Deployments to Diplomas: An Examination of Academic Motivation among Military Dependents using Self-Determination Theory

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Using self-determination theory, the academic motivation of college students from deployed military families was examined. Implementing a case study methodology, interviews with 14 college students were transcribed and coded using a theory-driven rubric to identify their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Each case was analyzed for one's self-determination regulatory style (external, introjected, integrated, or identified). The need for relatedness was the most prevalent in the data and the majority of cases exhibited regulatory styles consistent with introjected motivation. Implications for enhancing student success among this population are discussed based on findings.

Keywords: Self-determination theory, military families, college students, motivation

Military families are an important and integral part of military culture and help to define military life for service members. Military families face their own unique challenges while living a life committed to national service along with their beloved in-service family members (Chandra et al., 2010; Lowe et al., 2012). The various challenges and transitions that military families face requires resilience, sacrifice, and acceptance above and beyond what is typical for a family (Huebner et al., 2007; Lowe et al., 2012; Palmer, 2008). The unique duties of the job require a strict adherence to the commands of the military. This can often mean that the whole family is required to move, repeatedly, to duty stations nationally or internationally, or that service members are commanded to new posts which require leaving their families for extended periods of time and with limited notice (Mmari et al., 2009). Aikins and Aikins (2019) discovered that parental deployment can cause disruptions that impact children's adjustment and psychological health.

In Jill Biden's 2016 address to the American Educational Research Association she inquired, "What can you and your universities do to help our military students?" In reality, active military, veterans, and their dependents are student populations with unique situations and characteristics. The educational research literature regarding military families has primarily been focused on the educational outcomes of military dependents (i.e., children of military service members) during primary and secondary education (Garner et al., 2014; Stites, 2016). However, outcomes at the postsecondary level dependent on student services. For example, military dependents must navigate the process of transferring to various schools and using benefits, like the GI Bill and Post 9/11 GI Bill. Likewise, many students are transitioning from a military life on base (either domestic or abroad) with many support services to a civilian campus that may not specifically serve their needs. Many educational professionals do not fully understand the unique circumstances that military dependents face.

In addition to considering the special circumstances of military dependents, many higher education professionals do not exhibit knowledge of the basic components of military cultural competence (Gibbs et al., 2019). Indeed, Dillard and Yu (2018) proclaimed that "many veterans feel isolated due to the lack of military cultural competency among faculty and staff" (p. 66). Military cultural competence involves the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to work with this population (PsychArmor Institute, 2019). Basic military knowledge is the first component of military cultural competence. For instance, someone who is

competent in military culture will know that not all military service members are Soldiers as this term only applies to the Army. Other basic knowledge includes that there are five branches of the armed forces in addition to the reserves (i.e., Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, Coast Guard).

Going beyond basic knowledge, a familiarity with the misconceptions of the military community is another component of military cultural competence. For instance, the majority of combat veterans do not develop post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD; PsychArmor Institute, 2019), moreover, it is a myth that those with PTSD or other conditions known as "invisible wounds of war" (e.g., brain injury, depression) are dangerous or violent (Psych Armor, 2019). Myths, such as these, are pervasive among those who lack military cultural competence. Furthermore, many servicemen and women display stoicism (Hillenbrand, 1976); they find it difficult to ask for help (e.g., financial services, mental health counseling) making it most important to reach out to others who have served. Given that adult dependents from military families were likely reared in a stoic context, it is possible that they have acquired some of the attributes of their parents who have served or been deployed, for better or worse.

Although not all of the participants in the current study served in the U. S. military personally, all of the participants belong to military families, identify as dependents of active or retired military servicemen and women, and have experienced one or more parent being deployed. To address the gap in the literature on military dependents and their academic motivation, this study uses self-determination theory (SDT) to better understand how the context of parental deployment influenced their academic experiences. We hope that the findings can inform the University Community on how to promote student success and satisfaction among these students through awareness, intentional programming, and targeted services. This study started as an investigation of parental separation and academic motivation (Arrastia-Chisholm et al., 2017), but this subsample emerged with unique characteristics and motivations as a result of all subjects being military dependents. Based on Ryan and Deci's (2000) SDT, we were able to describe the differences in academic motivation along the continuum of external regulation and in terms of the three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness). Specifically, in this current study, we answer the following research questions: What are the academic motivations of adult military dependents enrolled in college? How has military life shaped their motivation and psychological needs? To better serve this

population, we explored the academic motivations of military dependents in college using a SDT framework.

Literature Review

In this section, we discuss federally mandated resources for college students associated with military service and the unique characteristics of military-related college students and military families. We introduce SDT, regulatory styles identified within the SDT, and prior study findings with military-related students.

Federally Mandated Resources

Under the Post 9/11 GI Bill, students can receive full tuition for all in-state public schools, a monthly housing allowance (dependent upon location), an annual stipend for books and supplies, and a one-time rural benefit payment of $500 to individuals who reside in a county with six people or fewer per square mile (U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2019). The GI Bill can be used for graduate or undergraduate degrees and a variety of trainings such as on-the-job, entrepreneurial, and vocational. In the 2018 fiscal year, more than 700,000 beneficiaries had utilized the Post 9/11 GI Bill toward education (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

Military-related College Student Population

In 2017, the U.S. Department of Defense reported that there were a total of 4,771,324 personnel and family members. Of this total, 2,667,909 were family members of service members (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). When taking a further look at the number of family members, almost one million were spouses in either a dual military or civilian marriage (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017). Furthermore, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2018), 1.4 million U.S. children currently have one parent in the military. Even with the prospect of one parent being in the military and possibly deployed, 75% of students from military families graduated high school on time with their peers (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). In the 2018 fiscal year, 708,069 service members, veterans, spouses, and dependents used the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill for higher education with 32,478 of those individuals being listed as dependents (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). Thus, higher education's veteran-focused programs and services may need to be more aware that the participating student population encompasses the veteran's family (e.g., spouses, children), as well.

