it.

As the term “weird” can be thought of something outside the norm, it can serve as the antithesis to the concept of “normal.” Used by six of the study participants to describe situations related to deployment, weird indicates a deeper connotation for these Army National Guard adolescents than merely serving as teenage vernacular. Examining what these youth describe as weird unveils their Army National Guard cultural construct. A major characteristic of their way of life involves multiple adjustments to their soldiers’ presence and absence. As Jon described, “It feels weird ‘cause it’s like almost like going from black pieces of paper and then white and then black and white… Like your whole life’s the military, now it’s family. Oh, now it’s military, now it’s family.” Although youth terribly miss the physical presence of their soldier—“Sounds weird, but I really missed the way he smelled—,” they adjust to the absence, as indicated by Victoria: “Like it’s just weird like asking my dad to do it ‘cause he wasn’t there the whole year.” As it happens often and for long periods of time, adolescents begin to accept the separation, like one participant shared: “Have your routine and getting’ used to life without somebody, which is and like pray like the most like depressing weird way to put it.” Part
of the military life for these Army National Guard youth is feeling isolated and alone at times. Joann stated, “That’s kind of hard sometimes for me when I’m like having those days ‘cause I’m not one to like talk about my problems or anything with my mom and sister. So that’s weird.” It also means others on the outside do not understand: “And they’re like supportive, but it’s just like weird ‘cause you can tell that they don’t really know what to do.” Youth recognize that their families must adjust in order to function without their soldiers, as Barbra described: “It’s weird to see when I go home that like the family dynamic right now is completely different from our usual family dynamic.”

However, deployment also seems to bind Army National Guard families together in a unique way. In the words of Haley, “I think the main thing that’s helped supported my family was- we have this weird thing called ‘Family First.’” Jon also recognized how his family developed differing priorities: “Uh, having that weird feeling of being like, just stuff you don’t need and really the only thing you like really need is your family.”

Adjusting to the return presence of a soldier brings on new aspects to their military life, as Joann stated: “Like it will be weird when he comes home.” How quickly reality is changed by the return of a soldier is part of the lifestyle. Another participant detailed:

“I remember, it was so weird uh ‘cause it seemed like so normal ‘cause he came back, had like the welcome back ceremony. Dad gets in the car, drives us, we go to McDonald’s, and we go home. And it felt like, it was weird.”

Yet, even with the changes, good comes from the demands of the Army National Guard lifestyle for these youth. Haley observed, “It’s weird because even though it was harder, it was probably better.” Relationships do endure the fires of separation:

“So like when my dad was gone, it was like, ‘Wow. This is weird. Gone for like over a year’ like. And I always felt like when he gets back, it’s gonna be weird ‘cause it’s like you’re the same person.”
Once youth become part of this Army National Guard experience, mutuality seems to exist amongst others in similar military situations because of their cultural understanding: “It’s weird ‘cause like I feel like they confide in me because I know what it’s like.”

**Reflections.** Deployment becomes what Army National Guard adolescents make it to be in their lives. *The lasting impact of a deployment largely depends upon how youth construct their understanding of the role it plays in their personal development.* Often this knowledge and understanding takes time to materialize as older participants farther removed from a specific deployment were more able to reflect and share how they perceived it to have changed them. However, no matter where they were at along the process of constructing meaning from deployment, these Army National Guard youth demonstrated their resilience once again by how they have allowed deployment to make them better.

Several participants recognized how deployment has *grown their maturity level.* Victoria said, “I feel like I definitely matured faster. Both me and my sister have matured faster.” She noted, too, how her peers have acknowledged this: “And then I feel like they really value my opinion because I’ve matured faster.” Joann also saw how deployment separated her from her peers: “I think that I’m like…like not really bragging or anything, but I honestly think I’m kind of more independent than a lot of like other people my age or my friends and stuff.” Haley viewed her increased maturity as a great gain:

“I feel like I have an advantage on other people. I feel like I know how to deal with situations a little bit better. I feel like compared to other people my age, I’m a lot more mature…. I feel like I had to grow up more than others had to.”

Another participant also shared how she saw growing up faster benefit her:

“But I feel like also growing up faster has kind of pushed me to be like a better person because I’m always trying to get good grades because I want my dad to be like, ‘You’re getting an A in everything. So I’m very proud of you for that.’” So I
feel like…him not there is me trying to- well again, prove to him that I’m being the best that I can be.”

Army National Guard youth most commonly mentioned how going through a deployment impacted their family. Contrary to what one might expect, these adolescents overwhelmingly understood the enduring influence as being positive. As eleven-year-old Jessica concluded: “[Deployment] probably made us all stronger as a family. Like letters and stuff, how we need to communicate more with each other and tell each other we love him because we might not be able to see him again.” She also added that the changes “made us stronger and just made us unite more.” Joann reflected on how she values relationships in her family more now:

“It makes me like appreciate a lot more, like having family. Some people like, oh, it makes me like really sad and mad like seeing like people my age be like mean to parents and stuff. I’m like, ‘Don’t be mean to him.’ So it makes me like really appreciate like family.”

Todd recognized that deployment allowed him to grow closer to family members who he would not have otherwise: “I’ve really bonded with family members…goin’ to a basketball game or somethin’ I would normally go with my dad. But instead I went and bonded with my stepbrothers and just bonding with people that I haven’t really bonded with.” Barbra noted how deployment actually grew her relationship with her father:

“Well, one thing that I’ve noticed with it being like my dad is we have a lot stronger like father-daughter relationship than most of my friends do. Like we like fight a lot, but…we have a really, really close relationship. And like I’ve noticed that like as I watch a lot of my friends go through like the teenage-parent like hating-your-parents thing, like I never. Both my mom and my dad I don’t think I’ve ever really taken them for granted because you go so long like with him gone that it makes you a lot closer. And we have a lot more like respectful relationship because of that.”

Haley understood deployment’s impact to be to her advantage as she could maintain close family relationships over a distance:
“Of course everyone thinks family is really important, but I think I’ve been in a place where I know like how important family is. You know having that connection with him there whether it’s over a text message or even like FaceTime and Skype. You know that they’re there, no matter what, not seeing them face-to-face. I feel like I have that advantage over other people.”

