

MILITARY YOUTH INVOLVED IN A 4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM AND
THEIR LEVELS OF CONNECTION TO PEERS, PARENTS, AND THE 4-H PROGRAM

By

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To my wonderful, supportive, and encouraging family

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School
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Military youth often struggle to make positive connections with peers because their families are constantly required to move. This constant moving also puts a strain on the connection between the parents and the adolescent. Positive connection to both peers and parents as well as a youth development program can lead to many positive outcomes. These include less drug use, less teen pregnancy and contributions to society. Therefore, this study is focused on determining whether or not involvement in positive youth development (PYD) program helps military youth develop better connections to their peers, parents, and the PYD program; and if so, does the level of involvement play a role in the level of connection. This study uses an adapted version of Armsden and Greenberg's Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment and an adapted version of Goodenow's school connection questionnaire. Questionnaires are completed by adolescents of active-duty military personnel living on military installations. The participants are between ages 8-18 and participate at some level in the 4-H program on the installation. The youth were divided into three different levels of involvement, low, medium, and high involvement. There was a significant difference between the low and high involvement groups for both peer and program connection but not parent

connection. These results could be because the adolescents should have been divided into two groups and not three. This would follow the results of previous research done on military youth. Therefore, we can conclude that despite being involved in a positive youth development program the youth fall into one of two groups, one group that does well and a group that does not do so well. This confirms previous research done with military youth. These findings are significant in that PYD programs do make a difference by helping to increase connections to peers, parents, and the program. We also know that connection to the program is positively correlated to the parent connection. Further research is needed to see what specific aspects of the program increase these levels of connection and ways to implement these aspects in other PYD programs.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Military youth is a population that has not been studied much until recently. The wars with Afghanistan and Iraq have not only drawn much attention to those who directly serve; servicemen and women but also to those who indirectly serve; their families. Military families are being re-stationed every two to three years. Thus children have to continuously move and continuously work to build new friendships. However, just as soon as children in military families begin to establish strong friendships they must relocate and start all over. Not only does the constant moving affect peer relationships but can affect connection to school and the community. Why become attached to a school if you will just have to leave in it a few years? Why become connected with a community if you are going to move away from it in two years? It is no wonder then that after several years military children begin to withdraw and not make friends or connect to their school or community. It is also easy to understand how this could negatively affect the family; the children could begin to resent their parents and see them as the reason for their constant moving. This could in turn start to affect the child's connection to the family.

It is not a far leap then to place military youth in the category of at-risk youth. At-risk youth are also frequently disconnected from the communities (Tidewell & Garret, 1994). At risk youth who are disconnected from their communities also have a higher likelihood of dropping out of school (Tidewell & Garret, 1994). When a child does not feel particularly connected to any group of individuals they are more likely to seek attention and positive reinforcement from antisocial youth and adults. Often times this can lead to risky behavior and involvement in delinquent activity. This risk and

delinquent behavior can range anywhere from illegal drug use, theft, vandalism to gang and sexual activity. Also, low levels of connection can also lead to low levels of academic aspiration because of low connection to school and teachers (Wyrick & Howell, 2004). We know from previous research that being connected to school offers strong protective factors, such as a higher percentage of high school graduation (Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004). Disengagement from one's school and community is also linked with higher rates of homelessness in youth (Heinze, Jozefowic, & Toro, 2010). Not only does this disengagement lead to more negative outcomes, such as homelessness, it also leads to repeated lower levels of exposure to positive peers and adults, resulting in less interpersonal supports (Heinze et al., 2010). Lack of support from peers and parents has also been associated with other negative outcomes like substance abuse (Chew, Osseck, Raygor, Eldridge-Houser, & Cox, 2010).

As previously discussed these tendencies for youth to detach and be disconnected from others can lead to social isolation and delinquent behavior. Obviously either of these options is less than ideal. Programs for youth that provides positive connection with peers and adults and encouragement to pursue positive future goals can promote positive youth development and prevent social isolation and risky behavior.

A youth development program based on Positive Youth Development theory is an excellent way to combat military children's tendency to withdraw and become disconnected from school, peers, community, and family members. Positive Youth Development or PYD is a theory that focuses on the strengths of youth and applies knowledge of those strengths or assets by fostering their growth. Developmental assets

predict PYD outcomes which can be broken down into five main categories known as the 5 C's (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittan, Lerner, & Lerner, 2010). These five C's are as follows, Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character, and Caring. The idea behind PYD is that you should strive to strengthen and build youth assets and result PYD outcomes of a well rounded individual. According to the Search Institute, there are a total of 40 assets that youth can possess within these five main categories. One survey found that the average number of assets that a youth possess is eighteen; this is less than even half of the possible assets youth can have (Chew et al., 2010). Assets can be broken down into internal and external factors. Internal factors are thoughts that the youth have about themselves and their abilities, such as being proud of who they are. External assets, however, have to deal with how youth view others around them, such as mentors or caregivers. One thing that youth with external assets have is a feeling that they can approach their mentor or caregiver with any problem they have (Howse, Diehl, & Trivette, 2010). Chew et al. (2010) told us that these assets are actually a more accurate prediction of at-risk behaviors than demographic factors. However, for the purposes of this research proposal we will only look at Connection as it is very closely related to social isolation and because the idea of connection is something that military children are likely to struggle with. When a youth has strong connections it means that the child has positive bonds with people, such as peers, family members, and community members (Bowers, et al., 2009, Lerner et al., 2005; Roth & Brooks-Gunn, 2003).

When a child is well connected to friends they feel as if they have friends that care about them and friends who would help them if they were in a bad situation (King,

Dowling, Mueller, White, Schultz, Osborn, et al., 2005; Pittman, Irby, & Ferber, 2001;). When a youth feels connected to the community they feel that community members (1) view them as important, (2) care about them, and (3) willing to help youth as well as other adults. These are all important things for military youth to feel connected to in order to become a well developed individual and not become an at-risk youth. PYD programs have been shown to increase self efficacy, feelings of acceptance as well as increasing mastery and thus increasing participation in PYD programs (Heinze et al., 2010). Research has found that youth who receive support, boundaries, empowerment, positive values as well as constructive use of time, and a commitment to learning have more positive outcomes than youth who do not receive these things (Chew et al., 2010).

Positive youth development programs influence positive outcomes for at-risk youth, including lower: tobacco use, alcohol and drug use; and violence (Howse, Diehl, & Trivette, 2010). On the other hand youth who participate in positive youth development programs tend to have higher levels of school success, better physical health, prosocial behavior, leadership skills and helping others (Howse et al., 2010). 4-H is an excellent way for youth to receive all of these things and more. Youth receive support from volunteers as well as empowerment as they successfully complete different projects. From previous research we know that when youth are a part of something that makes them feel important with the guidance of an older adult that is not a family member, levels of connection start to go up (Thomson & Zand, 2010).

Military youth struggle to make friends and connect with their peers when their parents are reassigned to another installation. Youth centers on the installations try to combat this struggle by providing youth a place they can go to hang out with others their

age. 4-H has partnered with the military to provide even more ways for youth to connect to their peers. Therefore, I am interested to find out if involvement in a 4-H program affects an individual's level of connection to their parents, peers, and the program itself. Furthermore, I would like to find out if the more involved (i.e. participates in more activities and completes more projects) a youth becomes do they subsequently become more connected to their peers, parents, and the program. Also I am interested to find out whether the variables of peer, parent, and program connection are positively correlated. Said another way, does a youth's connection to their peers affect their connection to their parents? Also, does a youth's connection to the 4-H program affect their connection to both their parents and peers?

Definitions

- **POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)**- PYD is a theory that states all youth are at-risk yet have the potential to become well rounded, productive, contributing members of society as youth and later as adults. All youth have developmental assets, some more than others, and all have the potential to acquire more assets. There are five main areas of PYD outcomes as follow: Connection, Character, Competence, Confidence and Caring. The constructs are interconnected and when one is strengthened others are strengthened as well.
- **THE 5 C'S**- The 5 C's are the 5 main constructs or asset areas of the PYD theory. They are Connection, Character, Competence, Confidence and Caring.
- **POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM(S)**- PYD programs are youth centered programs that are specifically designed to increase the assets in the five main areas of the PYD theory. They can take on many different styles and looks as far as programs go. Some programs use structured activities to increase assets while other programs use a more laid back approach.
- **MILITARY YOUTH**- In chapter one and two military youth refers to any child that has at least one parent serving in the military. This service can be either active or reserve duty and involves all branches. For chapters three, four, and five, military youth specifically refers to youth with at least one parent serving in the military and that is currently living on a military installation in the state of Florida.
- **4-H**- 4-H is a PYD program in which students participate in structured activities of their choice which are specifically designed to increase assets in the 5 C's.

Activities that the youth participate in range anywhere from agricultural, to science, to the arts.

- INSTALLATION-The physical location in which active duty service members and their families live. Different branches have different names for them, the Army refers to them as Posts and the Air Force refers to them as Bases. Therefore, the universal term used for all of the military is installation.