Military Family Characteristics

Although the needs of children and adolescents in military families have been addressed in the literature (Oliver & Abel, 2017), far less is known about military dependents that enroll in college (Dudley-Miller & Radel, 2020). In terms of parental deployment, the absence of fathers has been explored since the Vietnam War. Hillenbrand (1976) collected data from 73 boys and 53 girls enrolled in 6th grade at a domestic school for military dependents. The 126 children were rated by parents, teachers, and themselves on a variety of measures, including intelligence and dependency. In general, these families accepted the absence of the father who was deeply missed. This attitude was described by the families as stoicism. According to Hillenbrand (1976), boys within this family context exhibited more irritability, aggression, depression, and lower impulse control than girls. The girls in this sample did not display these characteristics but they scored lower on their math assessments in comparison to the boys.

According to developmental studies with civilian children in primary and secondary grades, this distinction with math performance between girls and boys does not occur until mid- to late adolescence (Jacobs et al., 2002). According to Hillenbrand's study (1976) with children (N =

126) from military families, having an older female sibling was associated with increased negative characteristics for boys and only slightly higher aggression and significantly higher academic achievement in girls. Within this study's sample, the oldest male child tended to assume the role of the father during deployment while the younger male children tended to react in maladaptive ways (e.g., physical violence, behavioral issues at school, regressive tendencies). The findings indicated that the deployed father's absence seemed less explicitly impactful for female children within the study's sample.

Similar to Hillenbrand's (1976) findings, a meta-analysis study by Gregory (1965) found that students with parental loss of varying degrees (e.g., prolonged separation, divorce, death) also had higher rates of delinquency and high school failure than students without parental loss. Gregory's (1965) review of students' retrospective data and statewide data sets indicated that parental loss had a substantial impact on the students' success. Likewise, Dr. Gregory cited a study of college students by Ingham (1949) where the group who reported various psychopathologies (n = 138) also had a statistically significant higher rate of reported parental separation than the control group (n = 370). Among Gregory's conclusions was a call for more research about the impact of childhood loss on the

academic success of students—college students in particular. These prior studies by Hillenbrand (1976), Gregory (1965), and Ingham (1949) present contrasting narratives about the outcomes for students from military families who experience prolonged and repeated parental separation. The impact of deployment on children and their academic achievement past second school represents a gap in academic motivation research literature.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

According to Ryan and Deci (2000), when the context of task performance aligns with the psychological needs of an individual (i.e., autonomy, competence, and relatedness), they are more likely to enjoy, identify with, and be motivated to complete a task. The repeated engagement with a task and supportive conditions (e.g., autonomy-supporting, competence-supporting) influences the development of intrinsic motivation along a continuum of regulatory styles. Thus, when university life fulfills a student's psychological needs, they are more likely to engage in academics and other activities without as much external regulation.

Psychological Needs

The psychological needs identified as supportive of well-being and intrinsic self-

motivation are autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within the SDT, autonomy refers to one's desire for control or agency while completing tasks and within life in general. Examples of this psychological need is often represented by exercising control through choice such as choosing the subject of your term paper, your career goals, and where you live. In the context of SDT, competence is one's desire to be knowledgeable and maintain a sense of self-efficacy while completing tasks. Examples of this psychological need are found in the popular expression, "I've got this!" Sometimes this need includes the desire to be held in high esteem for one's knowledge or ability. Also, within the context of SDT, the psychological need for relatedness is one's desire to belong to a group or to be valued by others. Examples of messages that support this psychological need are "we're here for you," "we want you here with us," and "I like or value you." Accordingly, Ryan and Deci (2000) posited that the contexts that support these innate psychological needs will influence one's self-motivation and mental well-being to develop *progressively intrinsic* self-regulatory behaviors toward goals. In general, "contexts supportive of autonomy, competence, and relatedness were found to foster greater internalization and integration than contexts

that thwart satisfaction of these needs" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 76).

Regulatory styles

According to SDT, the least autonomous form of motivation is external regulation. Individuals who are externally regulated have an external locus of causality and their behaviors are regulated by external rewards and punishments. Individuals who experience external regulation show less interest, value, and effort in regard to achievement. These individuals tend to deny any responsibility when encountering a negative outcome. External regulation is associated with compliance to external factors. Introjected regulation, the next style on the motivational continuum, is a somewhat autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. Individuals engaging in introjected behaviors have an external locus of causality even though their behaviors are influenced by internal rewards and punishments. Specifically, behaviors are performed to decrease negative feelings (e.g. guilt and anxiety) or to attain ego enhancements (e.g. pride). Individuals may also seek to increase their feelings of worth through demonstrations of ability (i.e. ego involvement). Individuals who experience introjected regulation expend more effort, handle failures poorly, and experience

negative feelings (e.g. anxiety) when facing failure (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

After introjection, the next regulatory style on the motivational continuum is identified regulation. It is influenced by intrinsic interest; therefore, it is a more autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. It involves a conscious valuing of a goal, so the actions are deemed as personally important. In the context of an educational setting, students with identified regulation experience more interest and enjoyment of school, have more positive coping styles, and put forth more effort (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of regulation is considered somewhat internal but not fully because it is not integrated with the self (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Finally, integrated regulation is the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation. It happens when identified regulatory mechanisms are embraced as part of one's self, which means they have been brought into congruence with one's other values and needs. Individuals internalize the value of goal to the point of self-identity, meaning the goal becomes a part of their sense of self. However, integrated regulation still involves the goal as an extrinsic achievement, as opposed to the intrinsic motivation of internal regulation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Although Ryan and Deci (2000) presented SDT as a general theory of

