PARENTAL MILITARY DEPLOYMENTS AND ADOLESCENTS’ HOUSEHOLD WORK

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Introduction Across Canada there are about 30 communities, large and small, that house military bases.1 These communities are populated by thousands of young people—an invisible minority2—who grow up in military families and experience frequent moves and parental deployments, but relatively little is known about their everyday lives. How has growing up in a military family, exposed to and socialized by military culture, affected adolescents’ sense of self, as well as their gender roles and relationships? This paper focuses on one community, Armyville, Canada (a pseudonym), to begin to try to understand this.

Survey data collected in 2008 in Armyville shows that the girls in this community have lower self-esteem than their male peers.3 Though deployments have long been recognized as a military life stressor, only recently has post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) been acknowledged as requiring serious attention. Deployments and PTSD were among the stressors discussed by Armyville adolescents in follow-up intensive interviews in 2009–10. This paper explores possible connections between deployments (and PTSD) and the self-esteem of girls in Armyville. It compares adolescent boys’ and girls’ participation in activities that contribute to building self-esteem, and finds that, while boys build their self-esteem primarily through sports, girls tend to build self-esteem through their familial roles, specifically in taking on increased responsibilities (unpaid domestic and care work) when their parents are preoccupied with deployments, and with deployment-related injuries such as PTSD. We use Marxist feminist liter-
ature on women’s unpaid domestic labour and our study’s interview data
to develop insights into the impact that deployments and PTSD have on
adolescent girls living in Canadian Forces (CF) families.

Armyville is a large CF army community that is relatively ethnically
homogeneous. Seventy percent of its inhabitants are military personnel and
their dependants. The base employs several thousand military members
and several hundred civilians; the Canadian Forces therefore plays a key
role in shaping the culture of the community. Research has shown that, for
the most part, military culture emphasizes obedience, conformity, hierarchy,
personal courage, the fear of shame or dishonour, male camaraderie and
unit cohesion, and the preservation of tradition rather than change.5
Mohanty6 and Enloe7 have written extensively about the deeply gendered
nature of contemporary US military culture, but authors such as Joshua
Goldstein8 have shown that defence and military institutions have been
associated with gender stereotypes relatively consistently across cultures and
time. Kronsell9 has noted that military and defence institutions tend to
represent and reify hegemonic masculinity10 in ways that make it the norm.
Duncanson’s11 study of military masculinities focuses on variations in types
of military masculinities, and the respectively different aspects of “manliness”
they emphasize. For example, officers aspire to authority and rationality,
whereas infantry soldiers attempt to emulate strength and aggression.
Duncanson suggested further that, in the context of peacekeeping, the
military masculinities of noncombat skills and negotiation are especially
emphasized. According to Whitworth,12 militaries endeavour to replace the
uncertainty of mainstream masculinity with a hegemonic representation of
idealized norms of masculinity that privilege the powerful, emotionless
warrior, always willing and able to use force to achieve the mission’s ends.
Taken together, these researchers highlight men’s traditional monopoly of
institutionalized force, and they explain how particular constructions of
masculinity are privileged in military institutions within specific contexts and
roles.13

Sasson-Levy14 drawing on in-depth interviews with Israeli combat soldiers,
has claimed that the warrior’s bodily and emotional practices are consti-
tuted through two opposing discursive regimes: self-control and thrill.
Military culture is also characterized by the mutually oppositional behavioural expectations of strict military discipline (hyperorganized control) and the unleashing of deadly force and violence. The tough, stoic, and emotionless warrior is expected to unleash his wrath, when ordered. It is not surprising that this institutional culture puts women in military families at a higher risk of abuse and violence than civilian women, especially following a deployment. Violence against women is also minimized and legitimized in military organizations. Few scholars, apart from Harrison and Laliberté, have studied how gendered familial roles are maintained and reproduced in military families.

In military families, heteronormative gender roles extend to other aspects of daily life, and families are expected to support the goals of the military institution. Although there are more women in the military today than 40 years ago, women are still dramatically under-represented in leadership roles and combat occupations in the CF, and a pronounced “warrior ethos” remains ascendant in Canadian military culture. Concomitant with the continued devaluation of women in the CF (especially in army combat occupations), gender expectations about work and family life remain deeply engrained in military communities. Military fathers are still positioned as the traditional heads of households, acting as the leaders, providers, and protectors of nuclear families, even as their jobs demand that they sometimes be away from their families in order to “serve their country.” Harrison and Laliberté describe how military wives often have to compensate for long absences of military members by doing additional unpaid work related to caring for their homes and families. They are essentially on call, and are expected to shift daily routines to accommodate their husbands’ absences. But what about the children in military families—are gender norm expectations in divisions of labour extended to them? Are adolescent girls in CF families, like their mothers, expected to take on extra responsibilities when their parents’ military deployments and PTSD are part of their everyday lives? If so, how is their well-being and self-esteem affected?

Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, and Blum, who conducted one of the few extant studies about adolescents in military families, found that these adolescents face prolonged separations from their parents. They and their
families also “experience considerable transformations in the daily organization and functioning of family life.”" But is the daily organizing of family life the same for adolescent girls as it is for boys? Further, how does the daily organization of family life change when parents (typically fathers) return from combat missions with PTSD, and what impact does this have on the families’ youth?

**Women and Unpaid Domestic Labour** Few studies have looked at young women and unpaid work. Existing studies of unpaid household labour are either demographically or geographically specific, and they are difficult to compare to the CF context; or they focus on measuring attitudinal patterns towards family structure and divisions of labour without providing an account of behaviour and lived experiences. One recent attitudinal study of Canadian youths’ perceptions of “men’s work,” “women’s work,” and housework found that gender and class affected young people’s attitudes about different kinds of work, and that fewer young men (nine percent) than young women (30 percent) reported a willingness to consider a job normally associated with the opposite gender. The study also found that working-class youth valued housework more than their middle-class peers.

A US study on teens and household work showed that there are gender inequities in teens’ contributions to household labour and that adolescent males spend more time in extracurricular and leisure activities than adolescent females, who work longer hours in both paid and unpaid labour. Similarly, Sayer found that, although in recent decades there has been an increase in the amount of household labour that men do, men continue to have access to more free time than women. Feminist scholars have identified social class as a key determinant of women’s relationships to paid and unpaid work.

Our analysis of young women’s lives in Armyville is guided by work on social reproduction carried out by feminist political economists, such as Meg Luxton. According to Luxton:

The concept of social reproduction refers to the processes involved in maintaining and reproducing people, specifically the labouring population, and their labour power on a daily and generational basis. It involves the provi-
sion of food, clothing, shelter, basic safety, and health care, along with the development and transmission of knowledge, social values, and cultural practices and the construction of individual and collective identities. The concept of social reproduction builds on and deepens debates about domestic labour and women's economic roles in capitalist societies.\textsuperscript{30}

Feminist political economy challenges the idea that modern economics is gender neutral, and considers how gender roles and expectations are embedded in divisions of work, roles and responsibilities, access to leisure time, resources and decisionmaking power.\textsuperscript{31} Feminist political economy stresses that the work of social reproduction is an important part of the functioning of the larger national or international economy, even though unpaid work is still largely unmeasured.\textsuperscript{32} That unpaid work is not monetized is a reflection of the undervaluing of women's work in general, and not an indication that this work is dispensable or insignificant.

Luxton and Corman\textsuperscript{33} examined working-class women's experiences in Hamilton, Ontario, where economic restructuring and the effects of globalization have affected the steel-manufacturing trade, which for several decades had provided steady jobs and a living wage for women and their husbands/families. Luxton and Corman show that loss of wages, unemployment, and the erosion of the social welfare system have disproportionately affected women, who have borne the brunt of the cuts in their paid work roles and in their domestic roles as wives, mothers, and caregivers.

Armstrong and Armstrong\textsuperscript{34} argue that domestic work should be considered “productive” labour because it is not a private service and is indispensable in its role of reproducing labour power. Similarly, Luxton\textsuperscript{35} has shown that the housework and care work that women do are socially necessary and central to the economy. We argue that this is especially true in CF families. In the CF, families are often relocated every few years, following the careers of (primarily) the men/fathers. Military wives tend to hold part-time, casual work, and are rarely able to gain jobs with benefits and seniority because of frequent relocations. Many military wives work “on base” in small stores, food services, cleaning services or other deskilled jobs.\textsuperscript{36} Their unpaid housework and care work form the backbone of the family and, more importantly, buttress the entire work of military institutions, especially during and after deployments.
In this paper, we are interested in how the familial roles and care work done by young women in Armyville are affected by military life stressors, especially parental deployments and the PTSD that often results from deployments to distant conflict zones. We believe that the CF families in Armyville are analogous to the working-class families Luxton and Corman discussed. Most of the men in Armyville work for the same industry (the CF). Partly owing to the stepped-up operational tempo of the CF since 9/11 and the war in Afghanistan, the entire community also shares a common and changing work experience that fundamentally shapes members’ lives and the gender roles within their families. We believe that the amount of emotional work or care work increases as a result.

Hochschild has written about the amount, value, and unequal sharing of emotion work and the commodification of and increasing need to “manage” emotions in and for paid work. We believe that the changing nature of mostly men’s CF work in post-9/11 military deployments, and the accompanying PTSD experienced by some of them, has resulted in an increased amount and increased management of care work and emotion work for female family members, including daughters.

While some feminist scholars have debated the origins and nature of domestic labour, very few have extended their analyses to include younger women in the household. We posit that a better understanding of adolescent women’s unpaid work, and the circumstances that influence their roles in the family, can lead scholars to a more complete understanding of the origins and maintenance of gendered divisions of labour.