Hypotheses

1. Three groups will differ significantly, p-value (≤ 0.05) with regard to peer connection, with the highly involved group having the highest Peer connection.
2. Three groups will differ significantly, p-value (≤ 0.05) with regard to parent connection, with the highly involved group having the highest parent connection.
3. Three groups will differ significantly, p-value (≤ 0.05) with regard to program connection, with the highly involved group having the highest program connection.
4. The variable of parent connection, peer connection, and program connection will be positively correlated.

CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter 2 focuses on three main areas of research. There will be a review of the research on military youth as they are the population that this thesis addresses. The second area of research reviewed is PYD research, this is the grounding theory for this thesis and it recently being applied to military youth was of great interest in the writing of this thesis. Social connection is the one construct from the five embedded in PYD theory that I am addressing in this thesis. Despite the fact that social connection is part of the PYD theory, there has been much research done on the benefits of social connection. Therefore, a portion of the literature review will be done on social connection and its benefits.

Military Youth Literature Review

While there has been a recent influx of attention placed on the military family and thus the military child; there still remains limited research on the subject (Barber & Schluterman, 2008; MacDermid, Samper, Schwarz, Nisbida, & Nyaronga, 2008; Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2010). The research we do have seems to either be incomplete in nature or offers conflicting information. Research done in the 1970's found that military children tended to have higher rates of psychopathology, however, a recent report showed that military children in fact, have less psychopathology than non-military children. Yet another report stated that there is no difference between military children, and non-military children in relation to psychopathology (Barber & Schluterman, 2008). Other researchers believed that military children had poor interpersonal development because they were constantly moving and unable to establish strong bonds to individuals for any length of time (Orthner et al., 1989; Shaw, 1987). On the other hand

others argue that the constant moving was exactly why military youth had stronger interpersonal development than non-military youth (Marchant & Medway, 1987; Shumaker & Stokols, 1982).

An article on military children discusses resilience among military children as well as the entire military family. The authors first discussed resiliency, stating that previous research had focused more on identifying the deficits that were present in individuals (MacDermid, Samper, Schwarz, Nishida & Nyaronga, 2008). However, more current research has started looking at assets or individual strengths that a person possesses instead of their deficits (MacDermid, et al., 2008; Tedeschi & Kilmer, 2005). MacDermid et al., (2008) go on to explain that in order for there to be resiliency there must first be some type of stressor. Therefore, one could argue that all military children, especially today's military children with the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are one step closer to being resilient than similar SES non-military children. However, the authors also point out that resiliency was originally thought to be more of a personality trait. Current research has shown factors such as parenting and non-family adults can and do play a large role in an individual's resilience (Benson, 2006; MacDermid et al., 2008). It has also been shown that while a deficit filled environment can have severe negative impacts on the development of a child, it is possible to buffer these negative impacts with a positive environment that provides support and nurturance to an individual (MacDermid, et al., 2008). Military children experience parental deployment and long parental work hours or training which require parental absence on a regular basis. This would be considered a chronic stressor by most individuals. Combat deployment can cause even more stress on a family as the remaining parent essentially becomes a

single parent and now has to deal with the stress and daily activities that two people once managed. This can lead to a more deprived environment for the child(ren) as the remaining parent is being pulled in many more directions and the surrounding families on the installation are experiencing the same stress. When parents feel that they are able to handle the stress they are more likely to transmit similar coping behaviors and attitudes to their children (Walsh 2007 as cited in MacDermid et al., 2008). While children (ages 4-11) may struggle more and thus are more vulnerable during parent deployments, adolescents (12-18) seem to fare much better comparatively. However, there is a difference between groups of adolescents; adolescents who confide their feelings to peers, parents, or other non family adults show greater levels of resilience and coping than do those who tend to keep their feelings to themselves (Huebner & Mancini, 2005 as cited in MacDermid et al., 2008). On the other hand, for families, it has been found that the best way to create resilience in the parents and couple is to have programs that initially focus more on the child(ren). When the programs come at it from the angle of “this is best for the child” more parents are willing to participate. After they have started the program the participants then move onto sessions that deal with building resilience and coping mechanisms in relation to their role as a parent and spouse (MacDermid et al., 2008).

Much is known about the effects deployment has on service members but much less is known about the effects it has on their families (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007). Currently there are more spouses and children (military dependents) than there are active duty and reserve service members (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007). Couple this with the fact that our service members are stretched thinner than they have ever been before

and that limited resources means longer deployments and greater mental stress on our service members; it is no surprise then that their dependents are also experiencing mental distress. As previously stated, during the 1970s it was thought that military children had higher levels of psychopathology compared to similar SES non-military children. More recent research has not supported this claim (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007). Research on children during Operation Desert Storm (ODS) did show levels of increased depressive symptoms and sadness but rarely, if ever, did it reach a pathological level (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007). It is also not known the impact that mental and physical injuries returning service members have incurred have on the family or children. The impact is likely a great one. Also, families of reservists may experience even more psychological distress than families of an active duty service member. Active duty service members and their families are more accustomed to long periods of separation, due to training exercises, and there is a built-in community of support on and around the installation. However, reservist families are not as used to long periods of separation and are often in civilian communities that do not understand what the family is experiencing. This makes deployments even more difficult as the family is not only adjusting to a new family structure but often lack a social support system. Regardless of what we do know, there is still a vast amount to be learned. Therefore, much more research needs to be done on what the impacts of deployment are and the best methods for helping families, and especially the children cope with deployment (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007).

Military children are required to move frequently; it is simply part of being a military dependent. However, this does not mean that it does not come without complications

and difficulties. Military children who frequently move have a harder time making friends, and have more emotional and educational difficulties than children who do not move frequently (Finkel, Kelley & Ashby, 2003). These difficulties seem to affect adolescents and children just entering school more so than any other age group (Finkel et al., 2003). Despite the associated difficulties with frequent moving, youth who move more are also more likely to participate in social activities (Finkel et al., 2003). However, if for some reason the adolescent does not become involved in social activities and therefore experiences a delay in making friends the adolescent is more likely to experience symptoms of depression and feelings of loneliness (Finkel et al., 2003). On the other hand, there are some external factors that play a major role in the successful adjustment of an adolescent after a move, two of these being mothers' lowered depression and higher marital satisfaction (Childs et al., 1994). There are some areas that are particularly important to military youth when measuring their adjustment and well being after a move. These include peer relations, social anxiety, self-esteem, and loneliness (Finkel et al., 2003). Finkel et al. (2003) found that adolescents' positive relationships with their mothers served as a protective factor against feelings of loneliness when military youth moved to a new location. Also it was found when families enjoyed spending time together their teens were less likely to feel insecure and have higher levels of self-esteem (Finkel et al., 2003).

Medway and Marchant (1987) found some interesting results in their study measuring achievement and well being in military families. They found a correlation between school and the total number of life moves among military youth. Another words, the more times a child had moved the more poorly they tended to do in school.

They also found that the more times a child moved the more likely they were to get involved in social activities, that is unless the adolescent had moved more than five hundred miles. The authors then go on to make a rather bold statement saying that military families do not suffer any damage to their well-being after a move and, in fact, that the frequent moving is what makes it easier for them. While this particular study did not find any negative effects of relocation in their specific military population I believe that it is unfair and slightly naive to make this generalization to every military family.

Mmari, Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, and Blum (2010) recently did a study on military youth and the effects if any that social connections have on the well being of the youth and their families. The authors start out discussing differences between military and non-military youth and point out that some authors have found no difference or better results among military youth (Marchant & Medway, 1987). Other studies have shown that military children have more behavior problems in school (Cantwell, 1974; Werkman, 1992). Yet other researchers have found little to no difference in behavior problems between military and civilian youth (Jensen, Xeanakis, Wolf, Degroot, & Bain, 1991; Morrison, 1981; White, 1976). However other research has found that military youth were found to be at a greater risk for involvement in risky behaviors because of the frequent moving in addition to all of the other stressors associated with adolescence (Catalano et al., 2004).

Therefore, Mmari et al., (2010) were curious to find out how social connections played a role in adolescents' lives as well as their parents' and how these connections could be used to create coping mechanisms. Despite years of research on military youth the results still seem inconclusive as to whether or not military children have more

problems than civilian youth (Mmari et al., 2010). Some researchers believe that when military youth are exposed to smaller stressors such as relocation it builds their ability to handle larger stressors such as a parent being deployed (Rutter, 1993). To further explore the role of social connections in military youth Mmari et al. (2010) conducted eleven focus groups that covered the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marines. Youth participants had to be enrolled in a public school that served the selected installation, had at least one parent that served at the installation and had experienced at least one military related move. Likewise, the parents had to have a child enrolled in a public school that served the selected installation (Mmari et al., 2010). The third group of participants were teachers or other school employees that worked in the public school serving the selected military installation.

