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Adult Attachment and Parent-Child Relations Among Adults with a Parent in the Military

Lexi Forsyth

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Abstract
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ADULT ATTACHMENT AND PARENT-CHILD RELATIONS AMONG ADULTS
WITH A PARENT IN THE MILITARY

By

Lexi Forsyth

A Senior Thesis Submitted to the

Eastern Michigan University

Honors College

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation

with Honors in Psychology

Approved at Ypsilanti, Michigan, on this date 2015
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Abstract

The role parents play in children’s lives has consistently been shown to affect how they engage in relationships in adulthood, though these findings have been inconclusive with regard to military children. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of adult attachment among those who had a parent in the military during their childhood as compared to those who did not. The current study asked college students to retrospectively reflect on their own childhood responses to parental deployment or separation. This allowed for an examination of the child’s own perception of the deployment and the effects that having military parents may have had on the child’s attachment style in adulthood. A survey was administered to 96 students on Eastern Michigan University’s campus that included questions assessing the individual’s childhood relationship with their mother and father and their current relationship experiences in adulthood and separation anxiety. A subset of the total sample (n = 25) reported that they had a parent in the military. Results revealed significant links between parental time away, parental care and control, relationship security, attachment and avoidance in adulthood and separation anxiety in both childhood and adulthood across all participants. The primary conclusion of the study was that, regardless of whether a parent is in the military, having a caring parent at home is most predictive of positive outcomes for the child.
Introduction

Development of romantic relationships is a normative step in most individual's life. Serious relationships often come about when individuals enter the young adult period. For many, the onset of romantic relationships often occurs while in college, making the "college years" important ones to consider. However, these relationships can only continue to develop if both partners have similar viewpoints on physical aspects, emotional aspects, intellectual aspects and shared activities (Ni, 2013). One key predictor of relationship success is the individual relationship attachment style. Attachment style is a concept that, "refers to a person's characteristic ways of relating in intimate caregiving and receiving relationships with "attachment figures," often one's parents, children and romantic partners" (Levy, Ellison, Scott, and Bernecker, 2011, p. 193). An important question to consider is how does one obtain these attachment styles?

According to John Bowlby, attachment starts in infancy as a need for survival. Bowlby believed that through the interaction with one’s caregiver over time, children develop an internal working model of relationships (Berk, 2012). Mary Ainsworth agreed with this and developed the measurement technique called the Strange Situation, in which an infant can be categorized into one of four attachment patterns, thought to be based upon the relationship the child has had with his or her parent. When combining Bowlby’s theoretical ideas with Ainsworth’s focus on the measurement of attachment quality, it can be seen that parent-child relationships can affect the child’s attachment pattern.

Those children of military families have what might be considered a non-normative life style, with either one or both parents being away for an extended period of
time. While not all of these military children’s parents deploy, many do. The United States military has deployed 180,000 military personal a year, since 2001. Over 50% of the U.S. military personnel are married with children and at least two million children have experienced their parent deploying at least one time since 2001 (Aranda, Middleton, Flake, and Davis, 2011). The effect of parental deployment on these children can be significant. For example, prior research suggests that children of deployed parents can experience a large effect of negative psychosocial factors such as, depression and aggression (Flake, Davis, Johnson, and Middleton, 2009).

Another factor that is particularly seen in military children is separation anxiety, a commonly researched area in childhood psychopathology. Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD) is “characterised by an abnormal reactivity to real or imagined separation from attachment figures, which significantly interferes with daily activities and developmental tasks” (Masi, Mucci, Millepeidi, 2001, p. 93). However, research is lacking in the area of military children and separation anxiety, leaving a significant gap in the current literature. Separation anxiety is not just present in military children or children alone however. Until recently, it was believed that adults could not experience true Separation Anxiety Disorder, as diagnosed by the (DSM) (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Now research shows that adults do in fact have symptoms of Separation Anxiety Disorder, which can either stem from childhood or can develop in adulthood for various reasons (Shear, Jin, Ruscio, Walters, and Kessler, 2006 and Lipsitz et al., 1994).

Given that military children can experience separation anxiety, and this can carry on to adulthood, then it is possible that it can affect their attachment styles in adulthood as well. Therefore, there is an expected relationship between attachment, military
children and separation anxiety. The primary goal of the current study was to explore and understand how childhood experiences, particularly those of military children, affect adult attachment styles.