Not only did the study participants explain how deployment influenced their family relationships but in a broader sense, how it changed the way they related to others in general. Haley saw it help her develop more relationships, stating “If anything, it made me branch out and form connections that I probably wouldn’t of made without that.” Jon developed a greater awareness for others in need: “People were emotional and like I said, I’d just go and help people, keep you active.” He also mentioned being better equipped to help others because of deployment: “I think when it comes to interacting with people, I think I gained like a lot of ground in being able to empathize with other people because I had a hardship.” One primary caregiver also recognized an increase in her daughter’s empathy, sharing, “It gave an experience that will give her understanding and compassion for the rest of her life.” Joseph viewed deployment as equipping him to sustain relationships despite distance and changes:

“I guess I deal with distance better. It doesn’t really bother me any to not talk to someone for a while and then just kinda pick back up ‘cause I mean, he was gone for over a year at time…. Usually (chuckles) like I don’t have to maintain the closeness and talking to someone constantly to feel like there’s a relationship.”

Army National Guard adolescents also recognized the role deployment plays in developing their resilience, a toughening that will continue to benefit them as they face other challenging obstacles in life. As Joann stated, “The big stuff for like the long run has been really positive ‘cause now I’ll know how to deal with like big situations and stuff.” Zohra agreed: “Um, it’s not made me a pansy (laughs)! It’s definitely made me stronger.” Being able to overcome a difficult situation can instill confidence as youth
move forward. One primary caregiver mentioned, “It is a part of her life that she can reflect back on and say she overcame.” Specifically, one participant observed how deployment grew her mental toughness: “…But like in the long run, I’ll look back, and I can be like, ‘That made me like so much like stronger’ and like…mentally stronger I guess…. I think that’s a big thing.” Jon garnered meaning from how deployment instilled emotional toughness:

“I think how like emotionally how like made me tougher definitely like. Like I said when I went to Basic, I think ‘cause of my dad’s deployments I was…just able to be there for them ‘cause I was so used to being there for my family.”

Youth also understand going through a deployment to bring about growth in other areas of their development. The variety of ways deployment impacted them further exemplifies how Army National Guard youth construct their own unique meaning of the experience. Deployment opened Jon’s eyes to a broader awareness: “Definitely perspective is pry the biggest positive thing I got from that.” Barbra saw how it impacted her faith, stating, “It has grown my faith a lot stronger, which has made me a stronger person.” Victoria’s reasoning skills developed as she tried to process through what her father would do if he were home advising her:

“Be kind of on my own like, I had a mother figure but now I need to like think on like the more rational sides, too, like my dad always did. Like he’s always like, uh if something bad happens, ‘Well, it was an accident and what can come out of it?’ So I always had…to think like he would.”

From her unique observer’s perspective, one primary caregiver acknowledged how going through a deployment provided a personal understanding of the cost of freedom: “They are more patriotic as a result- when they look at the flag, they know they have skin in the game. It’s not just a flag, it’s not just a country to them!” Another primary caregiver mentioned the impact deployment had in helping her sons choose a career: “It has shaped
the lives of my two sons in that both are scholarship Army ROTC cadets and are choosing to pursue active Army after graduation.” As she reminisced on experiencing three deployments during her adolescent years, Haley offered this powerful tribute to the role she understood the Army National Guard to have played in her life:

“I feel like if I didn’t have military in my life, I don’t think I’d be the person who I am today. I think it’s made me a stronger person emotionally. I think it’s made me realize how much family is. I think that deployments…have just changed everything in my life, like the way I go about things, the way I think about things…. I don’t know what my life would be without the military. I wouldn’t trade it for the world. I would trade moments but I wouldn’t trade being a military child for the world personally.”
Chapter Five: Discussion

This study provides a glimpse into what Army National Guard adolescents experience during deployment and what helps them stay strong. As the first known study to focus specifically on the understudied populations of (a) the Army National Guard and (b) adolescent military youth, this study also uniquely utilizes semi-structured individual interviews to gather a wealth of information. The results of this study unveil a rich understanding of what deployment is like for Army National Guard adolescents under the current OPTEMPO and what it means for them to be resilient. Specifically, three major themes emerge from the data collected. First, deployment is a mixed bag as all aspects of functioning become more complicated for youth; deployment’s impact is more complex than simply good or bad. Secondly, adolescents feel that nobody understands them during deployment as the context of their surroundings influences their ability to function. Finally, Army National Guard youth convey an attitude of “We can do this!” as they actively construct meaning from their deployment experiences; deployment becomes that which they make it to be in their own minds and understandings.

Complexity: “Deployment is a Mixed Bag”

During the deployment of a parent, Army National Guard youth experience additional complexities in their relationships, functioning, emotions, and development. Suddenly, normal daily tasks and interactions become much more difficult as these youth carry around a greater burden because of the deployment. How these adolescents function and emerge from the experience can best be understood in light of what is known about resilience. According to Luthar et al. (2000), resilience is a “dynamic process encompassing positive adaptation within the context of significant adversity” (p.
The Army National Guard adolescent participants in this study have all demonstrated positive adaptation in the face of deployment adversities. Yet, they do not have supernatural or mysterious qualities that enable these positive outcomes (Masten, 2001). Their ability to overcome can best be explained by considering the processes they undergo during a deployment. As Masten and Coatsworth (1998) explain, resilience is the demonstration of natural human adaptation systems at work. Similar to a machine, adolescents perform particular tasks when prompted by outside stimuli. For example, they may feel sad and lonely when reminded of their parent’s absence due to deployment. They may think about the danger their parent is in while discussing current events in a school classroom. Due to the complexity of deployment, Army National Guard adolescents must undergo many additional processes during the course of a normal day. They may have added responsibilities around the house. They may have to shield younger siblings from some of the realities of deployment. They may have to perform athletically with the knowledge that one of their greatest supporters, their deployed parent, is missing from the stands while everyone else on the team has their father there. Like a machine, their system has to work overtime in order to perform all the processes prompted by the phenomenon of deployment. The added complexities demand more work under more complicated dimensions.