One of the biggest reported stressors was that of constant moving. Some youth stated that it was difficult to make friends because most of the moves occurred in the middle of the school year, after all the other students had met each other and made their groups. Parents reported that their children took the moves differently. One mother talked about how her daughter just thrived on the moves while her son becomes more and more withdrawn with each move. Another adolescent stated that she never unpacks anything from boxes anymore because she will just have to pack them back up again. The second biggest stressor for the group was parental deployment. Adolescents were constantly worrying about their deployed parent and whether or not they are safe while in Iraq or Afghanistan. Not only was the deployment itself difficult and stressful but the period of readjustment after the parent returns is also difficult (Mmari et al., 2010). The youth stated that they themselves had been through a lot and had changed and

were unable to relate to their parent like they used to. One coping strategy that came up often between the parent and youth participants was that of living on a military installation (Mmari et al., 2010). The military base provided them with security so the parents did not have the added stress of wondering where their child was and the child knew where they could go and where they could not go. Also, living on a military installation provides an instant community. Youth and parents are surrounded by other families who are experiencing the same set of stressors and worries. School personnel are aware of the difficulties facing military youth and they know that one of the biggest struggles for military youth is making connections with other youth (Mmari et al., 2010).

Therefore, several schools have programs in place that help youth make connections with their peers faster. One such program is the “student-to-student” in which the guidance counselor pairs an existing student up with a new student. The existing student then shows the new student around campus, introduces them to other students, and eats with the new student during lunch. Overall, this study found some interesting results. First it found that the things that often cause the most stress for military children are also the things that make them more resilient and self sufficient (Mmari et al., 2010). They also found that social connection does in fact play a large role in the reduction of stress and an increase in coping mechanisms. All of the youth reported that being able to connect with other military youth proved to be a huge stress relief when they were forced to move because of another assignment (Mmari et al., 2010). It is recommended that more research be done in the area of social connection to see what types of programs are the best at creating social connections among youth.

Research shows us that parental deployment affects adolescents differently than it does small children (Mmari et al., 2008). There are several reasons for this difference; some are specific to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan whereas others are specific to the developmental stage the adolescent is in. For example, both Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Afghan Freedom (OAF) are hotly debated in the nation. Adolescents have more exposure to media through the internet and news media outlets, meaning they are more exposed to conflicting opinions about the war and negative views about military involvement overseas. This, in turn, causes the adolescent turmoil as they try to make sense of different opinions and establish their own opinion independent from that of their parents' (Mmari, Roche, Sudhinaraset, & Blum, 2009). Another reason that adolescents are affected differently by parental deployment than younger children is because adolescents have a better understanding of what deployment means and the associated risks (Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass & Grass, 2007). Some of these associated risks are permanent bodily injury, permanent brain damage, and death. Adolescents are more able to process and understand the risks that their parent is facing. Therefore, this causes distress and possible problems with their peers, school, and remaining parent while the military parent is deployed.

Social Connection Literature Review

While the study specifically focuses on social connection within the context of positive youth development theory, social connections garnered enough attention and research in the academic world that it deserves an in-depth look in this chapter. The following definition is a clear and concise portrayal of how social connectedness is applied in this study: "social connectedness, or the psychological state of belonging, as

occurring when individuals perceive that they are cared for, acknowledged, trusted, and empowered within a given context” (Mmari et al., 2010). As Mmari et al. (2010) point out most research on social connection deals with early connections between babies, family members, and other primary caregivers, however, this leaves out the rest of an individual’s life. It ignores the other connections they made as a children, adolescents or as they move toward adulthood. All of the connections made during these different stages of the lifetime have an impact on who the individual becomes.

Despite the multiple studies touting the advantages of connectedness in adolescence, Barber and Schluterman (2008) make the point that there is not a lot of consensus on the definition of connectedness. First the authors discuss that because connectedness has been applied to so many different areas, such as family, peers, school, parents, and even to communities, it is difficult to have one definition that fits all of these different relationships. Secondly, the adolescents’ relationships can be either with individuals such as family or peers or with institutions such as school or the local government. They further break down the way connectedness is looked at and defined in the general research. They explain connectedness as a property of a relationship system which means that it has two components, mutuality and permeability (Barber & Schluterman (2008). This is often found in the parent-adolescent connectedness with statements such as “mutual respect and trust,” is often said to be ideal between the parent and child. The second is connectedness as the liking of or performance in an environment or relationship. This type of connectedness looks at how much a youth likes their environment, which is most often school, by assessing how close they feel to other students and teachers as well as a general connection and sense of belonging to

the school. School connection also be measured by assessing the adolescents' attitudes towards the importance of school and doing well overall. The third type of connectedness is connectedness as the possession of feeling/attitude states. This type of connectedness is most often used when measuring community connectedness and is based on the emotional state of the adolescent and their sense of belonging. The fourth type of connectedness is connectedness as a mix of states and antecedent behaviors. While less clearly defined this type of connectedness is based on the feelings of the adolescent, i.e. feelings of closeness to others or feelings of satisfaction with their relationship with others.

Barber and Schluterman (2008) go on to explain that there is also confusion surrounding the idea of connectedness because of the interchangeability of terms that researchers of connectedness often use. For example connectedness researchers frequently use attachment in place of connection, however, most attachment researchers do not use the term connectedness interchangeably and often their measures of attachment do not match up with the measures of connectedness. Another example of term confusion is found when looking at parental connectedness. The term parental bond is frequently used, however, much like attachment, the items used to measure parental bond are not the same items used to measure parental connectedness.

Barber and Schluterman (2008) then point out that there are two over arching themes among the vast and sometimes contradictory research. One of the themes is the relationship aspect; that youth have a "connection or bond that youth experience with socializing agents" (p. 211). The second theme is an independent aspect, which is

the “degree to which youth feel that their individuality is validated or supported by their socialization agents” (p.211). The authors suggest that this is where connectedness research should go in the future as these two aspects of connectedness research are reoccurring and have a theoretical background. The theoretical background for relationships is the attachment theory by Bowlby and Ainsworth (Barber & Schluterman, 2008) and autonomy or the independence aspect found in the Self-Determination theory.

In conclusion, Barber and Schluterman (2008) stated that the recent focus on connectedness and its emotional and physical benefits for adolescents has been fruitful. However, the term “connectedness” still needs greater clarification. One of their suggestions is that authors simply lay out their definition of connectedness at the beginning of their research, thus eliminating any ambiguity that might exist. They also suggested that researchers begin with a broad scope of the theoretical concepts they are using to define connectedness down to the specific research they are using to create the operationalized definition.

Authors Boutelle, Eisenberg, Gregory, and Neumark-Sztainer (2009) follow some of Barber and Schulterman’s (2008) recommendations. For example when explaining their definition of parent/child connectedness Boutelle et al. (2009) explain that their definition is based on Attachment theory. They go on to explain that while connectedness may have roots in Attachment Theory, it is based more on a bi-directional relationship of the parent and child making equal contributions to the relationship. Boutelle et al., (2009) use the phrase “reciprocal dynamic relationship” to explain the uniqueness of the parent/child connection. Attachment and connectedness

have been associated with more well adjusted adolescents in the emotional, cognitive, and social spheres of development (Boutelle et al., 2009). Parent/child connectedness has been negatively associated with lower rates of depression and suicide as well as positively associated with self-esteem. Boutelle et al., (2009) conducted the first longitudinal study looking at parent/child connectedness and the effects it has on an adolescent's internalizing behaviors such as depression and body image. They found that strong parent/child connectedness was associated with decreased depression and increased self-esteem for both males and females and increased body satisfaction for females. The findings from this research confirmed previous research and therefore we know that high levels of parent/child connectedness serve as a protective factor against depressive symptoms, low levels of self-esteem, and low body image.

Ackard, Neumark-Sztainer, Story, and Perry (2006) also looked at the parent/child connectedness and the effects it has and on a child's behavioral and emotional health. As previously mentioned high levels of parent/child connectedness have been associated with lower levels of suicides attempts and overall emotional distress but Ackard et al., (2006) also report that these high levels of connectedness are also associated with lower alcohol and marijuana use as well as increased age at first sexual intercourse. Teens also reported lower levels of anxiety and greater feelings of self-worth when they were highly connected to their parents. Highly connected teens are more likely to ask their parents, specifically their mother, questions about healthcare (Ackard et al., 2006). Thus, highly connected teens are more likely to get important health related information from a parent who can offer reliable, correct information versus the teen getting the information from the internet or a misinformed friend. Ackard

et al., (2006) expand on the previous research of parent/child connectedness by increasing the ethnic and socioeconomic diversity in this study. Their study confirmed previous research by showing that when adolescents feel that they can talk to their parents about serious decisions, general problems and that their parents care for them adolescents have better behavioral and emotional health. This study added to the research by demonstrating a significant relationship between parent/child connectedness and a “broad range of serious behavioral and emotional health risk behaviors” (Ackard et al., 2006, p.62). One finding that is of particular interest is that youth value the opinion of their parents more than their peers when making serious decisions. Also, it appears that valuing their parents’ opinion is a protective factor against unhealthy behaviors. Another interesting finding was that when there was a perceived increase in communication regardless of whether it was with the mother or father there was also an increase in the adolescent’s well-being. The researchers also suggest that it may be even more beneficial for the adolescent if there is open communication with both parents. The researchers then go on to make suggestions on how to increase parent/child communication. Their first suggestion is that family sit down to dinner together more often, this allows for an uninterrupted span of time for parents and children to discuss important issues that are happening in the adolescent’s life. They also suggested that programs targeting youth should look for ways to include the parent(s) in different activities and teach parents how to better communicate with their child.