Military Life Stressors There is a paucity of literature on the topic of the impact of military life stressors on adolescents. Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, and Blum have shown that frequent moves often have a very negative impact. Parental deployments are another required part of most military families’ lives, with military parents away on military training or operations for months at a time. Many military members are deployed away from home on a regular basis, multiple times throughout their careers. Though deployments are a regular part of military life, US research has shown that among adolescents, parental deployments are associated with
increased risk-taking behaviour and behavioural problems, with higher levels of depression and stress and anxiety, and with diminished academic performance. According to a recent study by Chandra et al., “youth and girls of all ages [report] significantly more school, family, and peer-related difficulties with parental deployment.”

In Canada, there has been a steady increase in the frequency of military deployments for CF members. The number of overseas missions has increased, while the CF overall has downsized since the end of the Cold War. In the immediate post-Cold War period (1989–2001), CF members were deployed on 65 missions worldwide, compared with a mere 25 peace-keeping missions over the previous 40 years (1948–1989). For the past two decades, CF missions have become more dangerous (e.g., casualties from combat missions in Afghanistan), and therefore CF families are under more stress than they were during previous decades.

Military members also increasingly suffer from operational stress injuries such as PTSD. PTSD has been described as consisting of three clusters of symptoms: “intrusive recollections of the traumatic event”; avoidance, characterized by withdrawal, psychic numbing, and loss of interest in previously enjoyed activities; and hyperarousal, characterized by concentration and sleep difficulties, startle reactions, anger, and outbursts of rage. Other PTSD symptoms include anxiety and severe depression.

PTSD presents significant challenges to marital and parenting relationships, and often results in a parent’s inability to parent effectively. US research has also shown that PTSD is a predictor of marital conflict, partner abuse, poor family functioning, and adjustment problems of children and adolescents.

**Parentification/Boundary Ambiguity** One important result of military life stressors is the phenomenon of “parentification,” especially as applied to young women in military families. “Parentification,” or the functional and/or emotional role reversal in which children forfeit their own need for comfort, protection, and guidance to fulfill the parents’ needs, has been identified in cases where children are exposed to maternal depression and are reported to be caring for their mothers. This is not to say that children should not
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care for their parents; however, healthy child development has been found to depend on clear and flexible parent-child boundaries that have parents providing protection, comfort, and guidance, and promoting their child/children’s separateness. Mayseless and Scharf have noted that the usual and expected balance is that parents provide most of the caring.

Mayseless and Scharf’s study of Israeli young women’s transition from high school to military service found that a blurred boundary/parentified girls’ group demonstrated the lowest level of functional independence, compared to other girls’ groups studied. They explain that because of their enmeshed relationships with their parents, these girls had difficulties developing autonomy, due to their overinvolvement in family matters and their parents’ overdependence on them. They demonstrated that parents who bind their children—in this case their adolescent daughters—to them, or whose children are delegated to serve parental needs, hamper the children’s indviduation.

Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, and Weiss use the notion of “boundary ambiguity,” rather than parentification, when writing on military families, because they refer to the changing/redistribution of spousal roles during military deployments. They found that family members, especially (mostly female) spouses, experienced high levels of boundary ambiguity around household roles and decisionmaking when (mostly male) reservists were away on combat expeditions.

Methodology This paper uses data from a large mixed methods study of the psychological well-being, family functioning, attitudes toward school, and peer relationships of adolescents from CF families. In 2009–10, we conducted two-hour, semistructured interviews with 61 adolescents—sons and daughters of CF members—who were selected from the 1066 (of the ca 1200 enrolled) Armyville High School (AHS) students who, in 2008, had filled out a survey (the first part of our study) for our research team. Most of the survey had replicated parts of the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), and had compared CF youth and civilian youth on measures of psychological well-being, family functioning, attitudes toward school, and peer relationships. The survey results showed very few differences between the CF and civilian youth in Armyville on mental health.
and well-being measures. On the other hand, both CF and civilian youth in Armyville scored worse on mental health measures than youth in the national sample of the NLSCY.\textsuperscript{56} We also found gender differences in mental health between the male and female students, with CF and civilian males scoring better than CF and civilian females, particularly on self-esteem measures. We operationalized “self-esteem” as participants’ answers to 10 statements, including “I feel good about myself,” “Other kids put me down,” and “I worry about my appearance.”\textsuperscript{57} Finally, all Armyville youth scored more poorly on their relationships with their mothers than their counterparts in the national NLSCY.

We recruited the 61 interview participants by inviting students who had participated in the survey to volunteer by filling out contact sheets attached to their surveys. From this pool we constructed a sample consisting of 15 “CF adolescents” from each grade (16 from grade nine), with gender divisions reflecting our volunteer pool demographics, and an attempt to include youth with parents representing all ranks, and both regular and reservist status. The interviews were carried out a year following the survey, so that by then these students were in grades 10, 11, 12, and recently graduated.