Masten (2001) warns that these human adaptation systems may become overwhelmed if certain systems are severely harmed or if the adversity is too great for any individual’s coping ability. However, the inverse effect seems to have emerged from the youth participants in this study. At times their adaptation systems did appear to approach the processing limit. As Barbra shared, “There are definitely times when I have
breakdowns and I’m like, ‘I can physically not do this.’ Like two months is too long. The time is dragging by, and I don’t know how I am gonna get through this.” However, in evaluating how deployment personally changed them, many participants explained that the experience made them stronger. In effect, deployment served to expand their capacity, their ability to process through adversity and positively adapt. Their “machines” are more competent and able to perform under complicated conditions. Youth explained this as making them mentally or emotionally stronger, more prepared to deal with difficult situations, or more capable. Study participants also indicated this as they thought about going through multiple deployments. Even though each deployment brought its own unique set of complexities at different occasions along the life course, the majority of youth described at least some way that their functioning in subsequent deployments was aided by previous experience.

The complexity of deployment for Army National Guard adolescents can also be examined in relation to family systems theory. Since all family members are interconnected, the physical absence of one parent for combat service and resulting threat to his or her life will inevitably disturb the other family members within the system (Masten, 2013). Youth described how this complicates their family relationships, whether that be feeling more responsible for the wellbeing of their primary caregiver and siblings or trying to alleviate their father’s guilt for being gone. The study participants also understood to a certain degree how their attitudes and actions reciprocally affected others in the family as they mentioned changing the way they expressed their emotions around family members and helping out more around the house to lighten the burden of their primary caregiver. Paley et al. (2013) notes how this interconnectivity can either
lesser or intensify the challenges of deployment as families walk through the experience together. With deployment being the external challenge to a family system, the added complexities Army National Guard youth experience represent the conditions requiring adaptive self-stabilization and self-organization (Cox & Paley, 1997). Youth may not have a learned strategy for maneuvering through these changes, even if they have experienced deployment previously. Self-stabilization and self-organization require the coordination of all in the family system (Cox & Paley, 1997), thus contributing to the complexity of the adaptation process. It can be hypothesized that Army National Guard families who more efficiently undergo the adaptation processes of self-stabilization and self-organization serve to help lessen the complexities adolescents experience during deployment.

Army National Guard youth repeatedly mentioned the concept of “normal” as they described their deployment experiences. While their understanding of normal carries with it a variety of usages, perhaps “normal” can be known best as being synonymous with family systems theory’s concept of equilibrium. Equilibrium represents balance and stability within the family system as members organize along certain standards of interactions (Paley et al., 2013). Deployment disrupts not only family systems but also individual systems as well. Although the context for normal may change for these Army National Guard youth—describing civilian youth as opposed to themselves, their acceptance of separation, or their differentiation between life during deployment and upon the soldier’s return home— the idea remains consistent with the comfortable stability of equilibrium. Therefore, reorganizing and reaching a state of equilibrium where adolescents feel normal represents a key task of coping with
deployment. The more youth are able to reach this equilibrium under the new circumstances, the more able they are to function well within the increased complexity of deployment.

**Context: “Nobody Understands”**

Army National Guard youth never experience a deployment in isolation despite feeling as if no one understands them. Rather, the surrounding circumstances, environment, and interactions with others profoundly influence how adolescents deal with the deployment, for better or worse. This context can be understood as individual youth existing in a series of embedded environments that shape their development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or in this case, how deployment impacts them. Deployment provides a clear demonstration of how larger, more distant systems profoundly influence individuals. Foreign policy decisions made by the United States government or personnel decisions of the United States Army exist in the macrosystem, far-removed from where adolescents directly function. However, one simple mobilization order for an Army National Guard unit can completely turn the microsystem of an individual adolescent upside down. Study participants indicated how stronger connections between the settings of their daily lives, or mesosystem, facilitated their adjustments. Teachers who understood their family situation of a parent being deployed made the school setting more comfortable and conducive to learning. Family members who were able to send live updates of key sporting events to a deployed parent helped minimize the pain and loss of a parent not being there. The parents of Army National Guard youths’ friends who were aware of the deployment provided a relaxing refuge away from their disrupted home environment. Because Army National Guard families reside in civilian
communities and often have limited access to formal, government-sponsored support services, the ability of the study participants’ families to create their own informal support networks within their exosystem determined the extent of community support. Study participants indicated having access to a wide variety of informal support, such as extended family members, neighbors, church members, friends and their families, teammates, and other Army National Guard soldiers and families. Youth welcomed this support but also recognized its limitations, especially as far as understanding what it is like to go through a deployment or addressing emotional needs.

Specifically, Army National Guard adolescents’ microsystems include the family environment, which the researcher calls “family rhythm,” or how the family operates. The family rhythm concept incorporates dynamics, lifestyle, traditions, and routines shared by study participants when describing their family’s functioning during deployment. Although this study primarily focuses on the individual rather than family, this preliminary understanding of family rhythm lends itself well to the concepts of family strengths research. Additional research could further explore which aspects of an Army National Guard family’s rhythm correlate with DeFrain and Asay’s (2007) set of qualities describing the characteristics of strong families and what role deployment plays in forging these qualities.

Parenting itself becomes part of the context in which adolescents experience deployment. Study participants varied in attachment and closeness to their deployed parent as well as primary caregiver at all stages of the deployment. However, certain interactions between Army National Guard youth and their parents, either deployed or at-home, served to mediate some of the negative effects of deployment, consistent with
Palmer’s (2008) theory of risk and resilience within military families. Although operating with limited parenting resources, deployed soldiers who regularly communicated with their adolescent children at home often made the difference between their son or daughter having a good day or a bad day. Youth mentioned text messages, emails, calls, video chats, and letters setting the tone for a positive day and contributing to their emotional wellbeing. Primary caregivers, who in this study were all mothers or stepmothers, were instrumental in buffering some of the inevitable disruptions deployment brought to the lives of adolescents, such as minimizing changes, carrying on family traditions, and creating special links to the deployed soldier. Study participants most readily named their primary caregiver as being one who understood and to whom they could talk. Furthermore, parents crucially supported resilience in their youth experiencing deployment, albeit by different means. Adolescents wanted to stay strong and do their best to please their deployed father; honoring him served as motivation. Youth looked to their primary caregivers as positive examples of how to carry on well and often took on the same attitude and perspective of their situation as communicated by their primary caregivers. In these ways, parents help dispense necessary resources needed for resilience (Palmer, 2008).