In Armsden and Greenberg’s study (1987) the article starts out discussing the previous research done on infants and their parents by Bowlby and Ainsworth. They

then move onto adolescent and the two main types of relationships found during this time. One is the relationship between the adolescent and their parents and one is between the adolescent and their peers. They discuss not only what these relationships typically look like but how they influence the psychological well-being of an individual. For example at the beginning of the article the authors make the statement that “human beings at any age are most well-adjusted when they have confidence in accessibility and responsiveness of a trusted other” (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987, p. 428). First, we’ll discuss what Armsden and Greenberg (1987) found in the relationship between the parent and adolescent. One of the first things that Armsden and Greenberg (1987) stated was that adolescents cope better with challenges and become more independent when the relationship with their parents contains elements of trust, mutual respect, and good rapport. There is also a strong, stable connection between perceptions of warm, trusting relationships with parents and self-esteem. These warm relationships go on to influence individuals even when they go to college. Warm relationships with parents are associated with greater self-disclosure tendencies and higher levels of ego-identity (Armsden and Greenberg, 1987).

It has also been found that peer connectedness can have as large an impact on an adolescent as parent connectedness. Adolescents seek out their peers for connectedness when under duress and have feelings of anxiety when they are unavailable as well as feelings of comfort when in their company. Also these feelings are only found when the bond to a peer is perceived as emotionally significant (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). While adolescents may not be older or more experienced than their peers they are able to support and encourage the adolescent’s

assumption of growth-promoting challenges. The support received from both peers and parents is associated with greater psychological well-being. Both peer and parent connectedness are associated with higher levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction (Armsden & Greenberg, 1987).

Armsden and Greenberg's (1987) findings support the previous research that stated parent and peer connectedness is positively associated with overall well-being, specifically self-esteem and life satisfaction. Some of their unique findings include that connectedness also negatively predicted adolescents' depression/anxiety and resentment/alienation scores. Adolescents with high security connectedness to their parents and peers were very well adjusted and had higher than average self-esteem levels.

Not only has there been research done on the benefits of parent and peer connectedness but also on the benefits of school connectedness. School connectedness, which Loukas, Roalson and Herrera (2010) define as "students' experiences of belonging to and closeness with others at school" has been linked to fewer externalizing behavior problems. Such externalizing behavior problems include alcohol use, violence, early onset of sexual activity, cigarette and marijuana use, running away from home, and destroying other people's property (Loukas et al., 2010). Also, when an adolescent is connected to school they are more likely to try and meet society's expectations and thus show fewer externalizing behaviors. Loukas et al. (2010) were interested in whether or not school connectedness played a moderating effect on the problem behaviors of adolescents who had experienced low levels of positive socialization experiences provided by the family. They were also interested in

the effects of school connectedness on effortful control. Loukas et al. (2010) confirmed their hypotheses with the data. School connectedness more effectively predicted behavior problems than did negative family relations, gender, baseline conduct problems, or effortful control. School connectedness was also found to act as a buffer to negative family interactions.

There are several benefits associated with school connectedness; likewise, there are several risk factors when an adolescent is disconnected from their school. One of these risk factors is that of dropping out of school. When a student does not feel that they are valued or connected to a community in a meaningful way then it becomes difficult to sustain academic engagement and commitment (Goodenow, 1993). Likewise, students who do feel accepted by school adults but socially isolated from their peers are more likely to drop out of school. Goodenow (1993) uses two similar ideas to create her definition of school connectedness. The first is the “students’ sense of belonging or psychological membership in the school or classroom, that is, the extent to which students feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment” (p.80). She combined this definition with another one that also deals with the school adults and the rules and norms that govern a school. School connectedness in the second definition means that “students have established a social bond between themselves, the adults in the school, and the norms governing the institution” (Goodenow, 1993, p. 80). While the most ideal environment for school connectedness is one characterized by mutual respect between peers and the teachers, some students are still socially marginalized because of things such as a learning disability or being an ethnic minority.

Goodenow (1993) had several interesting findings in her study. The first is that overall, girls tended to have higher rates of social connectedness than did boys. It was also found that connectedness is not just a result of the school environment but a combination of personal characteristics and school environment. For example, a person may be open and good at making friends but if the school environment shuts them out, then they are still going to struggle to fit in and make friends with their peers (Goodenow, 1993). However, it is vitally important that we try to increase school connectedness as this type of connectedness is strongly associated with an increase in both expectations of school success and students' belief in the value of their academic work.

While it may seem that having a section on school connectedness is unusual or does not fit into this research paper, it is the belief of the researcher that it is possible to use school connectedness, and the measurements associated with school connectedness, to measure program connectedness in this particular study. 4-H clubs are often more structured in the way they do activities and therefore, somewhat resemble a classroom. In 4-H there are volunteers that the adolescents may become connected too, much like a student teacher relationship and the adolescents also develop relationships with their peers. Thus, adapting school connectedness inventories would make the most sense for measuring a fairly new idea like program connectedness.

Jose and Pryor (2010) make an interesting point when they state that most previous research done on connectedness has focused on the risk factors associated with a lack of connectedness. However, little research has been done on the positive

effects of connectedness. Some of the negative effects associated with low connectedness include aggressiveness, drug use, and psychological distress. Youth who report high levels of connectedness also report lower levels of maladjustment. The little research that has been done on the positive effects of social connectedness on youth show that some of these effects include hope, coping skills, optimism, happiness, and life satisfaction. Because of the little research done on the positive effects of social connectedness Jose and Pryor (2010) decided to conduct a longitudinal study looking at the effects of family, peer, school, and community connectedness on an adolescent's development and well-being. The results Jose and Pryor (2010) found confirmed their belief that "feeling connected satisfies a fundamental psychological need..."(p.34). Family connectedness was an exceptionally strong predictor of well-being but well-being did not predict family connectedness. It was also found that family and school connectedness better predicted feelings of well-being than did community or peer connectedness. It is possible that this is the case because the relationship between one's school and one's family members is more stable than relationships between peers and the community. Adolescents frequently change peers and therefore their influence on the adolescent changes; likewise, a community has an ever changing stream of members to exert influence over an adolescent (Jose & Pryor, 2010). From the findings it seems that the community is least likely to have an effect on an adolescent's well-being. This does not mean that community does not play a role in adolescents' well-being, it simply means that adolescents are more like to trust and be supported by family members and peers.

Hendry and Reid (2000) studied connectedness in a population that has not received as much attention. They focused on adolescents living in rural areas. These adolescents make an interesting population to study because their location sometimes makes it hard to establish connections with their community and peers (Hendry & Reid, 2000). Rural youth may be at an even greater risk for psychological maladjustment because it has been found that when there is a disconnect between the psychological needs of an adolescent and their connections with their families, peers, and school, their psychological development may be hindered. Hendry and Reid (2000) also pointed out that previous research has found that belonging to a community was one of, if not the most, important protective factors against both “quietly disturbed” behaviors such as poor body image and “acting out” behaviors which include risk of injury or teen pregnancy and drug use. It is harder for rural adolescents to maintain friendships outside of school because of the distance between them and their closest neighbor. In their study Hendry and Reid (2000) found that while friendships can also be a source of stress and anxiety they can also be a resource when dealing with self-esteem issues, depression, or physical illness. They also found that while almost all of the respondents reported having friends they did not all experience the support expected with close friendships. It was found that only the adolescents with “good” or “close” friends experienced the protective factors associated with peer connectedness.

Positive Youth Development Literature Review

The theory of Positive Youth Development or PYD involves assets predicating positive youth development outcomes (Howse, Diehl, & Trivette, 2010). These assets are both internal and external and help a child develop into well rounded individual and protect against several risk factors and negative behaviors (Aspy, Oman, Vesely,

McLeroy, Rodine & Marshall, 2004; Howse et al., 2010; Oman, Vesely, Aspy, McLeroy, Rodine & Marshall, 2004). These negative behaviors range anywhere from violence to legal and non-legal drug use (Atkins, Oman, & Vesely, 2002; Aspy, Oman, Vesely, McLeroy, Rodine & Marshall, 2004; Oman, Vesely, Aspy, McLeroy, Rodine & Marshall, 2004). Internal assets are things that children can control themselves such as a positive identity and a commitment to learning as well as social competencies (Howse et al., 2010). External assets are the things that other individuals usually have an influence over, such as support, boundaries, expectations, and empowerment (Scales & Leffert, 1999). Since these assets are so vital to the success of youth across the nation and because foster children are especially at-risk programs such as “Under One Sky” are specifically designed to build up these assets. These types of camps have been responsible for positive outcomes such as pro-social behavior, social support, positive connections with peers, and involvement in community service (Howse, Diehl, Trivette, 2010; Taussig, 2002, Hass & Graydon, 2008; Metzger, 2008). Under One Sky has, in fact, shown positive results with youth displaying an increase in both their internal and external assets (Howse et al., 2010). The evaluation of the innovative Under One Sky program is rather preliminary in its findings as an asset-based approach, designed specifically to target youth in the foster care system. It has been determined that while the camp shows positive results for almost all of its participants it still needs to be studied further (Howse et al., 2010).