**Attachment in Childhood**

Attachment styles stem from the relationship children had with their parents during childhood. John Bowlby believed that infants stay physically close to an identified caregiver so that biological and emotional needs can be met. As the infant grows, attachment patterns begin to form based upon the warmth and care children received from their parents (Berk, 2012). Additionally, as previously stated, Mary Ainsworth developed the *Strange Situation*, in order to categorize children into distinct attachment patterns that can describe relationships between the child and his or her caregiver, and the quality of the internal working model. These attachment patterns include, secure attachment, avoidant attachment, resistant attachment and disorganized/disoriented attachment. The secure child has a positive sense of self and others and a good balance between emotionally connected and independent behaviors. The avoidant child shows an imbalance toward independence, rather than connection. The resistant child shows an imbalance toward connection, rather than independence. Lastly, the disorganized child shows no clear, organized way of interacting with caregiver. Decades of research on attachment theory has shown clear evidence that a secure attachment pattern is ideal for long-term outcomes and future relationships (Berk, 2012). It is thought that everyone has developed some form of an attachment style from their childhood; however, their relationships with caregivers are the primary determinant of which style they manifest.
Other studies have additionally looked at the relationship between parenting styles and children’s feelings of abandonment and anxiety in later life. Children who experienced parents that criticized them or had overly high expectations for excellence, had higher concerns about abandonment or getting close to others. (Gamble and Roberts, 2005). These feelings led to “lower self-esteem, dysfunctional attitudes, and negative attribution style…” (p. 136). The study also found that girls were more sensitive to these parenting effects. This study further showed that parenting styles have a large effect on the outcome of anxiety and intimacy, which in turn affect attachment styles.

Attachment in Adulthood

As previously stated, attachment styles are thought to be developed in childhood. However, it is believed that these styles are carried into adult relationships with peers, family, and romantic relationships. Jones and Cunningham (1996) found that attachment styles “influence numerous aspects of adult relationship quality, including satisfaction, trust, interdependence, commitment, intimacy, self-discloser, and others” (p. 387). Attachment styles therefore are quite important in developing long lasting, healthy romantic relationships.

Every person has his or her own style of adult attachment that can usually be categorized. In a study conducted by Bartholomew and Horowitz (1991), four categories were created for attachment in adult romantic relationships, secure, preoccupied, dismissing and fearful. These categories mirror the patterns identified in childhood. It was found that those with preoccupied styles of attachment were self-blaming and were able to maintain positive views of others. However, they tended to be over dependent in relationships. Those that were dismissing had a high self-esteem and thought negatively
about others. Those categorized into the fearful category were not only insecure socially, but also not assertive. The last category, secure, consisted of those that maintained both high views of self and of others. This study presented various categories of attachment that explain adult attachment patterns.

Adult attachment style continues to be influenced by parents even into adulthood. One way to observe this is to look at how easily an individual can transition from the family home to being on his or her own. A study conducted by Mayseless, Danieli, and Sharabany (1996), categorized individuals into categories of secure, avoidant, ambivalent or controlling attachment, based on their relationships and closeness with their parents. The study showed that those with secure styles did not live with their parents; they most often lived with a romantic partner. They also reported their significant other as the closest person to them and they maintained the highest level of communication with their mothers out of all the participants. Ambivalent individuals lived outside the household, alone, or with a roommate, but not a romantic partner. Some said that their romantic partner was the person closest to them, but a good portion did not. This group also had a harder time separating from home than others. The avoidant attachment style most often lived at home and reported the closest person to them as a family member. Controlling subjects did not have any particular pattern. This specific study showed how attachment styles continue to be affected by parent-child relationships and how well different attachment styles can separate from the home.

Attachment style is important because one’s attachment style has a very large effect on how he or she will react to others. Different attachment styles will result in healthy or unhealthy romantic relationships. Studies have categorized people into areas of
comfort with closeness and anxiety over abandonment, which can be seen in Jones and Cunningham’s study (1996). In this study they found that couples did well when the male was comfortable with closeness. However, when either partner was anxious about abandonment, the relationship satisfaction was negative. “Anxiety over abandonment is likely to be expressed in clinging dependence in both women and men” (Jones and Cunningham, 1996, p. 395). Attachment styles in this study, along with others, can either help a relationship or work against the relationship and in turn, shape an individual’s life.

**Military Families**

Much research has been done in the area of military children, focusing on children’s behavior and psychosocial attributes; and how they are affected by having a parent in the military. However, the findings are inconclusive. Studies done before 2001, such as, Pierce, Vinokur, and Buck’s (1998), Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, and Bain’s (1991), and Kelley et al. (2001), found no relationship between having a parent in the military and being at risk for psychosocial or behavioral problems. However, more recent studies done by Aranda, Middleton, Flake, and Davis (2011), Flake, Davis, Johnson, and Middleton (2009), and Chandra et al. (2010), all have found that those children with parents in the military do in fact experience negative effects in the areas of behavior, well-being and psychosocial development. A possible reason for these inconsistent results is that, since 9/11 the U.S. has increased military deployment greatly, and many of these soldiers have children (Aranda, Middleton, Flake and Davis, 2011).

The impact of having a parent deployed can be great. While, not all children of military families are negatively affected, a substantial percentage of children are affected. Aranda, Middleton, Flake and Davis (2011), found that one in four children had
emotional and behavioral problems as a result of deployment. Research has shown that the more deployments a parent has and the more time spent away from the child, the higher the risk for the child. Chandra’s et al. (2010), found that the more months a parent was deployed, the more challenges the child faced when trying to maintain a healthy, normal life. Barker and Berry (2009), found that as the number of deployments for a parent increased, so did the number of behavioral problems in the child. Although earlier studies have found very little negative effects on military children, the more recent studies are showing that military children are in fact at risk.