**Construct: “We Can Do This!”**

Army National Guard adolescents do not merely act as spectators during a deployment, at the mercy of all the changes occurring around them. Rather, these youth actively construct understanding and meaning from their experiences as they individually determine what it means to stay strong and maintain a positive focus, to demonstrate that
“We can do this!” Deployment and growing up Army National Guard becomes that which these adolescents construct it to be in their own minds.

The message at the heart of positive youth development resonates well with what these study participants experienced during deployment. Just as adolescents are to be viewed “as resources to be developed rather than as problems to be managed” (Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003, p. 94), each Army National Guard young person going through a deployment can be considered a valuable resource in which the deployment itself is investing. Often literature examining the effects of deployment on military youth starts with the assumption that these adolescents will have problems with deployment, thus implying a need for fixing. Although the researcher does not deny the reality of deployment and the variety of challenges it brings to an adolescent’s life, approaching these youth as resources rather than problems completely changes how deployment impacts a young person. It does not have to break a person; deployment can serve to develop an adolescent and grow them in positive ways. Furthermore, consistent with what these study participants shared, deployment itself can be viewed as a resource in their lives to be developed, reaching beyond merely a problem to be managed. Barbra demonstrated this attitude as she declared, “I’m not gonna let it decide or dictate my life” and “I’m really gonna make the most out of this.”

Positive youth development focuses on the six Cs of desired outcomes for youth, which provide yet another way to determine the existence of good adaptation in the face of adversity. Throughout the interviews, Army National Guard youth detailed how these six Cs manifested in their lives not just during deployment but because of
deployment. Table 4 displays specific examples of these desired outcomes, as shared by six different participants.

Table 4

*Examples of Six Cs of Desired Outcomes in Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Desired Outcome</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Competence</td>
<td>Haley</td>
<td>“Some of the best times of my grades were when my dad was gone.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Joann</td>
<td>“I think I’m like more independent, and I can like deal with more stuff.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Todd</td>
<td>“I’ve really bonded with family members….bonding with people that I haven’t really bonded with.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“…I haven’t used it as an excuse….I’d find a way to release my anger without taking it out on anyone else.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character</td>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>“…it really opened my eyes to…whatever hardship you’re going through, there’s someone else that going through something much worse…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“…when they’re having a hard time with like coping with their dad or like they think their dads are stupid ‘cause they just got back and they don’t know anything. I just help them with that and ‘cause I’ve been there.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caring/Compassion</td>
<td>Jon</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Zohra</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Army National Guard adolescents interviewed for this study demonstrate that positive development can occur during deployment and that deployment can actually serve as a catalyst for some of that development.

While minimal expectations and hopes of Army National Guard parents may be just that their youth can make it through a deployment without it ruining their lives or causing irreversible damage, this study also indicates that deployment provides the opportunity for youth to thrive. The concept of thriving youth incorporates varying ideas from different researchers but stems from the sixth C, contribution, and Pittman et al.’s
(2003) challenge to fully engage youth in their own development, organizations, and communities. Although the concept of thriving seems at odds with the adversity of deployment, Scales, Benson, Leffert, and Blyth (2000) do specify “delayed gratification” and “overcoming adversity” as two of the seven indicators of thriving youth (p. 28). Study participants shared thoughts on their deployment experiences consistent with a research perspective on thriving. Deployment opened some adolescents’ eyes to the needs of others, whether that was younger siblings, primary caregivers, friends going through hardships, or other military youth going through deployment. As these Army National Guard youth acted on their concerns, contributing to their family and community, they demonstrated thriving behavior (Lerner et al., 2003). Having and developing a spark, or passion that brings energy, joy, purpose, and direction to an adolescent’s life, also contributes to the notion of thriving youth (Scales, Benson, & Roehlkepartain, 2011). Faith clearly served as the spark in one study participant’s life as helping others did for another. Sparks, therefore, seem to be something upon which youth can focus as they develop their own way to function best during deployment. A final aspect of thriving youth relative to this study is the concept of possessing a sense of empowerment (Scales et al., 2011). Feeling empowered during deployment may begin with having some sense of control of the situation, propelling youth beyond merely tolerating the deployment to being able to master the circumstances to some extent (Compas et al., 1991). Army National Guard youth communicated that their understanding of resilience also incorporated having some degree of choice, especially in their attitude and perspective. Being able to construct understanding and meaning from the deployment experience also contributes to a sense of empowerment. Perhaps the
youth who felt more in control of their deployment situation also felt a greater sense of empowerment, represented by how they cared for others and embraced opportunities to educate others about Army National Guard service.

**Implications for Practice**

This study aims to bring understanding to the phenomenon of deployment with the intent of helping those who come into contact with Army National Guard adolescents become better sources of support. As these youth revealed, the context in which they experience deployment crucially impacts their experience, for better or worse. Families, military service providers, educators, and community members can either contribute to the complexity of deployment for these adolescents or can help facilitate how they construct value from the experience.

This study’s finding that all aspects of adolescent functioning become more complex during deployment naturally leads to the implication of simplification. Whenever possible, those who support youth during a deployment should strive to help these adolescents simplify their lives so as to alleviate some of the strain on their adaptation systems. For some, this may mean helping them become more organized in their daily activities and responsibilities. Expectations need to be clearly communicated so youth do not have to wonder what is wanted from them. Even though staying busy seems to help youth function, some may need advice on how to eliminate too much busyness or how to input more structure into their activities. Helping establish a weekly routine with regular activities may help youth find comfort in their daily lives while also helping mark the passage of time. Simplifying even minor things, such as transportation
and meals, can relieve some of adolescents’ already overworked decision-making and processing systems.