After researching and analyzing hundreds of youth development programs, Eccles and Gootman (2002) were able to define what characteristics make for a successful PYD program. The characteristics they found to be most effective were (a) clear and

consistent structure; (b) opportunities for skill building; (c) positive social norms; (d) physical and psychological safety; (e) opportunities for efficacy; and (f) mattering; reduce negative behavior and promote positive behavior. However, as Heinze, Jozefowicz and Toro (2010) pointed out, most research on PYD programs have only been done with normative youth populations and tend to ignore higher at-risk youth (i.e. homeless youth). In fact, most of the research on homeless youth and PYD has shown that homeless youth have found less positive outcomes and that they tend to experience more disengagement in programs that produce positive outcomes for more advantaged peers (Heinze et al., 2010). This does not mean that the methods found effective for building assets and creating social connections are not important for homeless youth. Rather, there is a need to identify and enhance the experiences that foster social connections and asset development in order to help youth transition out of homelessness (Heinze et al., 2010).

There are two intervention perspectives in relation to PYD intervention. One is the development perspective and the second is the treatment perspective. The developmental perspective has one main hypothesis and it stated that “the features of PYD will emerge when the strengths of youth...are aligned across adolescence with the resources in families, schools and communities that can enhance PYD” (Blansano, Phelps, Theokas, Lerner & Learner, 2009). Out-of-school-time activities (OSTs) that are based on the PYD theory have a higher likelihood of being associated with one or more of the five C’s. Also, PYD programs that have large community-based assets have higher indicators of positive development. However, it has been found that while youth in the first few years of adolescence may participate in several OST activities they

usually only participate in one or two by the later years of adolescence. Much of the involvement in PYD programs declines as youth become more involved in sports or the arts. Thus, it has been suggested that in order to keep youth involved in asset promoting programs, there may need to be collaboration with non-asset based youth programs (Blasano, et. al, 2009).

Adolescence is a time of significant change. This change is not only physical but also cognitive, emotional, and social. During this time adolescents are able to develop more future thinking and will act in a way that benefit them and help them reach their future goals. Such goal-oriented actions are often self-regulated in nature and frequently benefit both the adolescent and the context. These regulations have been termed “adaptive developmental regulations” in the research literature and are exemplified and measured as a function of the positive youth development theory. The five constructs that encompass these adaptive developmental regulations are competence, confidence, connection, character, and caring. Research shows that when an adolescent increases their level of self-regulation as encompassed by positive youth development theory their problem behaviors should decrease (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007). Research has also found that self-regulation increases over the lifespan with a marked increase from ten years of age to twenty years of age. However, the processes by which self-regulation increases are unknown due to limited longitudinal. Gestsdottir and Lerner (2007), however, used the first two waves of the 4-H PYD youth study to develop a better understanding of this development process. Findings from previous research were confirmed in this study. That is, there was a positive correlation between self-regulation and the constructs of PYD theory and a negative correlation between negative

behaviors and the constructs of PYD theory. There were also links “between intentional self-regulation and adaptive relations between individuals and their contexts” (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007, p. 519). However, it was also found that self-regulatory processes are not “orthogenetically” well developed in fifth and sixth graders (Gestsdottir & Lerner, 2007). While these results were expected, one result that was not expected was the result that it is possible to look at self-regulation and possibly only one or two of the PYD constructs. This means that researchers only interested in how connection or competence plays a role in self-regulation do not need to measure all of the PYD constructs. This information is also useful for practitioners when applying the PYD theory. If an adolescent struggles with competence a practitioner can do activities with the adolescent that will increase their competence and at the same time will be increasing the adolescent’s self-regulation.

The Positive Youth Development theory has been applied to several different situations and populations, including international populations. The Project P.A.T.H.S. is one such example of an international population. The Project P.A.T.H.S. program was implemented in several schools in Hong Kong. The participants were students in secondary one through secondary three and all students participated in the twenty hour tier one program. Students who needed more psychosocial help were entered into the tier two program. Project P.A.T.H.S. was designed to increase social, emotional, moral, and cognitive competence as well as a self identity, prosocial behavior, self-efficacy, and other positive characteristics. The program is based on the Positive Youth Development theory and uses the five constructs to develop the curriculum used in both tier one and tier two. The authors suggest that “building cognitive, academic, social,

and emotional competence is a fundamental task in adolescence” (Shek, 2010, p. 477). Shek (2010) also stated that there are five core social-emotional outcomes that must be addressed in a PYD program. These include (1) self-management, (2) self-awareness, (3) responsible actions, (4) social awareness, and (5) relationship skills. Positive youth development is connected with the research construct of quality of life. It is particularly tied to the emotional and social side of quality of life. While PYD youth programs abound it is unclear whether the structure of all the programs is effective. Therefore, Shek (2010) decided to evaluate the effectiveness of the massive Project P.A.T.H.S. PYD program. The author decided that the best way to evaluate the Project P.A.T.H.S. program was to use both qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. This particular article discusses one of the qualitative methods used in the evaluation. Students were asked to keep a weekly journal of their feelings and perceptions of the program as they went through the P.A.T.H.S. program. Reports from the students were positive overall. Students felt that they learned the most about personal competence, which include things such positive self-image and goal setting. This was followed by moral competence, cognitive competence, and finally emotional competence. These results were repeated in the second study as well.

Lerner et al., (2005) present one of the most thorough explanations of the PYD theory in their article that looks at the first wave of the nationwide 4-H study. They start off by explaining that it has only been within the past twenty years or so that there was an increase in looking at youth as a positive entity. The PYD theory and advocates of the theory argue that all youth have strengths (assets) and that when these are properly harnessed, encouraged, and cultivated then youth will become more well rounded, well

developed adolescent and contributing member to society. With this new emphasis on positive development there has come a new wave of vocabulary. The vocabulary words emerging include overall positive ideas such as developmental assets, thriving, civic engagement, well-being, and moral development. While these words are useful and increasing there is still a much larger vocabulary of negative descriptive words. Another problem with the vocabulary of PYD is that because it is so new there are hardly any standard definitions. Without standard definitions it is rather difficult to do academically rigorous studies. No standard definitions means there is not a way to compare one researcher's results with another because the definitions they use for the same construct could vary greatly. The authors go on to explain that through the history of the study of adolescence, if positive development was even mentioned it meant that there was simply no undesirable behaviors being exhibited.

It is in this article that the 5 C's so often connected to PYD were thoroughly developed and proposed as the standard definitions the PYD theory. The 5 C's include Competence, Confidence, Connection, Character and Caring. Competence is a "positive view of one's actions in domain specific areas including social, academic, cognitive, and vocational" (Lerner et al., 2005). Confidence is defined as an "internal sense of overall positive self-worth and self-efficacy; one's global self regard" (Lerner et al., 2005). Connection is defined as "positive bonds with people and institutions that are reflected in bi-directional exchanges between the individual and peers, family, school, and community in which both parties contribute to the relationship" (Lerner et al., 2005). Character is a "respect for societal and cultural rules, possession of standards for correct behaviors, a sense of right and wrong and a integrity" (Lerner et al., 2005).

Caring is simply a “sense of sympathy and empathy for others” (Lerner et al., 2005). It has also be hypothesized that when all of these constructs combine and are all of the assets within them reach their maximum there emerges another C; contribution. It is argued that when the assets are at their highest then the adolescent is making a contribution to themselves, their community, their schools, and their families. However, at the time of the article it was still debated whether this was the case and if it was how to go about developing an instrument that would measure it.

Through the positive youth development research it has been decided that the best way to develop these assets is through a youth development program. Youth development programs allow adolescents the opportunity to develop different skills, interact with the community, and develop a long lasting relationship with a caring adult (Lerner et al., 2005). The study that Lerner and his colleges conducted was to find out what exactly leads to positive youth development and what components of youth development programs enhance the development of positive youth development. The way the researchers went about this was a national longitudinal survey focused on the second decade of life for children. The population was a representative sample taken from forty different towns in thirteen different cities. Participants were from both urban and rural areas, ethnically and religiously diverse. The programs that the youth participated in were just as diverse, some programs had no group or individual activity, some had individually focused activities, and others had a youth development mission. The four main groups that the researchers focused on was Boys and Girls Club, 4-H, YMCA or YWCA, and Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts. Since the researchers were interested in positive youth development *during* adolescence, the first wave of the

longitudinal study was conducted with fifth graders. This allowed researchers to develop a base line of where the students were in terms of assets and negative behaviors. While most of the data was collected from the adolescents some data was collected from their parents as a method of validation to some of the answers given by the adolescents. The total number of youth participants was 1,700.