motivation that could be applied to different contexts, researchers have yet to explore the extent of its applicability with military personnel and dependents. Studies with military service members and veterans pursuing postsecondary education (Johnson, 2018) and doctoral degrees (Ross, 2019) have yielded mixed results. For example, autonomy and desire for personal growth was the most significant factor in persisting to graduation in a sample of 114 service members (Johnson, 2018). However, the need for relatedness and having a solid support group was the strongest theme that emerged from a sample of nine veterans pursuing their doctorate degrees at a distance (Ross, 2019). Moreover, recent SDT studies of college student motivation at military academies (Filosa et al., 2020; Ghadampour et al., 2019; Raabe et al., 2020) identified unmet needs for autonomy among the study participants. In order to understand a documented pattern of attrition, a survey regarding regulatory styles and psychological needs was administered to 728 Army ROTC cadets (Raabe et al., 2020). Overall, the cadets reported that their need for autonomy was not being met at the academy. The summation of these studies (Johnson, 2018; Ross, 2019; Raabe et al., 2020) is that higher education barely identifies and scarcely addresses the needs of this minority student population. In order to support college students with military associations to persist and graduate, the university community needs to understand their psychological needs. Thus, the purpose of this study was to identify regulatory styles and the psychological needs of those who have experienced parental deployment.

Method

This study used an exploratory case study methodology (Yin, 2003) to answer the following research questions: 1) What are the academic motivations of adult military dependents enrolled in college? and 2) How has military life shaped their motivation and psychological needs as described by Ryan and Deci (2000)? Interviews with 14 college students from military families were transcribed and coded using a theory-driven rubric to identify their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In addition, we coded for the type of motivation they exhibited in terms of academic achievement. Each participant was treated as a unique case from a separate context with information from interviews and surveys used to contextualize their experiences.

Participants

For recruitment, a survey link was emailed to all students at a four-year university located in the southeastern United States. The email requested students who had experienced

parental deployment to voluntarily complete an online survey and participate in an interview. Table 1 includes demographic information about each participant. A total of 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted with participants ranging in age from 18 to 53 years. In terms of race and ethnicity, the largest portion of the sample identified as Black ($n = 6$). The majority of the sample were traditional college-aged (18-24 years old; $n = 11$), female ($n = 12$), and enrolled as undergraduates ($n = 12$). It is important to note that both Dan and Pamela were veterans. Only one participant experienced the deployment of both parents, with fathers being the most likely deployed. All participants reported using their parents' GI Bill or their own to fund college. Each participant was given a $25 Amazon gift card for their participation in this study.

Table 1

Participant Demographics in Order by Age

Name	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Parent Deployed	Major	Level	Status
Sabrina	18	F	Multi	Mom & Dad	Biology	U	Dependent
Jarnelle	20	F	Black	Mom	Exercise Phys.	U	Dependent
Abby	20	F	Latina	Stepdad	Nursing	U	Dependent
Marie	20	F	White	Dad	Art Education	U	Dependent
Denise	21	F	Black	Dad	Middle Grades	U	Dependent
Mary	21	F	Multi	Dad	Sociology	U	Dependent
Lisa	22	F	White	Dad	Psychology	U	Dependent
Arika	22	F	Black	Mom	Psychology	U	Dependent
Lauren	22	F	Multi	Dad	Psychology	U	Dependent
Ashleigh	22	F	White	Dad	Physics	U	Dependent
Jake	23	M	White	Dad	School Couns.	G	Dependent
Dan	32	M	Black	Dad	ASL Interpreting	U	Veteran[a]
Mena	35	F	Black	Dad	Org. Leadership	U	Dependent[a]
Pamela	53	F	Black	Dad	Org. Leadership	G	Veteran[a]

Note. U = undergraduate, G = graduate, [a] These participants were formerly dependents of military members, but have aged out.

Data Collection and Analysis

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured protocol to generate conversation about the student's experiences during and after parental deployment. Questions about academic experiences throughout grade school and college were part of the protocol (see Table 2). For example, students were asked how they picked their majors, about their role models growing up, and their current motivation for graduating. Interviews ranged from 30-75 minutes in length. Interviews were transcribed and coded using a theory-driven rubric based on Deci and Ryan's SDT (2000). The transcripts were coded using the following codes: need for autonomy, need for relatedness, and need for competence. Participants were categorized into regulatory styles based on the highest frequency of quotes found in each category: external, introjected, identified, or integrated.

Table 2

Sample Interview Questions

Conversation Prompts
1.   What was the process for applying to college?
2.   How did you pick your major?
3.   What challenges have you faced?
4.   What has helped you get through these challenges?
5.   How could have the university supported you?
6.   How do you utilize the [military resource center] on campus?
7.   How has your parent's deployment contributed to your decision to finish high school? To attend college?
8.   How has your parent's deployment affected your motivation (drive) for your major? How about motivation to graduate college and pursue your chosen career path?
9.   Have other things (factors), like your school environment, friends, teachers, role models influenced these decisions?

Note. Clarifying questions and probes were also used in this semi-structured interview process.

Trustworthiness

To establish trustworthiness, the researchers engaged in iterative coding over multiple cycles (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In terms of inter-rater reliability, two coders chose one interview (Sabrina) to code simultaneously

and discuss. This transcript served as the exemplar case for coding. The two coders discussed coding for each category and findings for the interview until consensus was reached across categories. The remainder of interviews were divided among the coders, but codes were discussed for clarity and consensus. Overall, inter-rater reliability was calculated as α = .93 with raters initially agreeing on the categorization of 13 of the 14 interview subjects along the continuum of motivation identified in the SDT.

Findings

This section presents the findings of each participant in the order of SDT regulatory styles. No students were identified in the external regulatory style, so the order will begin with introjected regulatory style and end with integrated regulatory style. Each case describes the psychological needs that were identified within participants' narratives and are assumed to represent their academic motivation at the time of the interview. Further themes outside of this framework are presented in the discussion section including implications for future research and practice.