These behavioral and psychological problems that occurred in children did not just stem from having a parent deployed, but were additionally brought about by suboptimal parenting by the non-deployed parent. The non-deployed parent undergoes much stress. They are now a single parent in charge of running a family by themselves. Flake, Davis, Johnson and Middleton (2009), found that parents that reported levels of high stress also perceived their child to have high psychosocial morbidity. Additionally, Jensen, Grogan, Xenakis and Bain (1989), reported that a “child’s symptoms may be mediated by the mother’s psychiatric symptoms and/or intercurrent family stressors” (p. 174). The non-deployed parent also has a large effect on the child’s adverse behavior, most often this effect is caused by the parents stress to adapt to the new life styles. Furthermore, the non-deployed parent is more likely to engage in some form of child maltreatment including neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse and emotional abuse, when his or her spouse is deployed. This risk for maltreatment increases when the deployed spouse is in a combat zone (Gibbs, Martin, Kupper, and Johnson, 2007). Not only are children affected by the stress of the non-deployed parents, but they also run the risk of
being abused because of the deployment. The more recent research on military children is not just showing that these children are at risk from having a parent away from the home, but is also presenting the fact that non-deployed parents can also have a negative effect on the military child’s mental health.

**Separation Anxiety in Childhood**

Separation anxiety in childhood can result from a multitude of sources. As stated previously, Separation Anxiety Disorder is an abnormal reaction that significantly interferes with normal daily activities and development because of a separation from attachment figures (Masi, Mucci, Millepeidi, 2001). Research on anxiety in military children is large; however anxiety is often lumped in with other behavioral factors that are categorized as psychosocial factors, including depression and aggression. Flake et al. (2009), found that one third of military children experienced higher levels of psychosocial symptoms, which included, anxiety, worrying and crying frequently. However, research has yet to examine the prevalence of separation anxiety among military children. Nevertheless, Murray (2002), has written about ways nurses can understand how help military children, while focusing on the children’s symptoms of separation anxiety. This article discussed the different effects separation anxiety can have on military children based on the author’s clinical experience. Toddlers could experience clingingness to the remaining parent and preschoolers were at risk to return to previous behaviors they had outgrown, such as bed-wetting. Six to eight year olds experienced heightened sadness and grief, while nine to twelve year olds experienced a mix of emotions. Teenagers were able to understand the separation but did not have the coping skills for it. These clinical observations suggest that separation anxiety is a symptom that
can emerge among military children. However, separation anxiety is not limited to just this population.

Much of the research on the topic of separation anxiety is included in research on children, not particular to the military. This study also found that 4-5% of children suffer from SAD. While this percentage is not high, it is still important to recognize and help these children. While separation anxiety may not be overwhelmingly common in children, it is very important to treat. A way to treat this is to look at parenting because oftentimes separation anxiety stems from parent-child relations. Kearney, Sims, Pursell and Tillotson (2003), found that children who suffered from SAD had parents that experienced depression, obsessive-compulsive disorder, general distress and phobic anxiety. This study also discovered that children with clinical SAD suffered from higher levels of somatic problems, general anxiety, internalizing behaviors based on teacher reports, compared to those children that were not diagnosed with SAD. This article shows how parents’ moods and disorders can play a part in children’s anxiety symptoms.

There are additional ways that parents can affect a child’s separation anxiety, another being parent intrusiveness. Wood (2006), examined how parent intrusiveness can affect children’s level of separation anxiety. Parent intrusiveness was defined as, “Parents who act intrusively tend to take over tasks that children are (or could be) doing independently and impose an immature level of functioning on their children, restricting children’s autonomy” (p. 74). This can be seen through unnecessary assistance in daily tasks, treating the child as if they are younger than they actually are and invading their privacy. This study found that parent intrusiveness is directly linked with SAD symptoms.
Zolfaghari, Jazayeri, and Karimlo (2008), looked at relationships between children with separation anxiety and their mothers. The study found that mother’s with anxious-ambivalent attachment styles, general anxiety and specific personality traits, were more likely to have children with separation anxiety. Separation anxiety is a disorder in childhood that can be triggered by the relationships the child has with his or her parent. Thus this an important disorder to look for in military children because of the unique relationships this group holds with their parents.

**Separation Anxiety in Adulthood**

Much research on separation anxiety has been conducted on children. However, recently has separation anxiety in adulthood been identified. Separation Anxiety Disorder was labeled in the DSM-IV-TR, but only as a childhood disorder (Shear et al., 2006). Recently the DSM-5 has been revised to no longer specify that the onset of SAD must occur before age 18 (APA, 2013).