The idea behind the instrument creation was to have one that could be used over time to measure the development. While this is the main goal for the longitudinal study, the goal for the first wave was to “establish the empirical reality of the Five C’s of PYD, of the construct of PYD itself, and of the links between these constructs and youth contribution, risks or problem behaviors, and YP program participation” (Lerner et al., 2005, p. 43). It was found that girls scored higher than boys in PYD, Character, Connection, Caring, and Competence. Hispanic and European American adolescents had higher levels of confidence than did any other ethnic group. Adolescents from high income families scored higher on constructs except for Caring. It was also found that the previously used instruments and measures behaved as expected. Overall reports for the measures stated that youth reported their overall behavior to be positive and healthy. While all of the measures were deemed effective and behaved as expected it was determined that Competence could be most effectively measured if there was a way to directly observe the adolescents’ actions. The authors did find that the construct of Caring did not seem to be as complete as the others. This is understandable because at the time the article was written Caring was just being included as one of the main constructs associated with PYD. Regardless of the need to further develop the Caring construct the first wave of the study supported mounting empirical evidence the 5 C’s

are associated with PYD and added to the beginnings of a standard vocabulary.

Overall, the research confirmed the connection of the 5 C's to PYD and as well as the positive role that youth development programs play in PYD.

CHAPTER 3 METHODS

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to see how involvement in a 4-H youth development program affects levels of connection to peers, family, and the 4-H program in military youth. This evaluation will allow for a better understanding of how different levels of involvement in a 4-H program can affect these different connections.

Design

This study will use a cross-sectional design to determine how various levels of involvement affect connection in military youth. Cross-sectional designs allow for the comparison of two or more groups in relation to certain variables (Bryman, 2004; de Vaus, 2001). A cross-sectional design was chosen because of the very nature of their design. Cross-sectional designs allow for the development of groups based on differences that already exist but are not necessarily clearly noticeable (de Vaus, 2001).

Sample

Population

The population of interest for this study is children of active-duty service members who live on a military installation. In addition to living on the installation the youth also participate in 4-H youth activities at the youth center. This population lives across the United States and represent every branch of the military. Military youth represent a wide range of ages and ethnicities. I am interested in military youth ages eight to eighteen as this is the typical age for 4-H participation.

Sample Population

The sample for this study is a volunteer sample taken from the different installation across the state of Florida. Participants will be selected based on returned parental consent forms as well as a quick age screen to make sure the child is old enough to participate. The installations will be chosen based on willingness of the installations to allow a study to be conducted at the youth center. No installation will be targeted more than another installation as military youth should not differ based on where their families are stationed.

While there is little harm expected with this study it was decided that a volunteer sample would be best because of the fact that youth are the focus of the study. As mentioned briefly earlier this volunteer sample will be found by sending a consent letter to parents of all of the youth involved in a 4-H youth development program. The consent letter will explain the purpose of the study, what exactly will be done, and how long it is expected to last. The letter will also contain instructions to return the letters either in person or through the youth to the youth development center.

Instrumentation

This study is measuring levels of connection to three different entities: family, peers, and the 4-H program. Therefore there is a need for three different instruments. While there are not any know scales that measure connection to a 4-H program or any type of after school programs there are instead programs that measure connection to school. This type of connection is frequently referred to as school engagement. Therefore it has been decided that instruments that measure school engagement would be effective in measuring connection to the 4-H program. The instruments will be

adopted and adapted in wording to make them more directly apply to the 4-H program and some questions will be removed as they do not apply to a 4-H program.

The program connection questionnaire is adapted from a school connection questionnaire created by Carol Goodenow. The questionnaire is a total of eighteen questions and has strong reliability. The questionnaire was tested three times with large populations of both suburban and urban youth before publication. The Cronbach's alpha score ranged from 0.875 to 0.803 across the three studies. Eight questions were removed as they were not easily adapted to the study and did not apply to the context of the study. Some questions used school related words such as teachers and the name of the school. The word teacher was substituted with the word volunteer and the name of the school was replaced with the name of the installation.

For the measures of connection to peers and family/parents the instrument used is taken from the Inventory of Parent and Peer Attachment, created by Gay C. Armsden and Mark T. Greenberg in 1987. This instrument is useful because it measures not only peer connection but parent connection as well, thus it allows for the measurement of two of the major research questions with one instrument. It also been used in several different studies to measure peer and parent connection (Bowers, Li, Kiely, Brittan, Lerner, Lerner, 2010; Lerner et al., 2005; Armsden & Greenberg, 1987). There are three different scales imbedded in the overall parent and peer questionnaire. These three scales are Trust, Communication, and Alienation. All of the subscales had a good Cronbach's alpha score. The alpha scores for parent trust, communication, and alienation were 0.91, 0.91, and 0.86 respectively. The alpha scores for peer trust, communication, and alienation were 0.91, 0.87, and 0.72, respectively. These

questionnaires were slightly modified to address the contextual specificity of the population (de Vaus, 2001). These children are military children and therefore, there needed to be questions that addressed specific aspects of being a military child. Statements addressing the aspect of having a deployed parent and having friends in similar life situations were added to the questionnaire.

Procedure

Once participants are selected from each installation the researcher will travel to each installation in order to administer the questionnaire. Participants will be gathered in a room and the purpose of the study will be explained once more. Emphasis will be placed on the fact that the questionnaires are anonymous and that the answers will not be used against them, it is only to help complete a study for the University of Florida. Questionnaires will then be passed out and participants will be told to complete them at their own pace. The researcher will stay in the room in order to answer any questions that might arise. One or two workers from the youth center will also be in the room to help answer questions and to represent a familiar face so participants are less stressed while answering the questionnaire.

Data analysis

An ANOVA will be run to determine if any of the three variables will show a significant difference. If a significant difference is found then a post-hoc test such as a Mann-Whitney U test will be run to determine where the significant difference lies for each variable.

Also, a correlation test, such as a Spearman Rank correlation test will be run to determine if all three variable are positively correlated.

Limitations

There are two readily identifiable threats to internal validity. The first threat is that of measurement error. Participants are only being measured once which means that there could be something that is affect the levels of connection that is not being measured. If through later research there is something found that can affect levels of connection there is no way to go back and add this measurement to a later questionnaire. de Vaus (2001, p.177) explained this as problems at the level of cause, it is hard to tease out the exact cause of a particular outcome. However, this is somewhat expected of cross-sectional designs and is a problem with almost all designs except for the true experimental designs. The other threat to internal validity is that of non response bias. The youth who chose not to participate in the study may vary in a significant way compared to those who do participate. This is however, going to be combated by trying to contact those who chose not to participate (Add to procedures). However, it is not know how many non respondents will be contacted and if there will be consistent reasons for nonparticipation.

One potential threat to the external validity of the study is that of introvertedness/extrovertedness. It maybe that all of the participants in the study tend to be extroverted and that individuals who are introvertedness did not participate; if this is the case then the results of the study will show that individuals who participated had higher levels of connection, when in fact they were just more extroverted. However, there is a plan to factor out this during the analysis phase thus eliminating levels of introvertedness and extrovertedness as a threat to the external validity.

CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Demographics

Table 4-1 presents the descriptive statistics for the sample. Of the thirty six participants, 16 (44%) were males and 20 (56%) were female.

The majority of participants, 56% were between the ages 11-13. Ten (28%) were between the ages of 8-10, and 6 (17%) participants were between the ages of 14-16. 83% of the participants were between the ages of 8-13, the typical ages of a 4-H participant.

Test for Reliability

It was decided that the first test that needed to be completed was a test for reliability of the instrument. This was done because of the addition of some questions specifically addressing particular aspects of being a military child. An item-total correlation test was run for each variable set. It was found that six questions from the peer connection set had either negative item total correlation or just low item total correlation and Cronbach's alpha was increased to 0.896 when the six questions were removed. An item-total correlation was also run for the parent connection set of variables. There were a total of nine questions removed from the parent connection set including questions that had a negative correlation or a very low correlation. After these nine questions were removed the Cronbach's alpha score rose to 0.918. An item-total correlation test was also run for the program connection set. It was found that all of the questions had good item-total correlation and therefore all questions were left in. The Cronbach's alpha score for this set was 0.767.

Grouping

The first four items of the questionnaire were used as a grouping variable. Participants were placed in one of three groups. One group was a low participation group which contained nine participants; the second was a medium participation group containing seventeen participants and the third was a high participation group containing ten participants. Distribution was normal for all groups together. However, when broken down by low, medium, and high involvement there were a few differences. Both the medium and high involvement groups continued to be normally distributed; the low group was not normally distributed. Thus, it was determined that it was better to err on the side of caution and run non-parametric statistical tests.

Testing

A Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA test was first run to see if there was a significant difference for each variable. Tables 4-2, 4-3, and 4-4 show the ANOVA results for peer, parent, and program connection respectively. The results for the ANOVA confirmed that there was a significant difference present for both peer connection and program connection. After a significant difference was confirmed a Mann-Whitney U test was run for each variable to determine between which involvement level group the difference liked. There was a significant difference found between the low and medium involvement (Table 4-5) for peer connection. As hypothesized there was a significant difference between the low and high involvement group (Table 4-6). However, there was not a significant difference between the low and medium involvement group (Table 4-7).

The variable of parent connection showed no significant difference between any of the involvement groups. Tables 4-5, 4-6, and 4-7 display the difference between each group.

No significant difference was found between the low and medium involvement group for program connection (Table 4-8), nor was there a significant difference between the medium and high involvement group (Table 4-9). However there was a significant difference between the low and high involvement groups (Table 4-10).