Creating a helpful context for deployment begins within the Army National Guard family system. Families need to be especially cognizant of their family rhythm, or how they operate. In order to counter the natural disruptions brought by deployment, families need to establish comfortable routines and responsibilities. Include adolescents in making these decisions and setting routines and responsibilities so they have more control over their daily lives. Monitor the changes and family rhythm regularly in order to make adjustments. Finding a comfortable, helpful routine and way of life during deployment may take a while or may need to be altered as circumstances change, such as starting school or the deployed soldier changing location or work schedule. Perhaps families need to create new, regular traditions during deployment that can bring enjoyment and promote family bonding, such as a regular movie night or meals out at a favorite restaurant. Again, seeking the input of adolescents in creating new special activities helps them take ownership of the event while also aiding their process of constructing helpful ways to function during deployment. Families also need to partner with the deployed soldier to develop beneficial ways to communicate regularly as allowed by the deployment circumstances. For some, this may mean altering digital data plans or devices to make it possible for adolescents to email, text, or instant message their deployed parent throughout the day or enable them to receive calls or messages from their overseas parent. Some families may find it helpful to schedule video chat time or phone calls ahead of time and regularly so that all members can take part.
Strengthening communication and connections between the settings of an adolescent’s daily life becomes a joint responsibility of youth, parents, and adults in those settings. As some youth indicated, telling others about a parent’s deployment sometimes does not happen as youth may not want to talk about it or may be hesitant to be viewed as trying to get attention or pity. However, the more adults and others become aware of the deployment situation in these daily settings, the more able they are to be understanding and helpful. Informing others about a deployment may be executed best several months prior to the actual send-off date so adults and other youth in these settings can be on alert during the challenging pre-deployment stage as well as prepare to be supportive during the deployment itself. In some instances, parents may need to confidentially inform adults such as school personnel or coaches so that adolescents do not have to carry the additional burden of peer perception.

Maintaining communication with Army National Guard families during deployment is an important responsibility of service providers, educators, and community members. Adults who regularly come into contact with Army National Guard adolescents should consider the primary caregiver as their best resource to understand how the young person is adjusting to the changes of deployment and what might be the most beneficial ways to provide support. As this study reveals, youth process deployment different. What one adolescent finds helpful, such as talking about the challenges, may actually disrupt the functioning of another adolescent who prefers to focus on other things. Primary caregivers know their adolescents the best, and by initiating communication with them, other adults can partner in providing helpful contexts for youth experiencing deployment. Furthermore, this communication goes both
directions and can also benefit primary caregivers by providing additional observations and insights into how their son or daughter is coping in various settings.

For anyone seeking to come alongside youth during a deployment, the concept of qualification divulged by this study must be taken to heart. Even if one has no personal experience with deployment, youth can still find a person to be supportive and helpful if approached in the right manner. Start with acknowledging that you do not understand but are eager to help. Ask questions and be willing to learn. Be available to Army National Guard adolescents but avoid being obnoxious or barging your way into their lives. How youth process deployment varies by individual and can change by the day. Complexity characterizes deployment, especially in the emotions experienced by youth. Some days they may want to talk about it while on other days, they may want to escape from it entirely. However, youth value others who are sensitive, unassuming, aware, and caring; reaching out to help in tangible ways, such as providing a meal, transportation, or place to get away, builds trust and qualifies others to be understanding and supportive during deployment.

Educators and youth workers may need to reconsider special events, such as a Father-Daughter Day or a Mother’s Day luncheon, when they have a young person under their care going through a deployment as these occasions can be especially difficult. Perhaps the event could be altered to instead involve the primary caregiver or planners can creatively find ways to include the deployed parent in the event. Maybe the soldier overseas could still participate via video chat or record and send a special message to their son or daughter. Again, purposefully communicating with the primary caregiver and adolescent about such situations benefits all parties.
A final implication for improving the context of deployment involves developing intentional relationships with others who have gone through a similar deployment experience. Army National Guard families living in civilian communities need to be proactive in connecting with other families in the same unit going through the same deployment, whether that be formally through official unit and Family Readiness Group activities or informally on their own. Be persistent even if there is not an instant connection as one can never underestimate the value of a shared experience. Other Army National Guard families, retired or from different units, can also be key resources. Find ways to connect youth with someone who has gone before them in deployment, perhaps an older adolescent, other family member, or soldier, who can answer questions, listen to concerns, or possibly even mentor them during the deployment.

Anyone involved in the lives of Army National Guard adolescents can be a valuable resource in helping them construct understanding and meaning from a deployment. Guide youth in setting personal goals for development during deployment that will keep them engaged and eager for the time period. Establish dates for completion or benchmarks for progress throughout the year rather than at the end to help motivate youth and keep them from being overwhelmed by the length of the deployment. For example, setting a goal of learning to cross country ski by February 1st can provide a young person with a meaningful highlight prior to the anticipated return of the deployed unit. Assist adolescents in learning new skills and trying new activities. This helps them create purpose for the time of separation. Educators and youth development professionals should seek ways to use the deployment as a learning experience for their classrooms or programs, with the partnership of Army National Guard adolescents.
Perhaps youth can teach others about the Army National Guard, what their parents’ specific roles are as soldiers, or share pictures and stories from places around the world. Younger adolescents especially seem to respond to the positive attention of sharing up-to-date information about the deployment and providing updates on their parent. Finally, the process of constructing meaning from a deployment does not end once a parent returns from service overseas. Help adolescents reflect upon the experience as time passes. Guide them in evaluating how the deployment affected them as well as how they have changed because of it. Assist youth in constructing value and meaning from the experience, which can prove useful in their futures.

**Implications for Policy**

Policy at local levels can be improved to better accommodate the complexities brought on by deployment in the lives of Army National Guard adolescents. These suggestions primarily stem from the disruptions deployment brings to the daily lives of youth during monumental transitions, such as send-offs, any applicable leave during the deployment, or reintegration. Youth may need to spend extra time with their soldier and families during these transitions as it may be the last/first occasion they will see their parent during a year or the only days they can be with them prior to going overseas. School and extracurricular activity policy should accommodate the needs of Army National Guard youth during these times, making it possible for them to prioritize their family. Adolescents should be allowed absences without suffering consequences so that they do not have to choose between playing time and seeing their soldier, for example. Students may still be required to make-up reasonable schoolwork or activity time for the absences but not as punishment for being gone. Such absence policy accommodations
should be extended to such entities as community sports, youth development programs, and the workplace. Although the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) grants employees up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave in a year upon the activation of an Army National Guard parent (U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division, 2013), most adolescents working part-time jobs do not qualify for this provision and are at the mercy of their employers for granted time-off.

