Military involvement in Operations Iraqi Freedom, New Dawn and Enduring Freedom brings a focus on military families to the forefront of public and governmental attention. The military family represents a distinct cultural context, as each family is immersed in “the prevailing values, norms, philosophies, customs and traditions of the armed forces” (Collins, 1998, p. 213, i.e., military culture). Thousands of families live within these unique communities, but little is known about the role of such family experiences upon the development of children and their transitions into adulthood or the impacts of military family life throughout adulthood. Specifically, few studies are available that assess how being a part of a military family affects the choices, competencies, challenges, and patterns of children in regards to relationships as adults.

Rationale, Instruments, and Method
This study utilized a sequential explanatory design, exploring friendships and romantic relationships of adult children from military families. One hundred and two participants completed the survey. Of those participants, eight were chosen to participate in qualitative interviews. Quantitative and qualitative results were interpreted through current literature, the Family Life Cycle, and the Theory of Ego Development.

Results
Participants were asked four questions that gauged the impact of their military family experiences on certain aspects of their lives. The first question looked at the overall impact that growing up in a military family has had on participants’ adult lives. All participants answered this question with their responses ranging from growing up in a military family having a highly negative impact ($n = 2$; 2%), a negative impact ($n = 14$; 13.7%), no impact ($n = 4$; 3.9%), a positive impact ($n = 55$; 53.9%), or a highly positive impact ($n = 27$; 26.5%) on their adult lives.

The second question asked participants what role growing up in a military family plays in their identity as an adult. Their responses ranged from a large negative role ($n = 3$; 2.9%) to a small negative role ($n = 8$; 7.8%) to no role ($n = 5$; 4.9%) to a small positive role ($n = 39$; 38.2%) to a large positive role ($n = 47$; 46.1%). The third question asked about the impact that growing up in a military family has had on friendships in adulthood. Participants responded that their military upbringing has had a highly negative impact ($n = 6$; 5.9%), a negative impact ($n = 34$; 33.3%), no impact ($n = 10$; 9.8%), a positive impact ($n = 39$; 38.2%), and a highly positive impact ($n = 13$; 12.7%) on their adult friendships. The fourth question asked about the impact that growing up in a military family has had on romantic relationships in adulthood. Participants responded that their military upbringing has had a highly negative impact ($n = 9$; 8.8%), a negative
impact \( (n = 26; 25.5\%) \), no impact \( (n = 31; 30.4\%) \), a positive impact \( (n = 27; 76.5\%) \), and a highly positive impact \( (n = 9; 9.8\%) \) on their adult friendships.

Participants were asked to complete the Washington University Sentence Completion test in order to uncover their levels of ego development. Participants’ scores ranged from E3-E8. One participant (1%) was scored at an ego level of E3. Five participants (4.9%) were scored at an ego level of E4. Thirty-eight participants (37.3%) were scored at an ego level of E5. The majority of participants \( (n = 43; 42.2\%) \) were scored at an ego level of E6. Fourteen participants (13.7%) received scores at an ego level of E7. One participant (1%) was scored at an ego level of E8.

Of the participants 102 participants that participated in the qualitative phase, eight were chosen to participate in qualitative interviews. The following themes and subthemes emerged from these interviews: **Historical Relationships** (Relationships in family of origin, Approach to relationships (parental), Wants and needs in relationships), **Relationships in Practice** (Defining relationships, Approach to relationships (on own), Important relationships) **Perspectives on the Military** (Childhood-Adult Link, Desire for military connection, Changes to upbringing)

**Discussion, Limitations and Implications for Future Research**

First, this study can benefit from being replicated with a civilian population, in order to understand, if the relationship patterns are in fact unique to adult children of military families. Second, Another study could look at younger generational cohorts, possibly gaining access to children and adolescents, or working with participants as young as 18, in order to explore similarities and differences between older generations and the newest generations of military children. Third, it may be of use to replicate this study in a fashion that has a more in depth qualitative phase. Fourth, two research studies can be conducted in order to examine friendship and romantic relationships separately. Fifth, a study of the impacts military culture has on Ego Development levels could expand the current body of knowledge on military families.

**Implications for Chi Sigma Iota and for the Counseling Profession**
The findings of this study and previous studies suggest that adult children of military families have faced unique experiences, suggesting that collecting information on immersion in military culture is both relevant and necessary to developing an appreciation and understanding of this cultural and family experience. The role of the counselor when working with adult children of military families could be to take a teaching role that helps clients develop the skills necessary to meet friends and create meaningful friendships, however clients define “meaningful.” Here it is assumed that clients would want to build skills to make and maintain friendships. This may not be the case. Another approach counselors can take is to simply respect the interior focus on the family. Also of importance is the fact that adult children of military families may have a desire to stay connected to the military lifestyle. Counselors must be knowledgeable of military culture in order to provide resources, such as online forums, groups in the area, etc. that may be of interest to their clients, especially in areas far from military installations.
References

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