Jarnelle: Introjected Regulation

Jarnelle's mother was deployed during Jarnelle's childhood, and her father was deployed before she was born. Her father struggled with alcoholism, and her parents subsequently divorced. The deployment and divorce left Jarnelle at home with more responsibilities to help care for her two younger brothers. The increased responsibility was her primary concern when selecting a college because it was important to get "as far away as possible" and still have in-state tuition. Jarnelle thus described herself as independent, having to "grow up and do things on [her] own quicker" than her peers. No one assisted her in applying to five colleges, all of which were far enough from home that she could get away from the domestic expectations of her family.

Moving Away in Search of Autonomy and Relatedness

Once she was enrolled at a university, Jarnelle majored in exercise physiology, a decision mostly driven by the promise of a lucrative career in physical therapy; she also worked at the campus bookstore while taking classes full-time. Although the autonomy of being self-sufficient was important to Jarnell, whenever procrastinating, she would hear her mom saying, 'If you're not gonna make it, if you're not gonna put in the time and the effort, then you better join the military.' According to Jarnelle, this was the external motivation that she needed to continue in her academic studies. Making her family proud was very important to her and drove her

goals of getting good grades to eventually get a doctorate. Despite wanting to be away from home, she did lament not feeling "connected" to others around her or feeling like she had a family at college.

Mena: Introjected Regulation

Mena, a non-traditional student and self-proclaimed "Army brat," looked to outside motivators to finish her bachelor's degree in organizational leadership at the age of 35. She was determined to finish her degree despite attending five universities. As a young child she lived in Germany while her father was deployed. Throughout her many moves, Mena recalls being bullied in school while still being a high achiever. At one point, Mena lived in the states with her mother while her father was deployed. She recalled feeling resentful toward him until he returned. Both her parents were college graduates, so Mena felt a lot of external pressure from her family to graduate college.

Living Up to Family by Seeking Competence and Relatedness

The first time she enrolled in college was a failure due to viewing college as time to socialize. Connecting with others was something that Mena reported being important to her. In fact, Mena picked her initial college major, psychology, because she wanted to help people and it was what

her mother studied. She recounts, "because I saw how much joy she gets from the work she does helping people." Her mother was her main motivation and role model growing up, even today while finishing the degree she began years ago. In Mena's case, her father's deployment created an environment in which her mother had to work extra hard to accomplish her goals. Mena resented this situation, and these vicarious experiences provided high standards for Mena to meet. With renewed focus, Mena reported that she wanted to establish her competence and feel more connected to others who have obtained a college degree.

Denise: Introjected Regulation

The main motivator for Denise includes the external expectations set by her family to care for others. Denise was born on a military base and moved frequently because of her father's Army assignments. She was a 21-year-old middle grades education major and identified as a caregiver. Growing up she was told the following was expected: "Graduate high school, go to college, get a job, get a house, get married." During the interview she described being homesick at college and recalled having a hard time being away from family, especially when her father was deployed.

Changing Majors to Gain Competence

Originally, Denise was a psychology major. She chose this path on the advice of her parents who suggested listening to others' problems could be her "calling." However, due to a rigorous gateway course in psychology, Denise did not succeed academically and had to change majors. Even though Denise recalled being singled out and picked on by teachers in elementary and middle school, she still chose education as her future career. She described being cast as a "motherly type" and that others expected her to take on a career within the caring professions. Despite several setbacks, transferring schools and changing majors, Denise was determined to gain a sense of competence. Likewise, she described changing majors to better meet her need for relatedness and helping others.

Mary: Introjected Regulation

For Mary, there were more external motivators than internal such as meeting her parents' expectations that she would attend college. It was ingrained in her that school was her only job; therefore, coming to college was the only option. Both of her parents also earned bachelor's degrees. She looked up to her mother as a role model because she was able to manage a full household and work full-time during her father's deployments. Mary's internal motivational drive was being

able to finish her Sociology degree early, even if she did not enjoy all her classes. She was excited to be finished in a shorter time, something she did in middle and high school as well.

Starting a Group to Increase Relatedness

Although Mary reported all three basic needs, she was personally motivated to help others like her feel that they belonged on campus. Her autonomy is showcased because even though her parents lived in the same town where she attended college, she chose to work and live separately to maintain her independence. Mary was allowed to take dual enrollment classes in high school and hoped to finish college early, which speaks to her competence. However, she desperately wanted to connect with other students and was a part of various sports and clubs. In fact, Mary wanted to start a group for students on campus who come from a military family so they could share their experiences and stay connected after graduation. The interviewer was able to connect her with Veteran services to start the process of establishing a student group.

Marie: Introjected Regulation

Marie valued school based somewhat on external influences. There were more external motivators than internal ones present in her narrative. For example,

Marie's parents told her it was "required" for her to go to college. In fact, they stated "You aren't *not* [emphasis added] going to college." Both of her parents and aunt went to college and graduated with different undergraduate and graduate degrees. Because Marie looked up to her mother and aunt as role models, she valued graduating from college more than pursuing her real passion of art. To fulfill her family's expectations, she chose to major in art education.

Processing Deployment to Meet Needs

Marie knew in 4th or 5th grade that she was good at art, so she started focusing on that subject area as a possible career. Working on her skills helped her feel competent. Marie's need for relatedness was evident by the way Marie talked about her aunt and mom. Being an only child, Marie reported that having autonomy was important to her. For example, finding and holding a job after high school graduation was an important marker of independence. Marie experienced anxiety and depression since childhood and struggled with these challenges by herself. As she got older, her feelings concerning her father's deployment evolved from ambivalence to resentment as she reflected on those times. For instance, Marie's relationship with her dad was not as close due to the length of his deployments.

Processing these feelings with friends and in therapy helped her overcome her anxiety and depression.