School policymakers at the local level should also consider adapting provisions to allow Army National Guard youth the option of communicating with a deployed parent during breaks in the school day. As many soldiers deployed overseas work extended schedules in time zones many hours ahead of their sons and daughters at home, the only free time a soldier may have to communicate may inconveniently occur during the school day. Also, some Army National Guard youth may not have access to the internet or technology such as a webcam at home. Allowing adolescents to communicate with a deployed parent using school time and technology creates a strong, understanding partnership between schools and Army National Guard families. Youth could be permitted to email, video chat, or instant message during breaks from instruction, such as directly before or after school or during lunch, passing period, or a study hall. Policy should maintain some degree of accountability, such as reporting to a designated room and checking in with a school employee, but not require direct supervision, which may threaten the student’s privacy.

**Implications for Future Research**

This study provides a rich understanding of what deployment is like for Army National Guard adolescents and what helps them stay strong. Several topics introduced
by the findings of this study stand out as necessitating further inquiry and research in order to bring greater insight into the deployment experiences of Army National Guard youth and their families. During the interview process, youth described different challenges and ways of adapting to those challenges at the various stages of the deployment cycle. Very little research has concentrated on differentiating deployment experiences by stage of the deployment cycle. Pincus et al.’s (2001) Emotional Cycle of Deployment serves as a starting point but lacks empirical evidence. Future qualitative research could utilize a case study design to examine how adolescents respond and adjust to the unique challenges occurring at each stage in one deployment cycle, encompassing pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, and post-deployment. Structured interviews could gather data on what changes youth face, how they think and feel about the deployment, and how they function during a particular stage. A quantitative component could also measure adolescent wellbeing as well as the frequency and duration of various coping strategies utilized during each stage.

This study introduces the strategy of self-talk as a way that Army National Guard youth remind themselves of the positives and how to function during deployment. Future research should consider the role self-talk plays in resilience by broadening the scope and specifically examining how positive and negative self-talk impacts an adolescent’s ability to overcome adversity. A qualitative grounded theory study could help explain the process of self-talk in supporting resilience by concentrating upon populations of youth who have faced a variety of difficulties. Focus group discussions involving older adolescents and emerging adults would likely provide the best insight since self-talk seemed to be a strategy utilized more by the older adolescents in this study.
This study shows the importance of context in helping Army National Guard adolescents function during deployment. Since this research focuses primarily on individuals, future research needs to explore the broader family system and how individuals relate to one another during a deployment in order to better understand the essence of being an Army National Guard family. A mixed methods study could combine the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative approaches in order to develop a more complete picture of deployment experienced by several family units. Quantitative data could reveal trends among a larger sample while qualitative case studies could compliment the results with in-depth personal stories. Collecting information at several stages throughout the deployment cycle from multiple family members, such as adolescents, primary caregivers, siblings, and soldiers, would enrich data with a variety of perspectives while validating information gathered from other family members.

**Conclusion**

For Army National Guard adolescents, this study will hopefully serve as a source of encouragement, knowing that they are not alone in their journey through deployment while opening their eyes to see how they can actively construct meaning from their experiences. Often simply being understood without having to explain much helps these youth commiserate with one another. Hopefully this study will be a proverbial light bulb going on in their minds as study participants put to words what others have experienced but could not find a way to explain. For soldiers, primary caregivers, and close family members, the results of this study will hopefully provide insight into how they can better lead and equip their Army National Guard youth to overcome the challenges of deployment. For anyone on the outside looking in to deployment and caring about Army
National Guard adolescents, this study will hopefully unveil a rich picture of what life is like for these youth during deployment and how one can best support them.

This study not only tells the deployment stories of Army National Guard adolescents like never before but also enriches our understanding of resilience through their unique perspective on what it means to stay strong. We all recognize soldiers, airmen, sailors, and Marines as heroes for their service to the good of the United States of America. Now may we at last also thank Army National Guard adolescents for their sacrifice and service to our nation, for their demonstration of what it means to triumph over difficulties is also heroic and worthy of honor.
References


academic adjustment among children of deployed military servicemembers.


March 2, 2015

Kerrie Rosheim
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies

Yan Xia
Department of Child, Youth and Family Studies
251 MABL, UNL, 68588-0236

IRB Number: 20141214490EP
Project ID: 14490
Project Title: Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth

Dear Kerrie:

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects has completed its review of the Request for Change in Protocol submitted to the IRB.

**The change request has been approved to conduct semi-structured, individual interviews to collect data from participants rather than focus group discussions.**

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

This letter constitutes official notification of the approval of the protocol change. You are therefore authorized to implement this change accordingly.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,

Julia Torquati, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB
Appendix B: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW RECRUITMENT LETTER SAMPLE

Here is your opportunity to let your voice be heard and tell your story! We are looking for youth and their primary caregivers to participate in a study exploring what the sons and daughters of Army National Guard soldiers experience during deployment and what resilience means to them. The Army National Guard lifestyle is very unique within the military and not much is known about deployment from the perspective of adolescent military children. Participating in this study is a way to share your story in hopes of being able to help others going through the same experience. Your perspective may be useful in providing better services and support to military youth during deployment and training to those who work with Army National Guard youth.

To be included in this study as a youth, you must have...

✓ had a parent deploy with the Iowa Army National Guard in 2010 or more recently
✓ been 11-18 years old during this deployment

To be included in this study as an adult, you must have...

✓ been the primary caregiver during deployment for a youth participating in this study

If you or your child would like to participate, contact Kerrie Rosheim at (308) 991-4969 or kjoyrosheim@gmail.com. Youth will be invited to be interviewed at a public place like the library or school. They will be asked open-ended questions about what deployment was like and how they stay strong. There are no right or wrong answers; I just want to hear your story and listen to what you think. The interview will last 30-60 minutes, and youth will receive a $15 gift card as thanks for participating. Contact Kerrie Rosheim today to reserve one of the limited spots in the study!

Adults who served as the primary caregiver for participating youth during deployment will be invited to take part in a confidential online survey with open-ended questions about what your child experienced during deployment and what helped them stay strong. The survey link will be provided at the interview.