One of the first studies to suggest that adults may have a form of Separation Anxiety Disorder was done in 1997 by Manicavasagar, Silove and Curtis. They described three cases of adults who fit symptoms of SAD. Manicavasagar et al. suggested that there was an adult form of SAD. In another study piloted by Manicavasagar, Silove and Curtis (1997), which was more experimental than the last, participants were asked to take part in an interview and a self-reported survey. Additionally, each participant was given a global clinical rating. Results indicated that many participants showed symptoms of SAD in adulthood. Manicavasagar et al. strongly suggested that Separation Anxiety Disorder was not only present in childhood, but adulthood as well.
While, it is not clear how adults’ feelings of separation anxiety begin, some research suggests that they stem from childhood. Lipsitz et al. (1994), looked at adults who had anxiety disorders to see if there was a relation to separation anxiety disorders in childhood. The results were positive. Many of those patients suffering from some sort of anxiety disorder showed a strong correlation to having separation anxiety disorder in their childhood. The study suggested that separation anxiety in childhood was related to anxiety in adulthood.

However, other studies, including findings for the replication of the National Comorbidity Survey (Shear, Jin, Ruscio, Walters, and Kessler, 2006), suggest that separation anxiety in adulthood may stem from childhood or events in adulthood. Through face-to-face interviews, the study asked a nationally representative sample about their experiences with separation anxiety. The study found that many people who had separation anxiety as children, still had symptoms in their adulthood. In addition, the study found that 77.5% of participants had their first onset of separation anxiety in adulthood.

Seligman and Wuyek (2007), looked at separation anxiety among college students moving away from home for the first time. They predicted that college students’ traits of separation anxiety would play a part in their educational choices thus showing that SAD can influence decisions made in adulthood. The study reported that those with higher separation anxiety scores had chosen to attend college close to home. Participants with high separation anxiety levels also admitted to having panic attacks when deciding to move away and also experienced them when they did move away. In the end, the study illustrated that Separation Anxiety Disorder symptoms can be found in college students
or young adults. Based upon all the research and the recent change to the DSM-V, it can be seen that separation anxiety can in fact be experienced in adulthood.

**Separation Anxiety and Attachment**

Separation anxiety in adulthood is important because research shows that it can have an effect on adult attachment styles. Mayseless, Danieli, and Sharabany (1996), looked at separation anxiety and how this related to different attachment styles. The *Separation Anxiety Test* was given to the participants along with the *Background Information Questionnaire* and the *Attachment Concerns Questionnaire*. It was found that those with secure attachment experienced little separation anxiety. Those with ambivalent attachments did live outside their parents’ houses, but had a hard time starting a romantic relationship. This group of individuals had a hard time with separation, even with day-to-day occurrences, and experienced much anxiety after a separation. Those with an avoidant style of attachment, ones that do not move away from their parents, did not have a high result when it came to separation anxiety, because they often did not put themselves in situations of separation. The controlling group, those not defined by any one type of separation, seemed to not care about separations from others. This study showed that different attachment styles may handle separations differently, and can result in an increase in anxiety.

Manicavasagar, Silove, Marnane, and Wagner (2009), conducted a study that also focused on attachment styles in relation to separation anxiety. These researchers gave patients in a public hospital’s anxiety ward, the *Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV*, the *Attachment Style Questionnaire*, the *Adult Separation Anxiety Questionnaire* and the *Separation Anxiety Symptom Inventory*. It was found that those with anxiety disorders
were more likely to have anxious attachment patterns. Not only does research show that separation anxiety can be present in childhood and adulthood, but it additionally can play a negative role in an individual’s adult attachment styles.

**Current Study**

The current study focused on the mixture of the three important variables discussed above: attachment in young adults, having had a parent in the military during childhood and separation anxiety. No known research has focused on all three of these aspects and their relation to one another. While there is much research on attachment, there is little focus on the effect of military children’s experiences with having an absentee parent and the attachment patterns they hold in their young adult lives. The role a parent plays in a child’s life can very well affect how they react to relationships in adulthood.

When it comes to military children, the findings have been inconclusive. Research conducted before the attack on the Twin Towers concluded that military children were not much different than those children who did not have parents in the military. Those studies that were conducted after 2001 have provided a different picture of military children however. Additionally, as of 2009, about 1.2 million children living in the United States’ had one or both parents serving actively in the armed forces (Fitzsimons, RNC, FAAN, and Krause-Parello, 2009). This is why the current study focused on military children and how it affects their adult relationships. With more and more parents deploying overseas because of the War in Afghanistan, what will be the repercussions on these children? The children who were alive during the attack on the Twin Towers, are
now in either their high school or college years. Studies can now begin to research how this particular war has affected children, especially those of military parents.

Additionally, past studies have always looked at adult responses on how the child reacts to deployment. The current study asks adults to look back on their own childhood; this will give a more personal perception of the effects of having military parents.

The current study furthermore focuses on how military children have a unique relationship with their parents, both the deployed and non-deployed parent. This study does not just look at that, but looks at how these relationships with the parents can affect adult attachment patterns.

The last aspect this study explores separation anxiety. There is a large body of research in the area of separation anxiety in children, but not in military children or how this affects adulthood. Only currently, has Adult Separation Anxiety Disorder become a diagnosis, because it used to be thought that only children could experience SAD.