Jake: Introjected Regulation

Jake valued school but was externally motivated in his educational pursuits. For example, he shared that he wanted to prove to his parents and the rest of his family that he could succeed professionally. Growing up he looked up to his older brother as a role model until his brother was expelled from college. That is when Jake realized that he had to be better than his brother. His parents were an external force making him go to college without alternative options. After completing his undergraduate degree, Jake had to pursue a graduate degree because "who's to say [his older brother] will not catch up" to him. His sentiments regarding his brother indicated some ego involvement, or comparison to other as an extrinsic motivator.

Psychological Needs of the Graduate Student

Jake admired his dad, the parent who deployed, as a role model. His father was someone who got things done and Jake strived to emulate this ability. He did consider his older brother a role model until his brother was incarcerated. Throughout the interview, it was clear that he wanted to get a good job

in order to be financially self-sufficient and not reliant on anyone. In discussing his future profession of school counseling, Jake only discussed the financial stability it would offer him. Jake very much identified with his work on campus, serving as a resident assistant and later a graduate assistant for housing. He described working with residents as more fulfilling than getting good grades in graduate school. Jake found communal living on campus to be similar to living in a military community.

Arika: Introjected Regulation

Arika did not value school personally, but her commitment to get an education came from the values ingrained in her from parents and step-parents who served in the military. Her biological parents were in the Army and her dad went on to join the Marines; therefore, she had always been immersed in the military culture. Arika said multiple times during the interview that she hated school growing up but needed to go to college in order to be the best possible self that she could be. She recalled hearing the phrase it is either "boots or books" from her parents. Although Arika did not intend on joining the military, she did feel like it was always on option if school did not work out.

Maintaining Autonomy and Achieving Relatedness

Arika's mother was her role model because her mother was not required to enlist in the military, but she chose to make that sacrifice. Arika reported feeling motivated to finish school because the military emphasized perseverance. If the external forces of her parents being in the military and learning the concepts of perseverance were not present in her life, she would not be as motivated. Arika grew up in a blended family with 13 siblings and half siblings and recalled finding independence when moving away to college. Choosing the major of psychology was straightforward and to the point, like decisions in the military, according to Arika. In her mind, industrial organizational psychologists are in demand in the military, so that meant job security. Despite participating in clubs, like Jarnelle, Arika reported finding it difficult to connect with fellow students.

Dan: Identified Regulation

Dan valued school and this was made evident by his decision to return for a second degree after retiring from the military. His first degree was in exercise sports science, and at the time of the interview Dan was finishing a degree in American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting. Throughout his childhood, he was told he would have to go to college by

his father who deployed. Dan's experiences in the military motivated him to finish school because he wanted to teach other service members ASL and be a part of the deaf community. In middle and high school, he was on a "bad track." With the help of his role models (e.g.,church pastors), Dan was able to get back on the right track, do well in school, and graduate. Growing up, he was closer with his mom and his sister but was able to keep a connection with both parents after their divorce.

Need for Relatedness for a Veteran Student

His levels of autonomy and competence can be seen starting in ninth grade because he kept a job and became independent as a result of his dad's deployment. He would step up to the plate and take on more responsibility. The absence of Dan's father disrupted his family structure and left him feeling like an outsider. To regain this feeling of relatedness, Dan tried joining a gang. That was short lived, and he was able to fulfill this need with JROTC, martial arts, and eventually his own military service. At the time of the interview, Dan belonged to a religious student group, as well as the ASL club on campus. Dan's time in the military drove his passion for finishing his degree so he could go back and help other military members. When asked about internships,

Dan lamented the lack of military-focused career services on campus that could make his dream a reality.

Lauren: Identified Regulation

Lauren valued school and hoped to practice military psychology with her degree. Neither of her parents went to college; therefore, they pushed her to get a bachelor's degree. Her interest in military psychology stemmed from watching her dad and other family members' paths in their military careers. At the time of the interview, Lauren was being recruited to join the Navy and hoped to help individuals, as well as travel. She did not name a specific role model who encouraged her to finish college, but Lauren wanted to make her parents happy and live a "comfortable" lifestyle in the future. She also wanted to take advantage of the travel that a military career might require.

Staying within Military Culture to Meet Needs

Part of being comfortable meant going back to military culture. Like Arika, Lauren wanted to pursue a career that could give back to the military, a community she felt she should support. Her sense of autonomy was showcased when she wanted to go to college out of state. Lauren's desire to continue school in either clinical or industrial organizational psychology demonstrates her

need for competence. However, she expressed frustration with the lack of good advising she was able to receive. Lauren discussed how none of her professors understood the options for working for the military. When asked about career services, she said they "didn't know" the pathways either, and she resorted to speaking with the Navy recruiter.

Ashleigh: Identified Regulation

Ashleigh valued school personally and was eager to finish her physics degree. She enjoyed building and breaking down things and hoped to work for an organization like NASA one day. Both of her parents held master's degrees; therefore, not going to college was never an option. Her role model was her mom, a second-grade teacher. Overall, Ashleigh did not believe that her father's deployments affected her and cited her young age as the major factor. Her parents' education levels encouraged her to get a bachelor's degree and pursue a master's degree. In fact, Ashleigh was interning out of state at the time of the interview.

Relatedness as a Twin in College

Although Ashleigh did not believe that her father's deployment had an effect on her academic motivation, she did acknowledge that the multiple deployments disrupted her

family structure and left her relationship with her father strained. Ashleigh commented on how important her family support was to her, especially the support from her mother and twin sister. Going to school separate from her twin sister made her feel independent, autonomous. However, her sister's choice to attend college out of town left her at home with their mother and father, who live locally. Going away for the internship was a relief for Ashleigh who still felt uncomfortable around her father. To combat her feelings of being away from her twin and "stuck" at home, Ashleigh focused on the rigor of the physics degree.