Youth participants under the age of 18 must have a signed consent form from a parent or guardian in order to participate. Youth will also need to sign a waiver saying you agree to take part in the study. Copies of these forms are included in this letter or can be requested from the principal investigator. If you have any questions, please contact Kerrie Rosheim, Principal Investigator, at (308) 991-4969 or kjoyrosheim@gmail.com.

Sign up by MARCH 15th to tell your unique deployment story!
Appendix C: PARENT/GUARDIAN CONSENT FORM

Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth
Parent/Guardian Consent Form

You are invited to allow your child to participate in this research study. The following information is provided to you in order to allow you to make an informed decision on whether or not to allow your child to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

The purpose of this study is to explore what your child experienced during deployment and what resilience means to him/her. Since your child had a parent deploy with the Iowa Army National Guard since 2010 and was 11-18 years old during that deployment, he/she is eligible to participate. Since the Army National Guard lifestyle is very unique within the military and not much is known about deployment from the perspective of adolescent military children, your child’s participation in this study is a way to share his/her story in hopes of being able to help others going through the same experience. The results of this research may also assist families, military service providers, educators, and community members in providing better support to Army National Guard youth throughout the deployment cycle and meeting their unique needs.

To participate, your child will be invited to be interviewed by the primary investigator, Kerrie Rosheim, at a public place like the library or school. I will ask several open-ended questions about what your child experienced during deployment and what helps him/her stay strong. The interview will last 30-60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded to help me remember what was said; I will also be taking notes during the discussion. Your child will only be asked to share what he/she is comfortable sharing in the interview, and his/her identity and answers will all be kept strictly confidential. His/her responses will be included in a final written report from the study, but there will be no way to identify your child or his/her answers in the research summary. Your son/daughter will receive a $15 amazon.com gift card as thanks for participating.

If your child would like to talk with someone further about their experiences with deployment and any issues they face resulting from deployment, you may seek assistance from Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 to connect with counseling services or call the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors hotline at 800-959-8277. You may also contact Chris Cox, coordinator for the Iowa Army National Guard State Child and Youth Program at 515-727-3064 (christopher.j.cox18.ctr@mail.mil) or visit the Military Kids Connect website at http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/ for additional resources.

Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this research or the possibility of your child’s participation in this study. I can be reached by phone at (308) 991-4969 or by email at kjoyrosheim@gmail.com. You may also contact my graduate school academic advisor and
secondary investigator in this study, Dr. Ruth Xia, by phone at (402) 472-6552 or by email at rxia2@unl.edu.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

- To speak with someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to your questions about your rights as a research participant;
- To voice concerns or complaints about the research;
- To provide input concerning the research process;
- To speak with someone in the event the study staff could not be reached.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to decide whether or not your child can participate in this study. Your child can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Iowa Army National Guard. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled should you decide to withdraw your child from this study.

**DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

You are voluntarily making a decision to allow your child to participate in an interview of this research study. Your signature certifies that you have allowed him/her to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

☐ **YES, I CONSENT** to my child being audio recorded.

  I understand that I reserve the right to change my mind.

☐ **NO, I DO NOT CONSENT** to my child being audio recorded.

_____________________________________
Child’s Name (printed)

_____________________________________
Signature of Parent/Guardian     Date

**INVESTIGATORS**

Principal Investigator:    Kerrie Rosheim    Cell: (308) 991-4969

Secondary Investigator:    Ruth Xia, PhD    Office: (402) 472-9154
Appendix D: YOUTH ASSENT FORM

Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth
Youth Participant Assent Form- Age 11-17

Dear participant,

I invite you to help me learn what it was like for you when your mom or dad was deployed and what helps you stay strong. Since they deployed with the Iowa Army National Guard since 2010 and you were 11-18 years old when it happened, I would like to ask you what that was like for you and hear your story. I am asking if you would like to talk about your experience in an interview. I also know what it is like to have a family member deploy, and I would like to meet with you at a public place like the library or school, to hear about your experience. This interview should take 30-60 minutes.

During the interview you can say as much as you like to answer each question and you do not have to say anything if you do not feel like talking about a question. The interview will be audio recorded to help me remember what was said. I will also be taking notes. You do not have to do this if you do not want to, and I will not let anyone else know who you are or how you answer any questions. I will keep the records strictly confidential. I will be writing a report about all the answers I get from the study, but there will be no way to know who you are or how you answered. I will give you a $15 amazon.com gift card to thank you for helping me with this study.

I will also ask your parent/guardian to give permission for you to take part in this study. Please talk to your parent/guardian before you decide to take part in this study or not.

If you would like to talk with someone else about what it was like for you when your mom/dad deployed and get help for anything that is hard for you about it, you can call Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 or call the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors hotline at 800-959-8277. You may also contact Chris Cox, coordinator for the Iowa Army National Guard State Child and Youth Program at 515-727-3064 (christopher.j.cox18.ctr@mail.mil) or visit the Military Kids Connect website at http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/ for more help.

Please call me at (308) 991-4969 or my secondary investigator if you ever have any questions.
□ YES, I CONSENT to being audio recorded.
   I understand that I reserve the right to change my mind.
□ NO, I DO NOT CONSENT to being audio recorded.

____________________________________  __________________
Signature of Participant                Date

____________________________________  __________________
Signature of Investigator                Date

INVESTIGATORS
Principal Investigator: Kerrie Rosheim    Cell: (308) 991-4969
Secondary Investigator: Ruth Xia, PhD     Office: (402) 472-9154
APPENDIX E: YOUNG ADULT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth
Young Adult Participant Consent Form Age 18+

Dear participant,

I invite you to participate in a study exploring what you experienced during deployment and what resilience means to you. Since you had a father/mother deployed with the Iowa Army National Guard since 2010 and you were 11-18 years old during that deployment and you are now between the ages of 18 and 22, I would like to ask you about your experiences and hear your story. The following information is provided to you in order to allow you to make an informed decision on whether or not to participate. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

Since the Army National Guard lifestyle is very unique within the military and not much is known about deployment from the perspective of adolescent military children, your participation in this study is a way to share your story in hopes of being able to help others going through the same experience. The results of this research may also assist families, military service providers, educators, and community members in providing better support to Army National Guard youth throughout the deployment cycle and meeting their unique needs.