The current study focuses on different aspects of attachment, military children, and parent relationships, while exploring separation anxiety. The hypotheses for this study are that: 1) Those children with a parent in the military will be more likely to experience their parent being away from home more often than those without a parent in the military 2) Having a parent in the military and having a parent away from home will result in an increased likelihood for separation anxiety 3) Those children with a parent or both parents in the military will report less warmth and more control during their childhood, 4) Those with parents in the military will be more likely to experience negative attachment styles in adulthood, 5) Experiencing less warmth in childhood will be related to an increased likelihood that the individual will experience negative
attachment patterns in adulthood regardless of whether or not one’s parent was in the military, and 6) Higher levels of separation anxiety in childhood will be related to negative attachment patterns in adulthood regardless of whether or not one’s parent was in the military.

Methods

Participants

Participants included a convenience sample of 96 students currently attending Eastern Michigan University. The average age was 21 years (SD 2.6), therefore representing a college sample. The sample included 40% males and 60% females. The sample was also representative of Eastern Michigan’s population with 68% Caucasian, 22% African American and 16% other minority groups. Additionally, 96% were single and 4% were married. When it comes to the military variable, 74% reported not having a parent in the military during their childhood (ages birth-16 years) and 26% had at least one parent in the military during childhood. In regards to parent absence, 46% reported never having their father away from home, 20% reported their father being absent for over 5 years and 34% reported having their father gone for 1 month to 4 years. For mothers, 87% reported never having their mother absent from the home, 2% reported having their mother absent for over 5 years and 11% reported their mother gone for 1 month to 4 years.

Procedure

The current study was a self-report, survey design. Participants were recruited through Psychology and ROTC classrooms on Eastern Michigan University’s campus. Before any participant was able to take the survey, he/she had to sign an informed
consent form. This form detailed the purpose of the study, the benefits, the risks of the study, confidentiality and the ability to withdraw at any time with no repercussions. If the participant chose to sign the informed consent form, he/she was then able to continue onto the survey. The survey took approximately twenty minutes to complete. All the participants recruited through classrooms were compensated for their time through course extra credit as determined by their professor.

Measures

**Demographics.** The participants first were asked to answer demographic questions, including, age, gender, ethnicity and marital status. Other general questions included, if one had absentee parents during their childhood before the age of 16 and if one had a parent or both parents in the military while they were children. If so, which branch were their parent(s) a part of and how long one remembered their parent(s) being gone from the home for, (never, 1-5 months, 6-11 months, 1-2 years, 3-4 years or over 5 years.)

**Parental Care and Control.** To study the parent-child relationships the participants held with their parents during childhood the *Parental Bonding Instrument* (Parker, Tupling, and Brown, 1979), was used. This survey asked adults to look back to their childhood and answer questions about their parents separately (i.e., mother and father). Although this measure is often used for mother only, in this study the participants were asked to fill out the survey based on both parents, separately. The survey contained 25 items, 12 pertaining to care, and 13 pertaining to overprotection, or control. Questions included items such as, “Seemed emotionally cold to me,” and “Let me go out as often as I wanted.” Participants were able to choose from four different choices on a scale. The
choices ranged from very like, moderately like, moderately unlike, and very unlike. For scoring, “very like,” received a score of 3, “moderately like,” a 2, “moderately unlike,” a 1, and “very unlike,” a 0. Half of the questions were reverse scored so that higher scores indicated more care or control. The response scored for each question was then added and each participant received a total score for the care items and a total score for the control items. This was done for both the mother and father separately. The higher the score for the care items, the more warmth the participant perceived from the said parent. The higher the control score meant that the participant perceived less warmth from his or her parent(s).

**Current relationships.** In order to assess current attachment patterns, two measures were implemented, the first being the *Relationship Questionnaire* (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This questionnaire can be asked in terms of general relationships or romantic relationships. In the current study, it was asked for romantic relationships. This questionnaire contained two sections. The first section asked the participants to read four different statements and choose the one that best described him or herself. An example of one of these items was, “I want to be completely emotionally intimate with others, but I often find that others are reluctant to get as close as I would like. I am uncomfortable being without close relationships, but I sometimes worry that others don’t value me as much as I value them.” The second section asked participants to read the same four statements and then respond to each one on a numbered scale. 1 being “not at all like me,” 4 being “somewhat like me,” and 7 being “very much like me.” The second section specifically categorized which attachment style the participant fit into, secure, fearful, preoccupied or dismissing, depending on what the highest score was. The
first section came into play if there was a tie between two of the styles in section two. However, if there was a tie between scores in the second section, and one of these styles was not what had been chosen in section one, the participant’s data was deleted. For the purposes of the current study, only the secure dimension of this measure was used in analysis.