Abby: Identified Regulation

Like Jarnelle and Arika, Abby's mother also gave her the choice to attend college or join the military. Because she did not enjoy relocating often, Abby decided at an early age that she would prefer to attend college. Repeatedly, she mentioned that her parents did not go to college, so it was important to them that their children have the job security a college degree affords. Abby reported seeking help along the way as a first-generation college student, "I actually got help from counselors at my school … I went around town asking questions." Abby received help from school counselors when applying to school and she researched the nursing field thoroughly before enrolling.

Competence as an English-language Learner

During her stepfather's deployment, Abby's father was also incarcerated. Abby explained, "since I was the oldest child, I had to hold it strong for the younger kids, as well." At a very young age, she "went straight to get a job" and dealt with any issues on her own. Once getting to college, Abby had to put extra effort into assignments as an English-language learner. Abby reported that college classes were so much harder than high school classes, especially while working many hours. When asked what help she sought, Abby explained that the university was not as easy to navigate as the schools on the military base. For example, she did not realize the Academic Support Center was located in the library.

Lisa: Identified Regulation

School was personally important for Lisa because she strived to do well in her academic studies. In high school, she stayed after school with a speech language pathologist to eliminate her speech problems. Lisa recalls having to work harder than the other students in order to learn the same content and skills. In college, she wanted to pursue a major that led to a career involving helping people. She acknowledged that she had to have a college degree to avoid a "back breaking" job and follow her passion. Her parents went to college and held different degrees, but when Lisa was younger her parents questioned if she could go to college. Her sister advised, "If you don't feel like going to college, you don't think that you can do it, then don't do it. Don't let other people pressure you into it."

Helping Others to Meet Needs

Throughout her interview, it was evident that school was personally important to Lisa, but it was a means to an end. She stated that her undergraduate program (psychology) was difficult and that she does not want to apply to graduate school because it sounds "awful." Finally, throughout the interview she discussed how close she is to her mother and that her mother is her role model. Even though her parents insisted on her going to college, it is her personal affiliation and drive to help others that helps her succeed in school. Growing up in a military family helped Lisa keep perspective because being in college was not like being at war. Lisa would say to herself, 'You know what? I failed this test but it's one test, I'm gonna live hopefully a very long life, and when I'm sitting on my death bed, hopefully like 102-years-old surrounded by family and grandchildren and great grandchildren, this test is not gonna mean anything to me.' Despite this strategy, Lisa did complain of struggling to regulate her emotions, especially in regard to her

mother's bipolar disorder which manifested during her father's deployment.

Sabrina: Identified Regulation

School was of upmost personal importance to Sabrina, which she ascribed to her mother's influence. Her mother always pushed education. In fact, Sabrina said that "My mom always gave 110%, so that really resonated with me." Her mom was the external motivation that began her journey of internalization. At the time of the interview Sabrina did not completely fit the category of integrated regulation because she said things like, "I lose motivation very easily if something is too tough." Sabrina described this as a "military mentality." She explained that she wanted to do hard things, just like her parents who both served overseas. In essence, she felt the need to prove her competence to others.

Challenges to Feel Competent

The need for relatedness is demonstrated in her close relationship with her mom. She says she can share anything with her mom. Even though she relied on her father when her mother was deployed (e.g., he drove her around everywhere), Sabrina regained autonomy when her mom returned from deployment. Furthermore, throughout the entire interview, it was evident how competent Sabrina felt about school. She

mentioned how she has always been in gifted classes since elementary school and that she would not do her homework unless it was challenging enough. Her competence shined through when she said, "And then I got to the International Baccalaureate Program and it just, 'Whoo!' It challenged me beyond belief and that's where I really found that I liked the challenge."

Pamela: Integrated Regulation

School was an essential aspect of Pamela's life as she began college at 17, enjoyed a career of teaching for 21 years, and was pursuing her doctorate in organizational leadership at the time of the interview. Growing up she was surrounded by education because her parents went to college and her grandmother was a school principal. Pamela shared, "I loved school. I always did." Despite her love for school and early enrollment in college, Pamela enlisted in the Army. In explaining this shift in paths, Pamela explained, "my dad probably had a little something to do with that because I just have a lot of respect for the military." In the Army, she was trained as a medical technician. She enrolled in medical school after completing her biology degree but could not continue the degree while still serving in the Reserves.

Increasing Competence as a Veteran Graduate Student

When asked about the difference between going to college before and after the military, Pamela explained that she did not have any support from faculty or advisers the first time around, "I talked to my counselors but they weren't really much help." When she completed her undergraduate degree, it was at an institution with explicit support for veteran students, "We were told, 'Take these classes.'" This removed the guess work for Pamela and simulated the military culture. After a full career as a science educator, Pamela still had a need for competence. At one point, she even helped her mother with studying for her own college courses. For this reason, Pamela enrolled in a doctoral program and was actively working on her dissertation.

Summary of Findings

In general, our analysis identified more statements of introjected regulatory behaviors (or stated motivations for behaviors) among the college student participants. Table 3 displays the summary of participants' regulatory styles and an illustrative quote from their narrative. As seen in the table, the majority of students (n = 7) provided statements about ego-related self-control as well as a mix of perceived external influences on locus of control. A

subgroup of students (n = 6) was identified as engaging in identified regulatory behaviors meaning that their statements expressed perceptions of internal locus of control and completion of tasks because of personal importance or value. One student was identified as engaging in integrated regulatory behaviors because she reported internal locus of control and completion of tasks that aligned with her sense of self (e.g., I did it because that is who I am).