We interviewed 35 girls and 26 boys who, among them, had 69 parents who were current or recently retired CF members. Seven (10 percent) of the 69 parents were present or former commissioned officers (captains or above); the remaining 62 (90 percent) were present or former noncommissioned members (warrant officer, sergeant, corporal, and private ranks). This ratio varied from the 20:80 ratio of officers to noncommissioned members that exists currently in the CF.\textsuperscript{58} All 69 parents were present or former army members, except for three from the air element and one from the navy. None of the parents had ever been career reservists.

The interviews covered topics unique to military life and not covered in the survey, including relocations, deployments, deployment-related injuries, family functioning, the participants’ perceptions of the impact military life stressors had on their families and lives, their perceptions of how they and their families had been supported by the school and the local Military Family Resource Centre, and their perceptions of their own resilience. The interviews were carried out by three female members of the research team.
The two questions that we asked participants about gender and self-esteem were:

- According to the survey you filled out last October, girls at AHS have less self-esteem than boys. Do you have any ideas why this might be so?
- How would you rate your own self-esteem?

We also asked every participant:

- How have you enjoyed life at AHS? (probing for, among other things, the quality of extracurricular activities available to himself/herself and other participants).

The centrality of the Canadian Forces to the culture of Armyville (including the presence of “Support the Troops” signs in numerous locations) prompted us to try to learn something about the hegemony (or lack thereof) of military masculinity in our participants’ lives by asking them questions such as:

- How has being part of the CF affected your parents’ relationship? (and your life)
- Do you feel connected with Armyville or with the Canadian Forces? Or both? (and why)
- Would you consider becoming a CF member?
- How do you feel about the war in Afghanistan? (and dying for your country)

Finally, we asked every participant who had experienced a recent parental deployment:

- How did your life change during the deployment? (probing for extra responsibilities, and less or more freedom)

We also asked these participants:

- What was the best part of this deployment for you (if any)? (probing for reflections on resilience and self-esteem)

And (when this situation was applicable):
– How has your dad’s/mom’s PTSD been hard for you? (probing for changes in household division of labour/family dynamics)

Given the self-selected nature of participation in our interviews, our findings cannot be generalized to all youth growing up in military families. They do, however, provide useful insight into what it was like to be an adolescent in Armyville, Canada, during the winter of 2009/10.

**Interview Findings** Twenty-eight (of 61) interview participants answered the question “How would you rate your own self-esteem?” While relatively equal proportions of boys and girls (respectively eight or 31 percent, and nine or 26 per cent) described their self-esteem as “relatively high,” 10 girls admitted to having “relatively low” self-esteem, as compared with only one boy.

Many participants spoke with pride about the abundance of opportunities that the school provided for boys and girls to become involved in organized sports and physical activities. In Armyville, both school-based and community-based sports are popular, and there is a wide variety of available options given the relatively small size of the town. This reflects the fact that strength, agility, and physical fitness are highly valued in the Canadian Forces. While sports opportunities are plentiful for youth of both genders, the young men we interviewed appear to engage in a larger quantity of sports, play more sports leadership roles (e.g., coach, team captain), and to be immersed in a larger number of rich friendship networks as a result of their sports involvements. Participation in sports thus appears to be more central to the creation and maintenance of the young men’s self-esteem than to the self-esteem of their female peers.

Virtually all participants provided one or more answers to the question “Do you have any ideas why girls in Armyville have lower self-esteem than boys?” Six of them mentioned some variant of “The army values young men more than young women.” In searching through participants’ answers to our “military masculinity” questions for corroboration (or not) of this assertion, we found an ideological story that was mixed. On one side of the equation, military masculinity in Armyville is, unsurprisingly, contested. A significant number of our participants did not support Canada’s involvement in
Afghanistan. Additionally, only about half of them aspired to become regular CF members or reservists as adults. A few provided us with eloquent explanations for their lack of interest in this vocational future. For example, Bud, a senior AHS male student, said “I want to be my own person standing out of the crowd. In the military everyone looks the same. You have to get your hair cut short, and … there’s no individuality in it. They work to make you the same as everyone else.” Ginny, a junior female student, said “I have this problem with being yelled at. I just can’t take it. I tried cadets and I only lasted a couple of weeks.”

Significantly more participants’ answers to questions about their parent(s)’ military career(s), their attachment to Armyville, and/or their desire to join the CF, however, revealed a profound pride in their CF fathers, the work they did, their leadership, their heroism, and their ability to protect their families. Albert, a senior male student, said succinctly that “Him being military, like I see my future as me being military...That’s what I want to be. I want to serve my country. It’s just the patriotic thing to do.” Eloise, a senior female student (who also plans to join the CF), said “I always used to love going to the parades and watching my dad march around, especially the promotion parades. You’d see people and they’d be all dressed up. I wanted that to be me.”