The second measure was the *Experience in Close Relationships – Revised* by Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000). This was a 36-item questionnaire that assessed how participants generally felt about their romantic relationships. It also looked at attachment-related anxiety and attachment-related avoidance. Items included statements such as, “I rarely worry about my partner leaving me,” “I prefer not to show a partner how I feel deep down,” and “I am nervous when partners get too close to me.” Participants were asked to respond to these statements based on a 1-7 scale. 1 being strongly disagree and 7 being strongly agree. Items 1-18 focused on attachment-related anxiety and 19-36 focused on attachment-related avoidance, however, the items were randomized. To receive a score on attachment-related anxiety, the responses to items 1-18 were averaged. To receive a score on attachment-related avoidance, the responses to items 19-36 were averaged. Fourteen items were reverse scored. The higher the score for the item grouping was, the more likely the participant was to experience attachment-related anxiety or attachment-related avoidance.

**Separation Anxiety.** To assess the level of separation anxiety the participant had during childhood, the *Severity Measure for Separation Anxiety Disorder – Child Ages 11-17* (Craske et al., 2013), was used. Originally, this measure was given to children ages 11-17 and asked them to respond to the questions thinking about the past 7 days.
However, for the current study, this measure was revised to ask participants to look back on their childhood and respond to the 10 items in general. Questions asked such things such as, I have, “felt anxious, worried, or nervous about being separated,” and I have, “distracted myself to avoid thinking about being separated.” Participants were able to respond to each item by selecting, never, occasionally, half of the time, most of the time, all of the time. Never received a score of 0, occasionally, a 1, half of the time, a 2, most of the time, a 3, and all of the time, a 4. Each of these items scores were then added, giving the participant a score from 0-40. The higher the score meant the greater the presence of the Separation Anxiety Disorder. To find the severity of the disorder the raw score was taken and divided by how many questions were answered. A score of 0 meant none; a score of 1 meant mild severity, 2 meant moderate severity, 3 meant severe, and 4 meant extreme severity. If three or more questions were left unanswered, the score could not be obtained.

The Severity Measure for Separation Anxiety Disorder – Adult measure was given to participants next. It was the same as the previous measure; however it looked at adulthood instead of childhood. The items were worded and scored the same as the childhood measure (Craske et al., 2013).

**Data Analyses**

Statistical analyses were performed using SPSS statistical software. Data were screened for outliers and errors using SPSS frequencies. Next, correlational analyses were conducted to examine relationships between variables. Point biserial correlations were run for analyses comparing the dichotomous variable of having versus not having a
parent in the military with other continuous study variables. Lastly, descriptive analyses of study variables across the entire sample were conducted.

**Results**

It was hypothesized that adults who grew up with a parent in the military would experience their parent being away from home more. Also, those with parent(s) in the military would: experience separation anxiety, perceive less warmth and more control during their childhood and experience more negative attachment styles in adulthood. It was also hypothesized that in general, the less warmth in childhood and more separation anxiety in childhood, the more negative the attachment patterns in adulthood. In order to test these hypotheses, correlations were run between study variables.

**Correlations**

**Military Fathers and Time Away.** In order to test one of the hypotheses that those children with a parent in the military are more likely to experience the parent being away from home more often, a Point biserial correlation test was run. There was a significant correlation between having a parent in the military and having a father away from home for a certain amount of time during childhood of ($r_{pb} = .30, p < -.28$), such that having a parent in the military was related to longer time away from the home. When looking at father time away, 57.7% of participants that reported *not* having their father in the military, experienced *never* having their father away from home, while only 8% of those who did have fathers in the military reported their fathers never being away from home. The next largest grouping of those who did not have fathers in the military reported their fathers being away from home for over 5 years, 21.1% However, the majority of those that had a father in the military reported their father being away from
home for either 1-2 years, 24%, or 3-4 years, 21.1%. Father time away from home percentages can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1
Father Time Away from Home

### How Often was Father Away From Home?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Father NOT in Military</th>
<th>Father in Military</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 Months</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-11 Months</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 Years</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 Years</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 5 Years</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

p<.05; **p<.01

**Separation Anxiety.** Correlation were run between separation anxiety, having a parent in the military, father time away, mother care and control and father care and control, which can be seen in Table 1. Having a parent in the military, nor time the father spent away from home regardless of military status, did not correlate with separation anxiety in childhood or adulthood. However, mother care had a negative correlation with childhood separation anxiety and negatively correlated with adulthood separation anxiety. Mother control had a positive correlation with childhood separation anxiety, but had no
correlation with adulthood separation anxiety. Father care did not correlate with childhood separation anxiety or adult separation anxiety. However, father control had a positive correlation with both groupings of separation anxiety.

Table 1

Correlations with Separation Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Qualities</th>
<th>Separation Anxiety - Child</th>
<th>Separation Anxiety - Adult</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent in Military</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Away</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Care</td>
<td>-.27**</td>
<td>-.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Control</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Care</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Control</td>
<td>.20</td>
<td>.25*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† < .10 * p< .05; **p<.01

Relationship Qualities. Relationship security, avoidance and anxiety were all correlated with several variables including, mother care and control, father care and control, childhood separation anxiety and adult separation anxiety. These values can be seen in Table 2. None of the prior relationship qualities, security, avoidance or anxiety, had any correlation with having a parent in the military. Mother care had a correlation with all three-relationship qualities though. There was a significant relationship with relationship security, with relationship avoidance and with relationship anxiety. Mother control had a positive correlation with relationship avoidance. Father care also had a
significant correlation with relationship avoidance. Father control did not correlate with any of the relationship qualities. Separation anxiety in childhood had a significant positive correlation with relationship anxiety. Separation anxiety in adulthood had a significant correlation with all three-relationship qualities.