Each participant expressed needing autonomy, competence, and relatedness in order to persist in college. Across all student narratives, references to the need for relatedness (n = 22) had the highest frequency and was closely followed by statements about competence (n = 20). The need for autonomy was expressed by each participant (n = 17), but not as prevalently as relatedness or competence. Across the three regulatory styles, references to the need for relatedness was the dominant need among students classified in the introjected regulatory group. Across these seven cases, social support and a feeling of belonging was an essential part of being successful in college. Participants with an identified or integrated regulatory style reported the need for competence most frequently. Because this half of the sample enjoyed academics more, they did not rely on external motivation as much as the students with introjected

motivation. Consequently, these participants craved the academic support needed to feel competent in college. Overall, the study participants reported using multiple campus resources, but also identified key aspects that were not as military friendly as they could be. In light of these findings, we present the implications in the next section.

Table 3

Participant Quotes Illustrating Regulatory Style

Style/Needs	Name	Quote
External	---	---
Introjected	Jake	"I wanted to prove that I could do something he never did… I've gone this far, who's to say he can't catch up at this point"
	Arika	"Since my mom was so emerged in the military life, it trickled down to me too. So, the perseverance, integrity, all that stuff, it's just like, "I need to go to college 'cause I need to be the best that I can be."
	Denise	"With my friends, it seems less about homework, more about personal problems and then my parents noticed it. And they're like, 'Maybe you should go into being a therapist or something … Maybe that is my calling.'"
	Jarnelle	"I like expensive things, I want to have a substantial amount of money, not saying that I need money but it's money. And I know I wanted to work with athletes so… I felt like exercise phys gave you more options."
	Mena	"She was like don't go to school just because you think that's what we want … So, I took a couple of years off and worked and I didn't go back until I knew I was ready."
	Marie	"I think watching them making their decisions not to go to college made me want to go to college, 'cause a lot of them are just staying at home still, working for pizza delivery."
	Mary	"I just felt like college was what they wanted, so I went"
Identified	Abby	"I actually got help from counselors at my school." "I went around town asking questions." "I don't wanna disappoint my parents, and I don't wanna feel like I'm wasting money either."

	Lisa	"Well, I knew that I needed to go to college in order to get a job that wasn't back breaking."
	Sabrina	"My mom always gave 110%, so that really resonated with me."
	Lauren	"I just really do like Psychology and I chose to keep it as my major."
	Ashleigh	"Well, out of highschool I knew I wanted to do something maybe with NASA … It turns out [my college] has a Physics program. So, I was like, 'Oh, I really wanna do physics.'"
	Dan	"I go introduced to the deaf community … 'Okay.' I think this is something I can put myself doing, I just need to go to school so I can learn, y'all language, that way I can communicate with you easier"
Integrated	Pamela	"I could really be a life-long student."

Discussion

Evidence of varying SDT regulatory styles was gathered from the study participants who experienced parental separation due to military deployment. According to prior studies of SDT with college students (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009), there is a range of motivational styles during the pursuit of academic goals (e.g., graduating college). However, we did not discover strictly external regulation among the college students in the sample. It was most common for students to express introjected motivation because they referenced external rewards and negative consequences as motivation rather than consciously valuing or identifying with the achievement, such as "I like expensive things, I want to have a substantial amount of money, not saying that I need money but it's money" (Jarelle). The most common type of motivational style was identified

regulation. These students felt personally invested in their education, partly due to their membership in a military family. For example, "My mom always gave 110%, so that really resonated with me" (Sabrina). On the other end of the continuum, we found some evidence of an integrated motivation for school, meaning that the student's academic achievement or interest in learning was inseparable from their self-concept. For example, the only student classified as having integrated motivation said, "I could really be a life-long student" (Pamela). The psychological needs of military dependents identified in the study indicated that an increase in awareness, intentional programming, and targeted services across the University Community could promote success and satisfaction for these students.

Parental Deployment Fostering Autonomy

Although some of these students' needs (e.g., autonomy) were reportedly being met, others, including relatedness, were not. The low frequency of statements about their need for autonomy suggests that these students had high levels of individual motivation. Their current college context was a sufficient autonomy-supportive experience. Although not traditionally included in the list of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), students who were separated from their parents due to military deployment face varying degrees of hardships, including economic struggles, divorce, and multiple relocations (Oliver & Abel, 2017). Despite these challenges, we found a common characteristic of independence and resilience among college students from military families. For example, because of her prior experience with moving multiple times throughout childhood, Denise was not deterred by transferring schools or changing majors and had addressed academic challenges with resilience. Furthermore, similar to prior research by Palmer (2008), we found that prolonged parental separation due to deployment had influenced several participants to make choices for themselves with less parental guidance. For instance, parental deployment left Jarnelle, Dan, and Abby taking on more responsibilities around the home and with siblings. This empowered them to be more "independent" when it was time to go to college.

Military Friendly Social Support to Foster Relatedness

Despite the military culture of being individually responsible for one's success, we found many instances of participants expressing a need for relatedness. Academic success was a top priority to the parents (both civilian and active duty/veteran). Participants stated that high parental expectations were communicated from an early age and never questioned the expectations to graduate from high school and college. Many of the participants also identified a parent as a role model, rather than a teacher, friend, or celebrity. The parent role models served as emotional, financial, and social supports for these students, which helped meet their need for relatedness (Mitchall & Jaeger, 2018). Specific challenges faced by students from military families include the stress of parents being deployed in war zones, reintegration of parents into civilian culture, and their fear of the death or injury of a loved one in the line of duty (Kelley, 1994; Oliver & Abel, 2017). As a result, the needs for relatedness among the military dependents in this sample could be explained by their shared military culture.