Confiding what his father means to him, Howard, a senior male student, said “I felt [unprotected] when I was younger and Dad wasn’t there to help me with problems. But when he was, I felt protected, like everything was going to be okay. … ’Cause I trust him.” Along similar lines, Darlene, a senior female student, said:

I look towards my dad a lot more. ’Cause we’ll sit there and we’ll talk and we’ll fix the truck. … I’ve gotten along with my dad a lot more over the years than I have with her. So if I have a problem I’ll generally go to my dad before I go to my mom.

All four of the previous comments reflect the participants’ revering of their military fathers as role models. Albert’s and Eloise’s comments comprise what one might normally expect from the offspring of military members, whereas Howard and Darlene were attempting to convey that they trusted their fathers more deeply than their mothers. Relevant here is Duncanson’s
view that contemporary military masculinity comprises both the traditional form of military masculinity and a more modern strand of military masculinity, which positions military men as part of a “force for good.”

Our survey results show that adolescents in Armyville have poorer relationships with their mothers than their counterparts in the national NLSCY sample. Although some of our interview participants reported enjoying strong relationships with their mothers, our interviews provide evidence that the military father figure is conspicuously revered and mounted on a pedestal by his offspring in the “single industry” context of Armyville, in a way that the civilian female mother figure is not. By definition, working towards growing up to emulate this military father is a course of action, and source of present and future self-esteem, which is open to young men in Armyville, but not to young women. A senior female student, Freda, implied as much when she said:

Girls are having more issues, more stress put on them…They have to go to university and get a good degree or else they’re worth nothing…Guys can join the military. As long as they play sports and stuff, they’re valued.

In the Armyville context of sports and powerful male military role models, it would be surprising if Armyville young men spoke of their familial roles and responsibilities as significant sources of positive self-esteem. Indeed, very few of them did. The girls, however, talked about playing meaningful and important roles in their families, taking on responsibility, and learning skills that they felt better prepared them for adult life. The young women we interviewed had shouldered increased household responsibility, most conspicuously by taking on additional household tasks during their parents’ deployments. They had carried out parenting work, such as dressing, feeding, or supervising their younger siblings; they had also prepared food and done various household cleaning tasks. For example, Clara, a senior student, discussed how, at age 12, she had assumed a parenting role vis-à-vis her younger sisters while her mother was away for eight months attending military basic training:

So it was just me and my dad, which was not a lot of fun. 'Cause I was like the mother role now, 'cause my dad was working. So I got up early in the
morning, had to get my sisters ready to catch the bus...I had to make lunches and...I had to get myself ready for school. And then, you know, I would come home after school and my dad wouldn't be home yet. So I had to make dinner and had to make sure the girls did their homework. And, you know, they had time to play by themselves and stuff. And when my dad got home, I'd have dinner on the table.

When asked how this experience affected her self-esteem, Clara replied:

I liked being in charge...Because I was in charge a lot more than I was before. I could tell my sisters to do stuff around the house. You know, 'Can you please come and do the dishes. Can you please sweep the floors. Can you go tidy your rooms.' Stuff like that.

Eloise, a senior student introduced earlier, described the impact of her father's deployment to Afghanistan on her self-esteem: “It changed me. I don't think I would have been as mature and responsible as before. I would have been your typical teenager.” Other young women quoted in this paper made similar comments. Only two of them were among the 10 female participants who volunteered that they had low self-esteem.

Less obvious, and perhaps more labour intensive, was the emotional support or care work many of these young women provided to one of their parents while their other parent was deployed. Many of the girls were hyper-aware of their parent’s mental/emotional state, as well as his/her stress level and work load, and wanted to be as helpful and supportive to him or her as possible.

Some of this work, as would be predicted, was taking pressure off Mom by doing a better-than-usual job of managing relations with siblings. For example, Marlee, a junior student, described making an extra effort vis-à-vis her disabled older sister: “I try and get along better with my sister, because I don’t want to put that pressure on my mom when it’s just her there and not my dad.”

Other emotional work falls into the “self-censorship” category—not far from Hochschild’s “managing feelings,” whereby the daughter suppresses her own needs in order to reduce the stress on her remaining parent. For example, the mother of Clara (introduced earlier) was extremely upset during her husband's long deployment. Consequently, Clara told us:
I just did my own thing. 'Cause I didn't want to stress her out more. So I kind of kept to myself. And I think that's why we started to get farther apart. 'Cause I wasn't really telling her as much...It wasn't like I was getting into trouble or anything, it's just I didn't want to stress her out.

Frances, another senior student, told us how she kept silent about being severely bullied for five years, in order to spare her mother, a chronic pain sufferer, during a period when her father was deployed frequently. Speaking more generally about how she oriented towards her mother during this time, Frances added that “I think it's because of how independent I had to be...It was like Mom was dealing with all this stuff, so I'll just deal with my stuff alone.” Other girls echoed Clara and Frances in describing suppressing their own needs in order to support their mothers.