Table 2

Correlations with Relationship Quality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relationship Security</th>
<th>Relationship Avoidance</th>
<th>Relationship Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent in Military</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>-.03</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Care</td>
<td>.32**</td>
<td>-.42**</td>
<td>.20†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Control</td>
<td>-.17</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Care</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.19†</td>
<td>-.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Control</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>-.07</td>
<td>.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep Anx - Child</td>
<td>-.12</td>
<td>.16</td>
<td>.51**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sep Anx - Adult</td>
<td>-.27*</td>
<td>.23*</td>
<td>.38**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

† < .10 * p < .05; **p < .01

Descriptive Statistics

The following descriptive statistics examined study variables in the sample as a whole. This is because, for the following characteristics, it was seen that those that had a parent(s) in the military did not significantly differ from those that did not have a parent(s) in the military. Therefore, these analyses do not differentiate between these two groups.
Care and Control. Table 3 below shows descriptive characteristics of parental care and control as assessed by the Parental Bonding Inventory. The higher the score means the more caring or the more controlling the parent is. Fathers scored an average of 23 out of 36 and mothers scored an average of 27 out of 36 points. For the control dimensions, fathers scored an average of 13 out of 36 points and mothers scored an average of 16 points.

Table 3
Descriptive Statistics for Parental Care and Control

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father Care</th>
<th>Mean = 23.7 (SD = 9.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 4 – 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father Control</td>
<td>Mean = 12.9 (SD = 7.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 0 - 31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Care</td>
<td>Mean = 27.3 (SD = 2.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 8 - 36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother Control</td>
<td>Mean= 15.8 (SD = 7.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range = 0 - 34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Avoidance, Anxiety and Security. Table 4, seen below, presents the descriptive statistics for adult attachment and separation anxiety. Relationship security was assessed
by a 1-7 scale on *The Relationship Questionnaire*; the higher the score, the more secure
the individual was. As can be noted below, the mean response for this was 4.3. *The
Experience in Close Relationships-Revised*, assessed relationship avoidance and anxiety.
The higher the score, the more avoidant or anxious the participant was in adult
attachment. The mean score for both relationship avoidance and anxiety was about a 3 on
a 1-7 scale. The mean score for childhood separation anxiety was a .7 out of 4 and the
mean score for adult separation anxiety was a .6 out of 4.

**Discussion**

Several hypotheses in this study were supported. It was found that those children
with a parent in the military were more likely to experience their parent being away from
home more often than those without a parent in the military. Results also showed that
experiencing less warmth in childhood was related to an increased likelihood that the
individual would experience negative attachment patterns in adulthood regardless of
whether or not one had a parent in the military during childhood. Additionally, higher
levels of separation anxiety in childhood were related to negative attachment patterns in
adulthood.

While not all the hypotheses pertaining to military children were supported in this
study, important relations were found between military fathers, parental care and control,
separation anxiety and relationship qualities, which are important to study when looking
at childhood experiences and how these affect adulthood.
Table 4

Descriptive Statistics for Attachment and Separation Anxiety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Security</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Avoidance</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship Anxiety</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation Anxiety - Child</td>
<td>.7</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation Anxiety - Adult</td>
<td>.6</td>
<td>.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of participants in the current study were rated as secure in their relationships. However, when it came to avoidance and anxiety, about half of the participants reported some avoidant or anxious behavior in their relationships. This means that there is some variability in the relationship experiences in the current sample. However, separation anxiety was very low in the current sample. Participants reported that they did not experience much, if any, separation anxiety during either childhood or
adulthood. However, this low rate should possibly not come as a surprise. This study took a clinical measure and applied it to a general population of people where base rates are likely to be lower. This restricted range, however, could limit the ability to find significant results and may account for the lack of finding between military children and experiences of SAD.

Correlations

Military Father and Time Away. The findings from this study show that having a father in the military does in fact increase the chances of having a father away from home for some period of time. However, contrary to study hypotheses, this did not translate to poorer outcomes. Mothers were not examined in the current study because very few were either in the military or spent any time away from the home.

Interesting results were found when looking at how long fathers were away from home. Over half of those who reported that their father was not in the military during their childhood reported never having their father away from home during their childhood. For those that did have fathers in the military during childhood, they almost always experienced having their father away from home for a certain period of time, typically 1-4 years. Thus, having a father in the military does greatly increase the chances of having him away from home for some period of time. Having a father away from home for 1-4 years is a significant period of time, especially during one’s childhood. Despite this difference in time away from home between military and non-military families, having a father in the military did not lead to negative outcomes for the participants in this study as hypothesized.
Separation Anxiety. When looking at separation anxiety in relation to having a parent in the military and father time away, the original hypothesis that having a parent in the military and having a parent away from home would result in separation anxiety was not supported. However, results showed that the more warmth received from the parent during childhood, the less risk the child has of experiencing separation anxiety in either childhood or adulthood; especially when the warmth comes from the mother. The more controlling the parent, or less warmth the child receives, the more risk the child has of experiencing separation anxiety in either childhood or adulthood, which supports one of the original hypotheses; that the less warmth in childhood would lead to higher rates of separation anxiety.