To participate, I would like to interview you about your deployment experiences. I also know what it is like to go through the deployment of a family member and would like to meet with you at a public place like the library or school. I will ask several open-ended questions about what deployment was like for you and how you stay strong. I will encourage you to only share what you feel comfortable sharing for each question. The interview will be audio recorded to help me remember what was said; I will also be taking notes during the discussion. This interview should last 30-60 minutes. Participation in this study is voluntary, and your identity and answers to the questions will be kept strictly confidential. The data will be stored in a password-protected file and locked cabinet in my office and will only be seen by me during this study and for five years after the study is complete. Your responses will be included in a final written report from the study, but there will be no way to identify you or your answers in this summary. You will receive a $15 amazon.com gift card as thanks for your participation in this study.

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research. If you would like to talk with someone further about your experiences with deployment and any issues you face resulting from deployment, you may seek assistance from Military OneSource at 800-342-9647 to connect with counseling services or call the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors hotline at 800-959-8277. You may also contact Chris Cox, coordinator for the Iowa Army National Guard State Child and Youth Program at 515-727-3064 (christopher.j.cox18.ctr@mail.mil) or visit the Military Kids Connect website at http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/ for additional resources.
Please contact me if you have any questions regarding this research or participation in this study. I can be reached by phone at (308) 991-4969 or by email at kjoyrosheim@gmail.com. You may also contact my graduate school academic advisor and secondary investigator in this study, Dr. Ruth Xia, by phone at (402) 472-6552 or by email at rxia2@unl.edu.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:

- To speak with someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to your questions about your rights as a research participant;
- To voice concerns or complaints about the research;
- To provide input concerning the research process;
- To speak with someone in the event the study staff could not be reached.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or the Iowa Army National Guard. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled should you decide to withdraw from this study.

**DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT**

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in an interview of this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

☐ **YES, I CONSENT** to being audio recorded.
   I understand that I reserve the right to change my mind.

☐ **NO, I DO NOT CONSENT** to being audio recorded.

____________________________________  ________________
Signature of Participant              Date

INVESTIGATORS
Principal Investigator: Kerrie Rosheim

Secondary Investigator: Ruth Xia, PhD

Cell: (308) 991-4969
Office: (402) 472-9154
APPENDIX F: YOUTH DEMOGRAPHIC FORM

Exploring Deployment and Resilience through the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth Youth Demographic Form

Please fill out the questions below. This will be completed prior to beginning the interview.

Pseudonym: _____________________________

Age: _____________

Deployment(s) Time Period(s): _________________

*Example: April 2010-April 2011*

Age during Deployment(s): _________________

Total Number of Deployments Experienced: _________________

Currently Experiencing Deployment? Yes  No

Is your parent employed fulltime with the Army National Guard? Yes  No
APPENDIX G: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FORM
Exploring Deployment and Resilience through
the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth
Individual Interview Protocol Form
Principal Researcher: Kerrie Rosheim

Date:__________ Place:____________________________ Time of Interview:_____

Interviewee (Psuedonym):____________________

Thank you so much for agreeing to visit with me about what deployment was like for you. I first want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the sacrifices you have made as you, too, serve our country. Thank you for giving up your dad/mom for a time and for staying strong for him/her. You are an American hero, too, for what you do, and I appreciate you!

Our time is going to be very relaxed, so think of it just like sitting down and having a conversation with me. I want to hear your story and learn from you. I really value what you think and have to say. I am going to ask you several questions about deployment and what you think it means to stay strong. There are no right or wrong answers, so just respond with what you think. Please tell me as much as you feel comfortable sharing for each question; I may ask you to clarify or describe your thoughts in more detail at times. I will not share your responses with your parents or anyone else. I had you choose a pseudonym so that no one else will know exactly what you said. I will be taking some notes and recording this interview so that I can remember exactly what we talked about today. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Questions
8. What do you think about having your mom/dad serve in the National Guard?

- What is unique about being a military youth, especially from the National Guard?

- What does your mom/dad’s service typically involve outside of deployment?

9. What are some of the challenges you faced during the deployment of your mom/dad?

- What are some changes you had to make during deployment?
- What did you miss about your mom/dad being around for you?

- How did having your mom/dad deployed affect other things about you, such as school, sports, friendships, jobs?

10. What helped support you and your family during deployment?

- Who understood what you were going through?

- Who were you able to talk to about what you were going through?

- What were some things that helped make for a “good day” during deployment?

- What were some things that contributed to you having a “bad day” during deployment?

11. How has going through a deployment changed you?

- Would you say those changes are mostly positive or negative? Why?

- What is it like going through more than one deployment?

12. What do you think it means to bounce back from the tough things of deployment?

13. Do you consider yourself to be a strong person?

- What made you strong during deployment?

- How did you show that strength?
• How did you share your strength with others?

• When was it the hardest for you to be strong?

14. Do you think you have any control over how a deployment affects you? Why or why not?

• How have you been able to make something positive come from deployment?

• How have you struggled to find something positive?

Thank you so much for taking time to visit with me today. I really appreciate being able to hear your story. Would you be willing to read the findings of this study a few weeks from now and provide your feedback? Please indicate this by writing your email address or mailing address on this paper.

Researcher Memo

(Include observations from the interview, body language, central ideas, additional questions prompted by the interview, and thoughts about the process itself)
APPENDIX H: PRIMARY CAREGIVER ONLINE SURVEY QUESTIONS
Exploring Deployment and Resilience through
the Experiences of Army National Guard Youth
Primary Caregiver Online Survey Questions
Principal Researcher: Kerrie Rosheim

Questions

1. What were some of the greatest challenges your son/daughter faced during the deployment of his/her mom/dad?

2. What helped support your son/daughter and your family during deployment?

3. How has going through a deployment changed your son/daughter?

4. Would you say those changes are mostly positive or negative? Why?

5. Do you consider your son/daughter to be a strong person? If so, how did your son/daughter show that strength during deployment?

6. Is there anything else you would like to comment on regarding your son/daughter’s deployment experiences?