Adolescent males also do extra work at home when their parents are deployed, but the nature of the work they take on is different, and, for the most part, they speak about it in a different way. Most of the adolescent boys we interviewed were much more casual about what they did when their deployed parent was away. When they described the chores they typically performed, they described yard work, car repair, shoveling snow, and other typically masculinized tasks that are more physical.

The response of Fred, a junior student, was typical: “I just keep to my chores, my brother keeps to his, and that’s that.” Another junior student, Peter, told us: “Usually me and my dad do [the dishes]. And then my mom will just like fill in his role, and...do the laundry, and I might clean, like dust. It’s pretty much the same.” Similarly, Harold, a junior student, said:

I did have to do a little bit more chores, which I didn’t really mind, 'cause I was getting $10 basically a week for cleaning my room and putting clothes away. So helping out more felt a little more fair.

Mac, another junior student, seemed to take on a bit more:

Basically, anything he would normally do. Like sometimes he'd haul in the firewood, or I'd do it all the time. Anything that needs to be fixed, or something that has to be dealt with, I kind of have to deal with it whenever he's not there. Or figure out how to deal with it, or call him and ask him how to do it.
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Much less typical were adolescent boys who provided emotional support to their mothers when their fathers were deployed. For example, Lance, a senior student, whose father spent nine months in Afghanistan, recalled how he helped his mother bring the Easter Bunny to his younger siblings while his father was away, after learning that several deaths in Afghanistan had just occurred:

And of course it being Easter weekend, the Easter Bunny still had to come. And so that was kind of the first time that I helped Mom with that, but she really needed help. I mean, before that I believed in the Easter Bunny...I didn't really care that he wasn't real any more. It was more my mom needed me.

Howard, another senior student (introduced earlier), suppresses his own needs during his father's deployments, to ease the situation of a mother who is chronically depressed. Eloquently summarizing his situation, he told us:

Having my dad go away constantly, Mom being depressed...It's almost like you're living with yourself. Because you don't want to talk to your mom about it because she's depressed, and you don't want to make her more depressed, and you don't want to make her think about it. And then you're sitting there like, 'What am I going to do?' and you have to come up with your own reasons, your own answers.

Only a couple of boys commented during interviews about how their extra jobs during parental deployments increased their self-esteem. In another contrast with their female peers, only boys talked about taking advantage of their fathers' absences during deployments (and their mother's lesser degree of control over them), in order to enjoy greater fun and freedom. For example, George, a senior student, recalled:

I always had friends over and stuff. But shhh (laughter)...I lived right around the corner from the skate park. So there used to be a few times where everyone at the skate park would come over to my house and we'd have a little party or whatever.

Albert, another senior student (introduced earlier), took advantage of his greater freedom more forcefully:
My mom, she got pretty down. I remember her crying a couple of times because my dad wasn’t home to correct us and we actually became pretty rebellious towards her, using a lot of profanity at her and stuff like that. … Like with me and my brother, we think we’re above our mom when my dad’s not home.

For the most part, the adolescent boys we interviewed appeared to perform significantly less traditionally female domestic work when their parents were deployed and significantly less emotional work. Some even took advantage of, or benefitted from, the CF parent’s absence, no doubt adding to their mothers’ and sisters’ housework and care work.

Many of the adolescents also discussed the effects of PTSD on their families. As noted in the literature, one significant impact of PTSD on adolescent children of affected military members is the whole or partial loss of the affected parent as a parent figure (parenting deficit), creating a vacuum in the adolescent’s life, and usually also compromising the parenting of the non-affected parent.62 This loss is typically experienced as enormous. It should be noted that only sons and daughters of fathers (or stepfathers) with PTSD volunteered to discuss their experience with us. Evidence exists that women respond to trauma differently than men63; these differences in turn would be expected to produce different effects on these women’s families and children. From our interviews, there were, again, significant gender differences in the way parental PTSD was experienced and discussed.

Again, it was the girls, rather than the boys, who described doing extra emotional work at home, and shouldering part of their families’ extra emotional burdens. The girls discussed how they “stayed out of the way” and kept their problems to themselves, so as not to burden their parents with extra worries, and how they assumed caring and parenting roles with their siblings, and did additional domestic work. These were difficult times for girls who had previously relied on their mothers as support persons. Owing to the extra stress on the family, their mothers were now much less available to them emotionally. Roles had sometimes even become reversed, with adolescent daughters providing a disproportionate amount of support to their mothers.
For example, Natasha, a senior student, had accepted responsibility for
the depression her father was suffering as a result of his PTSD, and reported
trying to avoid reacting to him in a way that might “push him too far.” She
said that “I’m afraid to get angry at him, because if I get angry at him, then
I’m afraid that I’m going to push him off the edge.” The loss of her father
as a parent figure was so profound for Natasha that sometimes she felt that
it was she who had to parent him. Natasha described how her father often
behaves in the kitchen:

If we’ll be in the kitchen, and we’re making supper… he’s in there fooling
around, joking, punching you, like playing around. I’m like ‘Did you want
me to burn you?’ Like, ‘You need to stop. You take things too far.’ And then
he goes and sits on the couch. He’s just very childish sometimes.