Relationship Qualities. When looking at adult relationship avoidance, anxiety and security in relation to having a parent in the military, no significant relationships were found, contrary to the hypothesis that having a parent in the military would increase the chances of experiencing a negative attachment pattern in adulthood. However, relationship security, avoidance and anxiety correlated to mother and father care and control and separation anxiety in both childhood and adulthood in the expected directions.

The hypothesis that the less warmth experienced in childhood, the more likely the individual is to experience negative attachment patterns in adulthood was supported by the data. When looking specifically at parental warmth and the relationship qualities, it was found that mother care was an important influence. The more warmth received from the mother in childhood, the more relationship security the individual had in adulthood and the less relationship avoidance and anxiety present in adulthood. Furthermore, it was seen
that the less warmth received from the mother during childhood, the more avoidance was seen in adult relationships.

When it came to the father, the only two variables that were marginally related were father care and relationship avoidance. Meaning that, the more warmth received from the father during childhood, the less relationship avoidance in adulthood.

The last hypothesis, that higher levels of separation anxiety in childhood would be linked to negative attachment patterns in adulthood was partially supported when looking at relationship avoidance, anxiety and security and childhood separation anxiety. Results showed that the more childhood separation anxiety that was present, the more anxiety in adult relationships was experienced; but there was no strong connection between childhood separation anxiety and security or avoidance in adult relationships. However, it was found that all three-relationship qualities were statistically correlated to separation anxiety as an adult. This means that if one experienced separation anxiety in adulthood, they additionally experienced less relationship security and more relationship avoidance and anxiety.

While these relationship qualities were not shown to be influenced by having a parent in the military, they were related to the parental warmth during childhood and separation anxiety, which makes them important when assessing how childhood experiences influence adulthood.

**Strengths and Limitations of Current Study**

This study was unique in that it looked at adult attachment, military children and separation anxiety in childhood and adulthood. No other research to date has looked at all three of these aspects and their relation to one another. This study was also unique in that
it specifically asked adults to retrospectively respond to their own childhood experiences of having military parents. Past studies have typically asked adults, parents or teachers, to respond about how a child reacts to deployment, not the children themselves. Therefore, this study offers an important contribution to the literature.

While this study was unique to research on military children and adult relationships, there were several limitations that should be noted. The first is that the sample size for those that had one or more parent in the military during their childhood was relatively small. Also, many only had fathers in the military, not mothers. Results may have varied if more participants reported mothers being away, not only fathers. This small grouping of military parents was most likely due to the recruitment location for the current study. The sample was limited to only students on Eastern Michigan University’s campus, the mean age was twenty-one and the University is not located near any military bases. The participants here may be too young to have experienced extensive parental deployments in past wars and may be too old to have experienced extensive parental deployments in the War on Afghanistan.

Additionally, if the campus was located closer to a military base, perhaps there would have been more college-aged students who experienced parental deployments during their childhood. The sample may have also been too low risk to show hypothesized relationships, especially in the area of separation anxiety.

Lastly, another limitation to this study is that it asked adults to self-report and look back upon their childhood. This could have resulted in biased data because these were only perceptions and remembering information from one’s childhood can be
difficult. While this study had several limitations, it still built upon past research and has led to ideas for future research.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has opened up ideas for several future endeavors. The first being to expand the sample to not only adults on Eastern Michigan University’s campus, but elsewhere, such as near or on a military base. Next is to open the sample to not only adults, but also children who currently have a parent(s) in the military. That way, data does not only represent adults looking back upon their own childhood, but also children who can answers more prospectively. There are still no known studies that have been done specifically asking children about their experiences with having a parent in the military in a prospective, longitudinal study, thus this new endeavor could to lead to further research on military children.

**Conclusion**

While this study did not find support for all hypotheses, other important factors were found that are important to keep in mind, especially when looking at childhood experiences and how these affect relationships in adulthood. This study showed that parental warmth in childhood could affect relationship security, avoidance and anxiety, as well as separation anxiety. Also, separation anxiety has an effect on these three relationship qualities as well. This study did find support for the hypothesis that having a father in the military increases the chances of having the father away from home for some length of time. Even though not all hypotheses were supported in this study, the foremost conclusion from this study is that, regardless of whether a parent is in the military, having
a parent at home is most predictive of positive outcomes for the child into their adulthood.
References


Comparison of attachment style, personality and anxiety, in mothers of children with separation anxiety disorder and mothers of normal children. *Journal of Family Research, 3* (3), 709-726.