Table 4-1. Gender and age of participants

	Age			Total
	8-10	11-13	14-16	
Male	4	10	2	16
Female	6	10	4	20
Total	10	20	6	36

Table 4-2. ANOVA results for peer connection

Involvement Level	Code	Valid	Sum of
Low	101	9	102.5000
Medium	102	17	327.5000
High	103	10	236.000

Table 4-3. ANOVA results for parent connection

Involvement Level	Code	Valid	Sum of
Low	101	9	134.5000
Medium	102	17	311.0000
High	103	10	222.5000

Table 4-4. ANOVA results for program connection

Involvement Level	Code	Valid	Sum of
Low	101	9	120.5000
Medium	102	17	299.0000
High	103	10	246.5000

Table 4-5. Mann-Whitney U test for low to medium group comparison for peer and parent connection

Variable	Low Involvement	Medium Involvement	U	
Peer Connection	84.5000	266.5000	39.50000	-1.99418
Parent Connection	106.5000	244.5000	61.50000	-0.80845

Table 4-6. Mann-Whitney U Test for low to high group comparison for peer and parent connection

Variable	Low Involvement	High Involvement	U	
Peer Connection	63.00000	127.0000	18.00000	-2.20454
Parent Connection	73.00000	117.0000	28.00000	-1.38804

Table 4-7. Mann-Whitney U test for medium to high group comparison for peer connection and parent connection.

Variable	Medium Involvement	High Involvement	U	
Peer Connection	214.0000	164.0000	61.00000	-1.20503
Parent Connection	219.5000	158.5000	66.50000	-0.90832

Table 4-8. Mann-Whitney U test for low to medium group comparison for program connection.

Variable	Low Involvement	Medium Involvement	U	
Program Connection	103.5000	247.5000	58.50000	-0.970143

Table 4-9. Mann-Whitney U test for medium to high group comparison for program connection

Variable	Medium Involvement	High Involvement	U	
Program Connection	204.5000	173.5000	51.50000	-1.68202

Table 4-10. Mann-Whitney U test for low to high group comparison for program connection

Variable	Low Involvement	High Involvement	U	
Program Connection	62.00000	128.0000	17.00000	-2.28619

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

I tested four main hypotheses in my research. I found evidence to support three of the four hypotheses to varying degrees. Below I will present the evidence and possible explanations for my findings. I will talk about the different explanations for each involvement group and I will also compare and contrast my finding with those of previous research studies and offer future research suggestions.

Hypothesis One

The first hypothesis about there being a significant difference between the low involvement group and the high involvement group for peer connection was confirmed. It was also found that there was a significant difference between the low and medium involvement group and no significant difference between the medium and high group. Therefore, my hypothesis of the highly involved group having the highest peer connection was indeed correct. It was also confirmed that there was a significant difference between the low and medium involved groups. This would make sense because as I had hypothesized the more involved one becomes in the program their peer connection should also increase. It should increase because the more time they spend at the program the more they are able to be around their peers and interact with them allowing time for bonds to be built. These bonds would not be created if the youth did not come to the program or if they did not participate in any of the activities the program offered. On the other hand, there was an interesting result in that there was not a significant difference between the medium and high involvement group. This result would not confirm my hypothesis of the more you become involved the more you become connected to your peers.

However, there is a possible explanation for this. The decision to split the participants into three groups was based on the Positive Youth Development (PYD) theory. According to this theory there are youth who are never to rarely involved in PYD programs such as 4-H or Boys and Girls Club. They may come only so often (i.e. once a month) over a long period of time or only participate for a concentrated but brief amount of time. There is also the medium involved individual, this individual is your typical 4-H participant, they regularly attend club meetings and complete at least one project but they do not do the activities that require a time commitment outside of the regularly scheduled club meetings. The highly involved member is one that not only attends regularly scheduled club meetings and completes several projects, as well as participates in several other activities such as being a club officer or 4-H congress. It was because of this break down of the three different types of participants that I believed that there would be the same three group break with my participants. However, when one is looking at the research on military youth the results are often split down the middle. Nearly half of the research states that military youth are no different than civilian youth, that they are able to connect with and establish friendships with others just as well and just as quickly as a civilian youth. The other half of the research states the opposite. This research states that military youth do in fact struggle more than civilian youth to make friends and establish a feeling of connection with the surrounding community. Therefore, it is possible that the participants fall more along the lines of the military research and only form two groups rather than the typical three groups associated with the PYD theory.

The cut off point for separating the medium involved group and the highly involved group was an arbitrary decision as there was not a clear cut off point. When examining the data again, it appears that it may be more easily to cut the groups into two with the low and medium groups becoming one group of low involvement and leaving the high involvement group as it were.

Hypothesis Two

Unfortunately my hypothesis for parent connection was not confirmed. There was not a significant difference found between any of the three groups. My original thinking was that if a child becomes more involved in a program that gives them a place to immediately connect with other youth upon moving and if they develop close friendships with their peers at the youth center then they will have better relationships with their parents. This assumption was based on both social connection research and military youth research. Both sets of research stated that when a youth is well connected with their peers they are more likely to be better connected to their parents. This is especially true for military youth because youth can begin to resent their parents and their parents' job because of the constant moving that is required. This constant moving means that a youth must break bonds and connections with their peers that may have just been established because of a parent reassignment.

However, one must consider that even though parent connection is something that is often measured in relation to PYD theory almost all of the PYD programs do not specifically address building better relationships and or connections between the parent and child. Therefore, it is not surprising that there was not a significant difference between the groups. It should also be noted that there was a difference when the groups were changed from three to two. While there was still not a significant

difference, it was very close to being significantly different. The p-value for parent connection with the two group break down was (0.071) and the p-value was set at p-value (0.05). It is possible that if the participant pool were larger we would be able to see a significant difference; I believe that this would be the case but because of the special permission that is required to get onto some installations it was impossible to collect more data in the allotted amount of time.

Hypothesis Three

The third hypothesis was confirmed for the low and high groups; meaning that there was a significant difference between the low involvement and high involvement groups and their levels of program connection. There was not a significant difference between the medium and high groups or the low and medium group. Once again, this could be due to the way the groups were split. We know that there was a significant difference between the low and high group and not a difference between the other two. If the groups were divided according to military research the medium group would be combined with the low involvement group and the high involvement group would stay the same, thus confirming the significant difference between low and high involvement group.

Hypothesis Four

This hypothesis was also partially confirmed. All of the tests including the Spearman Rank Order Correlation test were originally run with the three group division. The three group division showed that both program and parent connections were positively correlated. I believe they were positively correlated because when a youth becomes more connected to a program they know that they have a place to go where they can feel accepted and build friendships. This will increase the connection to their

parents because youth will resent their parents less because they have a place to go when they are required to move to a different installation.

Overall, despite having divided everyone into three different groups for comparison based on the positive youth development theory I do believe that the data makes more sense when divided into two groups than three. When divided into two groups there is almost a significant difference between the low involvement and high involvement groups for parent connection and there continues to be a significant difference between the low and high involvement group for both peer and program connection. Also, when divided into two groups instead of three there is a positive correlation between all three groups instead of just between program and parent connection. Therefore, I believe that the participants and data should be divided according to the research on military youth versus the positive youth development theory.

Limitations

There were a few limitations that could affect the generalizability of my study. One limitation is the sample size. Ideally the goal was to get an accurate total population number and then determine a proper sample size. However, this proved to be a rather difficult task once started. In two instances it was impossible to establish contact with the youth director at the installation. These are the individuals whom I would speak with about the number of students involved in 4-H and about acquiring permission to collect data. In some instances I was given an exact number as to how many youth were active in 4-H; in other instances I was told that the 4-H activities were embedded in other things and then given a rough estimate of how many children participate in those activities. Therefore, I was unable to get a clear idea of the overall population in the

state of Florida and thus unable to determine a more ideal sample size than the one I eventually got.

Therefore, instead of trying to determine an ideal sample size I instead tried to make contact with each base and ask for permission. This proved easy in some cases and rather difficult in others. Some bases were able to give me immediate permission to come on the base and collect data. Others were required to ask their supervisor for permission and after review I was granted permission. In two cases the request to collect data was sent up the person in charge and they never responded. In another case I was never able to make contact with the youth director. In which case it was determined that the most effective thing to do would be to go to every installation that I had received permission from and try to collect at least thirty individual pieces of data. In the ideal situation this would be enough data to run tests of significance to confirm or disprove my hypotheses. The problem of sample size only arose when data analysis was complete. The data confirmed some of my hypotheses but did not support other hypotheses. There are two possible explanations for this, one is that my results are similar to the results often found when researching military youth, some do well and some simply do not; therefore causing the data to appear somewhat confusing. The other possible answer is that the involvement groups and results would fall into clearer cut categories if there were more pieces of data collected. More data collection was attempted in order to determine if the results were due to sample size or if that is simply how the data would fall regardless of the number or participants. Unfortunately, because of the chain of command I was unable to get permission to collect data in time to include it in this thesis.