In a typical child-parent interaction, one might expect that the parent would
be cooking, and the adolescent would be the one behaving too exuberantly.
In Natasha’s house, the roles are reversed: the parent is “horsing around”
while the adolescent is cooking—an example of parentification, as discussed
above.

Susan, another senior student, whose father no longer lives with her,
believes that he has never been an adequate parent, partly because he devel-
oped PTSD on an overseas deployment when she was a small child. As a
sixteen-year-old, Susan has recently made the decision to completely forgive
him for the injury that has been at the root of many of the difficulties she
has experienced in her own life:

Being a parent is really hard, and [PTSD] made it hard for my dad to be a
parent. That’s why it was so hard for him to be a parent while my mom was
away. Like, my dad was the best dad ever when I was little, before he went
away.

Marcia, another senior student, has learned to set aside her own feelings
of loss and bitterness, and her own needs, in order to focus on assisting her
mother’s efforts to alleviate her father’s suffering:

It’s so surreal at times… We’ve never done anything wrong. Why is this
happening to us? But you deal with it and you’ve got to stop being selfish
about how it’s hurting you, and you’ve got to try and help your family member.
Like it’s all about being supportive.

She is also aware of her father’s new verbal abusiveness towards her mother,
and is consequently considering postponing her plans to leave home, to live
with her boyfriend, and start a career:

It’s a little scary moving out from home, thinking that my mom’s going to
have to deal with him all by herself. That’s the thing I’m very worried about.
’Cause out of all of us, the one who gets the most heat would be her. Like
the most painful things that get said are to her. I’m scared that she’s going to
have to be alone with that. And if it happens again, I don’t know if she could
handle it kind of thing…I don’t want her to have to be alone.

In trying to take responsibility for her mother’s future wellbeing—something
clearly beyond her control—Marcia, like Natasha, exemplifies parentifi-
cation.

The boys whose fathers had developed PTSD gave very different responses
to questions about how this had affected them. For the most part, their
fathers’ injuries appeared to have had relatively little impact on them. And,
to the extent that the injury had been experienced as significant, the son
tended to discuss how this had inconvenienced him, rather than how he
was contributing to the family’s emotional efforts to cope with the situation.

For example, when asked if his father’s PTSD (developed in Afghanistan)
had affected his parents’ relationship, George (introduced earlier) replied
succinctly “They’ve always been okay. They’re not ones to fight.” Harold
(introduced earlier) focused on how his father’s injury had hampered his
freedom to pursue extracurricular activities: “So basically, since he had to
sort of find himself again for a little bit, I sort of couldn’t do anything. I was
sort of stuck at home, and I’m a person [who] really [doesn’t] like to stay
at home.” Albert (introduced earlier) has a father whose PTSD has accumu-
lated gradually throughout multiple overseas tours. He described being
stressed and irritated by his father’s anger, but when asked if his father’s
problem was untreated PTSD, declared that this was “not his business”:

Every tour he takes, his anger level gets higher up, and what he’s capable of
through his anger…I don’t know if [the PTSD] is treated or not. I think it’s
just the way that he expresses himself. I don’t know. I don’t ask him. It’s not my business to know.

The one exception to this self-focused tenor of discussion among the males, as discovered during the interviews, was actually Harold, who echoed some of the girls at the end of his interview, in his grasp of the seriousness of the situation, and his expression of love for his father:

[Parents with PTSD] may seem different, but they are still your parents, and deep inside they do love you. It’s a challenge not only for them to overcome, but you have to overcome it yourself. That's what I've always found like with almost everything...Tough it out, because they’re gonna end up coming back to reality soon enough, and then your relationship’s probably gonna become even better.

Consistent with the way in which they shouldered extra domestic work during deployments, our female participants were more likely than their male peers to shoulder extra work when a parent developed PTSD, and to think about their parents’ needs, rather than their own, when developing a response to the situation.

However, in the instances of both parental deployment and parental PTSD, there are, as we have seen, notable exceptions to what seems to be the norm for military adolescent boys. At this early stage of research on military adolescents, we are unable to conclude that the impact of these stressors on boys is less significant than it is on girls. Based on the relatively few interviews we have conducted, there certainly is at least a gendered difference in adolescents’ usual descriptions of the impact of the stressors on their lives.