Military Culture on Campus: Student Spaces

Although participants did not directly attribute their academic success to being from a military family, we believe that carrying a shared identity, internalizing the values of military life (such as perseverance) was a factor. This sense of internalized value was expressed by participants across regulatory styles: Arika, Sabrina, and Pamela. Lisa stated her affiliation with the military helped to put academic challenges into perspective. When she encountered small setbacks, Lisa knew it was nothing compared to war. Thus, it is also possible that benefiting from veteran and active military resources make up a protective factor. This is in sharp contrast to other college students who experienced parental separation for other less "honorable" reasons (e.g., incarceration, adoption, and divorce; Arrastia-Chisholm et al., 2017). However, when the student is working in a non-military culture (e.g. civilian college) are the protective factors decreased when the shared identity is with a minority population? It is reasonable to assume that when the student is no longer in frequent daily contact with the parent or the military community that they may need additional support. For example, Abby stated not finding the campus as easy to navigate as the schools on military bases. Similarly, Mary so desperately wanted to connect with other

students from military families that she had to create her own club. Although the participants all had access to a military resource center on campus, only the two veteran students felt like it was intended for them. The other dependents, like Mary, did not know it existed until the interview.

Military-specific Counseling and Advising

The findings from this study could help promote self-determination in future college students. For example, programming and resources should be provided separate from, as well as in conjunction with, any existing veteran services. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides different resources for student veterans. For example, the VA provides a campus toolkit for faculty, staff, and administrators to help welcome these individuals by understanding their sources of trauma and needs that may require different resources in an academic setting. In addition, there are specific counseling services available to families dealing with pre- and post-deployment issues on and off base. Likewise, PK-12 school counseling services are now tailoring their services for students in military families (Cole, 2014).

Similar services should be present on university campuses in highly visible places, explicitly marketed to military-affiliated students – not just active military and veteran

students. We know that active duty and veteran students are at higher risk of post-traumatic stress symptoms and alcohol abuse as compared to other students (Nyaronga & Toma, 2015; Mitchell et al., 2017). However, counseling resources, even in a support group or peer counseling setting (Cox, 2019), could have been especially helpful for students like Mena, Marie, Ashleigh, and Lisa who spent a lot of time processing feelings of resentment, disconnection, and emotional dysregulation associated with parental deployment and its effects. Due to the separation from their parents, some individuals expressed higher levels of relatedness needs. In fact, Arika and Jarnelle both found it hard to connect with people on campus (civilians) as compared to their military families and communities. Therefore, we recommend support groups and common spaces (Haynes, 2014), like the one Mary started creating, to help meet this need. Housing communities for military students, similar to the ROTC Living-learning communities (Haynes, 2014), could further meet these students' need for relatedness. Jake likened his experience living on campus and serving in Residence Life to living in a military community. This could be one missing link that could help military dependents and veteran college students alike feel more connected on campus.

In terms of other student support services, military career counseling could have shortened the paths of veteran students, like Dan and Pamela. The unique challenges of veteran students are being addressed in veteran student centers but should also be targeting in career counseling centers (Miles, 2014). However, military dependents may need to be considered when being counseled or advised about career planning. For example, military-informed advising could have benefited students like Arika and Lauren, who specifically wanted to pursue careers in the military. Both of them wanted to give back to the community from which they benefitted. Lauren could not get information or internships connected to the military from her advisor and resorted to joining the Navy as a means of getting more information.

Support from Faculty and Staff

Prior research indicates the necessity of military learners' feelings of institutional belonging, but research is limited on the realities and experiences of these students (Ford & Vignare, 2014). Instructors may also consider how these needs are being met in the classroom for students who identify as military dependents or veterans (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Particularly, students with military associations may experience challenges in transitioning from service and

a base environment or community to a college campus and community. As such, faculty need to develop competency in how to best support these students and guide them in their academic endeavors. Although faculty may be unable to identify if students are military dependents unless the student provides this information, faculty are able to engage in professional development focused on how to better support these students. Dillard and Yu (2018) suggested that faculty are able to participate in faculty development focused on developing empathy and an understanding that students with military associations may experience in establishing mentors and advocates on their college campuses. Further, Dillard and Yu (2016) outlined military cultural competence professional development trainings should encompass topics that include available campus resources, academic transitions and challenges experienced, deployments, PTSD, and realistic scenarios that faculty may encounter with teaching military students. Institutions need to provide a united front that is focused on developing learning environments that support the unique characteristics of this minority student population. Faculty and staff also need to foster veteran students' success as a community effort in order to create a military friendly campus (Dillard & Yu, 2016). By more effectively training faculty and staff to

work with students' military associations, they should be able to provide mentorship and guidance to ensure student success and retention. Faculty and staff who have undergone such training report feeling empowered to better assist military active, dependent, and veteran students (Gibbs et al., 2019).

Implications for Research

Future studies should explore these themes using a larger sample and consider individual differences, such as age at parental deployment, military branch, as well as other parental factors, like gender and number of deployments. For example, research suggests that more challenges are faced by children when the mother is deployed (Southwell et al., 2016). Additionally, we would like to explore the protective factors of military culture in terms of academic success. Are military cultural norms (e.g. stoicism, self-reliance, perseverance, explicit expectations) related to greater academic success among college students from military families? Likewise, what barriers does military culture create for academic success? Once those factors are concretely identified, the effectiveness of interventions to support students can be explored. We expect further research will help to explain the greater need for relatedness for this population of college students. Particularly, given that our research found that many

participants described a need for relatedness in order to succeed in their academic studies. Participants discussed relatedness as in regard to their familial connections and activities on campus. However, to ensure that students feel better supported in classes and on campus experiences, faculty need to have more trainings and understandings of military cultural competence.

Conclusion

According to SDT, if the University Community can help meet the needs of the military students on campus, they will be more internally motivated to learn and persist to graduation. When examining the three basic needs of relatedness, competence, and autonomy, the highest need identified most frequently among participants was relatedness. The participants were able to relate to and be successful in their relationships with their parents, friends, and other family. Regulatory styles were moderately externally regulated with the most common regulatory style in the sample being introjected motivation. Institutions of higher education should consider the implications for practice when serving military dependents as part of an ever increasingly diverse student population. In particular, faculty need to consider military dependents' motivational styles in order to better serve their students. Likewise, future research could explore to what extent current policies and practices within higher education thwart motivation and self-regulation for academic success among military-related populations.

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