Another limitation to the study was the length of the questionnaire. The total questionnaire including demographics was seventy six questions. While most participants were able to complete within twenty minutes there was some hesitation in taking the survey when youth saw how long the survey was. In a few instances there was survey break off, these participants were younger and I believe the main reason they stopped is because they would become distracted by other youth who came into the center. Most of the questions in the parent and peer questionnaire portion of the survey were already created but with my additions specifically addressing issues associated with being a military child each section become over fifteen questions. It is possible that if the questionnaire had been shorter I would have been able to get a few more participants. However, even after the reliability tests were run those were still rather long so if any more questions had been deleted from the survey it is possible that I would not have found a significant difference with the data.

Implications for Future Research

Several implications for future research can be made based on the results of this study. Based on discussions with the youth directors as well observations made while collecting data it became very apparent that the youth centers are run very differently. One center had very little children present despite being told it was their busiest day and others had several children present involved in many different activities. It would be interesting to study the effects of program structure on the levels of connection to peers, parents, and the program. Does a structured program lend itself to creating higher levels of connection or does it actually hinder it?

Also it was found that parent connection and program connection is positively correlated. I believe it would be beneficial to explore this correlation and find out why

program connection influences parent connection or if it is the other way around. If program connection influences parent connection what aspects of the program make a difference and how do we apply it to more programs to create stronger parental connections across all youth.

Prior to this study little had been done to explore how program connection can affect other areas of outcome for a youth. It has been well researched that school connection can and does have an effect on youth and their overall well-being. In fact the questions used to measure program connection were adapted from a school connection questionnaire. I believe it would be interesting to see how program connection influences other areas of a youth's life and if it has the same benefits and preventive effects that school connection does. Finally, the sample size was a little on the small side and therefore it would be interesting to find out if some of the unusual results would be sorted out by a larger sample population or if that is in fact the way the data would come out regardless.

APPENDIX A
YOUTH PROGRAM INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1). How many **hours a week** do you participate in 4-H activities?

- A) 1-3 hours
- B) 4-6 hours
- C) 7-9 hours
- D) 10-12 hours
- E) I do not participate in 4-H activities on a weekly basis.

2). How many **times a month** do you participate in 4-H activities?

- A) 1-3 times a month
- B) 4-6 times a month
- C) 7-10 times a month
- D) more than 10 times a month
- E) I do not participate in monthly 4-H activities.

3). On a scale of 1-5 (5 being the most involved, 1 being the least involved) rate how involved you are in 4-H activities.

- A) 1
- B) 2
- C) 3
- D) 4
- E) 5

4) Over the past **6 months** how many 4-H projects have you worked on?

- A) 1-3
- B) 4-6
- C) 7-9
- D) 10 or more

The following statements indicate various feeling about your peers, mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. **Mark your answers on the scantron as follows: A = Strongly Disagree, B = Disagree, C = Neutral, D = Agree, E = Strongly Agree**

A = Strongly Disagree, B = Disagree, C = Neutral, D = Agree, E = Strongly Agree	
5.	I like to get my friends' point of view on things I'm concerned about.
6.	My friends sense when I'm upset about something.
7.	When we discuss things, my friends consider my point of view.

8. Talking over my problems with my friends makes me feel ashamed or foolish.
9. I wish I had different friends.
10. My friends in 4-H understand me.
11. My friends encourage me to talk about my difficulties.
12. My friends in 4-H accept me as I am.
13. I feel the need to be in touch with my friends more often.
14. My friends don't understand what I'm going through these days.
15. I feel alone or apart when I am with my friends.
16. My friends listen to what I have to say.
17. I feel my friends are good friends.
18. My friends are fairly easy to talk to about my parent being deployed.
19. When I am angry about something, my friends try to be understanding.
20. My friends help me to understand myself better.
21. My friends in 4-H are concerned about my well-being.
22. I feel angry with my friends.
23. I can count on my friends when I need to get something off my chest about being a military brat.
24. I trust my friends.
25. My friends respect my feelings.
26. I get upset a lot more than my friends know about.
27. It seems as if my friends get irritated with me for no reason.
28. I tell my friends about my problems and troubles that are caused because of my parent's deployment.

- 29. If my friends know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
- 30. I have more friends now that I participate in 4-H.
- 31. I am able to connect with kids my own age through my 4-H project.
- 32. 4-H gives me a way to make friends quickly when my family and I move.

The following statements indicate various feelings about your parents. Mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. **Mark your answers on the scantron as follows: A = Strongly Disagree, B = Disagree, C = Neutral, D = Agree, E = Strongly Agree**

A = Strongly Disagree, B = Disagree, C = Neutral, D = Agree, E = Strongly Agree

- 33. My parents respect my feelings.
- 34. I feel my parents are successful as parents.
- 35. I wish I had different parents.
- 36. My parents accept me as I am.
- 37. I have to rely on myself when I have a problem to solve.
- 38. I like to get my parent's point of view on things I'm concerned about.
- 39. I feel it's no use letting my feelings show.
- 40. My parents sense when I'm upset about something.
- 41. Talking over my problems with my parents makes me feel ashamed or foolish.
- 42. My parents expect too much from me.
- 43. I get upset easily at home.
- 44. I get upset a lot more than my parents know about.

45. When we discuss things, my parents consider my point of view.
46. My parents trust my judgment.
47. My parents have their own problems, so I don't bother them with mine.
48. My parents help me to understand myself better.
49. I tell my parents about my problems and troubles.
50. I feel angry with my parents because of their commitment to the military.
51. I don't get much attention at home.
52. My parents encourage me to talk about my difficulties.
53. My parents understand me.
54. I don't know who I can depend on these days.
55. When I am angry about something, my parents try to be understanding.
56. I trust my parents.
57. My parents don't understand what I'm going through these days.
58. I can count on my parents when I need to get something off my chest.
59. I feel that no one understands me.
60. If my parents know something is bothering me, they ask me about it.
61. My non-deployed parent is too busy to pay attention to me.
62. I try not to bother my non-deployed parent with things that might upset them.
63. I always try to act happy when talking to my deployed parent.
64. I openly discuss my worries with my deployed parent.
65. I am concerned for my deployed parent's well-being.

The following statements indicate various feeling about your involvement in the 4-H program. Mark how much you agree or disagree with the following statements. **Mark**

your answers on the scantron as follows: A=Strongly Disagree, B=Disagree, C= Neutral, D=Agree, E=Strongly Agree.

- 66. I feel like a real part of (Name of installation).
- 67. People here notice when I'm good at something.
- 68. It is hard for people like me to be accepted here.
- 69. Other students in this 4-H club take my opinion seriously.
- 70. Most volunteers in my 4-H club are interested in me.
- 71. Sometimes I feel as if I don't belong here.
- 72. There's at least one volunteer in this 4-H club I can talk to if I have a problem.
- 73. People at this installation are friendly to me.
- 74. The volunteers here are not interested in people like me.
- 75. I am included in lots of activities at (Name of installation).

Demographics

76). What is your ethnicity?

- A) Caucasian
- B) African American
- C) Asian American
- D) Hispanic, non white
- E) Other

77). How old are you?

- A) 8-10
- B) 11-13
- C) 14-16
- D) 17-18

APPENDIX B
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

**Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences
3014 McCarty Hall D
PO Box 110310
University of Florida
Gainesville, FL 32600-0000**

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Family, Youth and Community Sciences at the University of Florida, conducting research on military youth and their involvement in a 4-H youth development program. The purpose of this study is to see how students involvement in a 4-H youth development program affects youths' levels of connection to parents, peers and the 4-H program. The results of the study may help youth works better understand how to get youth involved in programs that will result in stronger and beneficial connections to other individuals. These results may not directly help your child today, but may benefit future students. With your permission, I would like to ask your child to volunteer for this research.

All of the participants will be asked to complete a survey about their feelings of connection to peers, parents and the 4-H program. The 30 minute procedure will be completed at one point in time under the supervision of the researcher and youth workers. The surveys are anonymous and any identifying information will be kept confidential. Results will only be reported in the form of group data. Participation or nonparticipation will NOT affect your child's future participation 4-H activities.

You and your child have the right to withdraw consent for your child's participation at any time without consequence. There are minimal risks and no immediate benefits to the participants. No compensation is offered for participation. Group results of this study will be available in August upon request. If you have any questions about this research protocol, please contact me at [REDACTED] or my faculty supervisor, Dr. Pracht, at [REDACTED]. Questions or concerns about your child's rights as research participant may be directed to the IRB02 office, University of Florida, Box 112250, Gainesville, FL 32611, (352) 392-0433.

Laura Bradley

I have read the procedure described above. I voluntarily give my consent for my child, _____, to participate in Laura Bradley's study of adolescents' participation a 4-H youth development program and levels of connection

. I have received a copy of this description.

Parent / Guardian Date

2nd Parent / Witness Date

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Laura Bradley was raised in Howey-in-the-Hills, Florida. She graduated from East Ridge High School in 2006. She attended the University of North Florida as an undergraduate and received a Bachelor's of Arts in psychology in April 2009. She went onto pursue a Master of Science degree in family, youth, and community sciences at the University of Florida. After completing her graduate education she remained in Gainesville, FL. She will pursue another degree and subsequent career in mental health counseling and will go onto work with service members and their families.