So, not unlike Gager and Cooney,64 who found that adolescent males spend more time in extracurricular and leisure activities than do adolescent females, who work longer hours in both paid and unpaid labour, we found that daughters in CF families respond to the physical and emotional needs of their families more, and differently, than their male peers. We found that, in Armyville, young women often make up for parents’ lack of availability, due to deployment or work-related PTSD, by forgoing participation in extracurricular activities and taking over some of the critical tasks involved
in household maintenance and social reproduction. On top of this, their contributions to emotion work through care work and emotion management\(^5\) have benefitted their families, and also proved to be socially valuable in a (military) culture that expects and extols a gendered division of labour. It is not surprising that this work helps to elevate the self-esteem of these young women, as some may feel enriched by having filled what are considered to be culturally appropriate roles for them.

As has been found to be generally true of women’s unpaid work,\(^6\) military culture relies upon the unpaid work of military wives.\(^7\) We see here that it also depends upon and benefits from the unpaid housework and care work of military daughters. In turn, this reinforces gender stereotypes and roles, while both directly and indirectly benefitting the Forces at large.

**Conclusion**  Through this analysis, we have seen, among other things, that wider processes in political economy and national and international politics affect young people’s everyday life at home, even when they are not directly involved in conflict and war. Consistent with Armstrong and Armstrong\(^8\) and Luxton,\(^9\) it appears from our interviews that young women in military families disproportionately carry the burden of social reproduction. In CF military families, daughters rearrange their daily lives to accommodate the need to take over domestic labour (where their flexibility is crucial to supporting the primary wage earner), and also take on much more extra care work than sons during deployments, and in instances where a parent has PTSD. Some young women may find their self-esteem boosted by the fact that they have been raised in a culture that values relatively rigid and traditional masculine and feminine roles. Their “success” as emotion managers and substitute caregivers allows them to feel good about themselves as young women in a culture that privileges these values.

We contend that military culture in Armyville presides over the activities that are promoted and facilitated by the school and community. We know that the CF recruits heavily from among the male AHS students, and that many of the male students join the CF upon graduation. Since physical fitness is a prerequisite for qualifying for army training, it makes sense that sports and other physical activities are of heightened importance to
Armyville’s adolescent males, and that the school supports these activities. Consequently, army culture reinforces gender norms for both adolescent boys and girls. It was troubling for us to see that an important source of increased self-esteem for young women in CF families is connected to meeting the very gender role expectations that keep their interests subordinate to men’s in CF culture.

Despite their limitations, our findings bring us a step closer to understanding the impact that CF culture—and militarism itself—has on the lives of children and youth growing up in CF families. Given the number of CF families that have been, and continue to be, affected by multiple overseas deployments, and by PTSD, we would expect the gender role differences identified in this paper to intensify during the coming few years.

Notes

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4. Canada, Department of National Defence, Canadian Forces Base/Area Support Group “Armytown” (pseudonym) (2010) <http://www.army.forces.gc.ca.czproxy.library.yorku.ca> (accessed 6 August 2010). To protect the identity of the community, part of the web address naming the base has been removed.


20. McKee and Davis, Challenge and Change in the Military.

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23. Mmari et al., “When a Parent Goes Off to War.”


36. Harrison and Lalibérté, *No Life Like It*.


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51. Mayseless and Scharf, “Too Close for Comfort.”


53. We defined a “CF adolescent” as a youth who had at least one parent or step-parent who either: was a regular or reservist CF member, or took his/her release from the regular or reserve CF during the previous five years and had been a member for at least four years prior to release. We defined a “civilian” as a youth who had no parents or step-parents who had ever belonged to the CF. It is important to note that children from CF families had been deliberately excluded from the NLSCY.

54. Research team members were Deborah Harrison (PI), Patrizia Albanese, Rachel Berman, Angela Deveau, Danièle Kwan-Lafond, Lucie Laliberté, Margaret Malone, David McTimoney, Mary Mesheau, the late Christine Newburn-Cook, Jennifer Phillips, Karen Robson, Chris Sanders, and Riley Veldhuizen.

55. The NLSCY is a national study of the development and well-being of Canadian children that began in 1994 to collect information on child development and well-being, and has been following its initial cohort of more than 22,000 children (0–11 years) every two years. Children from military families have been excluded from this study. NLSCY measures were appropriate for our research because they enabled CF adolescents to be compared with their civilian Canadian peers on a range of health and social indicators. Our national comparison group was the CF AHSS students’ nation-wide, age-appropriate peers who had participated in the NLSCY during the seventh (2006–07) cycle. In addition to selected NLSCY measures, measures were also selected from the Children of Alcoholics Screening Test [CAST], and the Juvenile Victimization Questionnaire [JVQ], in order to address specific stressors associated with military life that are not included in the NLSCY. The survey also included questions that were designed to elicit each participant’s “CF status.”

56. Harrison et al., “The Impact of Shared Location on the Mental Health of Military and Civilian Adolescents.”

57. During the interviews, each participant was permitted to comment on self-esteem, as s/he himself/herself understood it.


59. All names used for participants in the study are pseudonyms.


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64. Gager and Cooney, “The Effects of Family Characteristics and Time Use.”


