

## Chapter 6

# Warfare and Parent Care: Armed Conflict and the Social Logic of Child and National Protection

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**Abstract** A fair amount has been written on intergenerational issues in military families, with special consideration given to the difficulties that active-duty (or soon-to-be-active-duty) parents experience. Less attention, however, has been paid to the soldiers' parents. Inquiries pertaining to this group are provocative as much for the questions they raise as for the answers they offer, especially when it comes to sorting out the parents' attitudes and behaviors. The mindsets of these fathers and mothers would seem to warrant special scrutiny, in that how parents of soldiers are expected to think, and how they actually think (the two are not always in sync), can make an enormous difference in how individual parents and entire populations interpret military life. What do fathers and mothers of adult children ponder when their nation is engaged in armed conflict and needs combatants? What do they contemplate when it is their children who might be drafted or called upon to volunteer? Drawing on a social constructionist approach and offering a variety of family illustrations, I explore these and other questions. My specific objective is theoretical, in that I aim to delineate the quandaries that arise in times of war and articulate the thought patterns of parents of soldiers (or potential recruits/draftees). Essentially, I outline a "paradox of care" that, at its core, entails two mandates: a mandate to protect the children and a mandate to protect the nation. The social logic that parents use to decipher the paradox yields five scenarios, which differ depending on the weight accorded to one mandate or the other and on the extent to which the two are thought to be mutually incompatible or overlapping.

**Keywords** War, Combat, Child protection, National protection, Military draft, Cognitive sociology, Culture and cognition, Social logic, Fatherhood, Motherhood

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## 6.1 Introduction

A fair amount has been written on intergenerational issues in military families, with special consideration given to the difficulties that active-duty (or soon-to-be-active-duty) parents experience (e.g., see Goodman, Turner, Agazio, Throop, Padden, Greiner, & Hillier, 2013; MacDermid, Schwarz, Faber, Adkins, Mishkind, & Weiss, 2005; Taylor, Wall, Liebow, Sabatino, Timberlake, & Farber, 2005). Less attention, however, has been paid to the *supra-parents* in military families, by which I mean not the parents who are soldiers, but the parents whose children are soldiers (Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011).

The fact that researchers have closely examined the family lives of men and women in the military is understandable. It would be helpful, however, if researchers also delved deeply into the social world of the soldiers' fathers and mothers, considering, among other things, the influence of parents on young adults' decisions to enlist (or respond to a draft), and the anguish felt by parents when their children are deployed, wounded, or killed (Boehmer, Zucker, Ebarvia, Seghers, Snyder, Marsh, Fors, Bader, & Strackbein, 2004; Carvalho, Turner, Marsh, Yanosky, Zucker, & Boehmer, 2008; Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011; Frank, 1992; Gibson, Griepentrog, & Marsh, 2007; LaRossa, 2011; Legree et al., 2000; MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010; Willerton, Schwarz, Wadsworth, Oglesby, 2011). Studies of parents of soldiers are provocative as much for the questions they raise as for the answers they offer, especially when it comes to sorting out the parents' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., see Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011; Garner & Slattery, 2010; Ronel & Lebel, 2006; Slattery & Garner, 2007, 2011). The mindsets of these fathers and mothers would seem to warrant special scrutiny, in that how parents of soldiers are expected to think, and how they actually think (the two are not always in sync), can make an enormous difference in how individual parents and entire populations interpret military life. What do fathers and mothers of adult children ponder when their nation is engaged in armed conflict and needs combatants? What do they contemplate when it is their children who might be drafted or called upon to volunteer?

Offering a variety of family illustrations, I explore these and other questions. My specific objective is theoretical, in that I aim to delineate the quandaries that arise in times of war and articulate the thought patterns of parents of soldiers (or potential recruits/draftees). Because of the paucity of data on some of the issues discussed, I rely, in part, on materials that are not about the parents of soldiers, per se, but about the soldiers and potential recruits/draftees themselves. I have found, however, that these materials can be very informative and yield valuable leads.

As the title of the chapter indicates, I examine the concept of care, and particularly the concept of *parent care*. My use of this term refers both to the care of a parent for a child (i.e., parental nurturance) and to the care that others might give to a parent (e.g., solace offered to a grieving dad or mom). Thus, I examine the challenges

that parents face in trying to determine how to best care for their children while also responding to a nation's call to have military-trained youth at the ready and, if needed, on the go; and I also examine the kind of comfort that parents are believed to desire and need to help them cope with the absence, maiming, or death of daughters and sons who, while in uniform, were placed in harm's way.

As for the theorizing process itself, whereas other studies of military families have employed attachment theory, family stress theory, and life course theory (MacDermid Wadsworth, 2010), I employ a social constructionist approach that places cognitive processes in the foreground. The cognitions that I discuss are not reducible to physiology or psychology, but are located within cognitive sociology, which itself is integral to an area commonly referred to as the sociology of knowledge (Zerubavel, 1997; see also Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Cognitive sociology does not deny the value of looking at how humans in general think (i.e., how humans, regardless of their race or gender or social class, are hardwired to think in a particular way). Rather, it sees merit also in a pluralistic orientation (vs. universalistic orientation), one that emphasizes that cognitions can vary, depending on the sociocultural circumstances in which people are immersed (i.e., group members can think in group-specific ways because of their distinctive group-contingent experiences) (Nisbett, 2003). Cognitive sociology, in effect, examines the *social logic* that may be used in certain situations.

Cognitions themselves are broken down into six acts (perceiving, focusing, signifying, timing, remembering, and classifying), with the acts operating in concert whenever someone contemplates something. These are the same six acts that are of interest in the cognitive sciences as a whole, but instead of examining how humans jointly engage in perceiving, focusing, signifying, timing, remembering, and classifying, cognitive sociology examines how people within certain thought communities socially (and differentially) perceive, focus, signify, time, remember, and classify (Zerubavel, 1997). Given that the acts operate symbiotically, disentangling one from another can be difficult. Still, each can be defined.

*Social perceiving* has to do with social optics. Feeling the need to monitor news reports about combat operations, debating whether it is honorable or dishonorable for flag-draped coffins to be pictured or televised (what should be visible and what should not?), and wondering whether it is improper to stare at a distraught parent (should we look away out of respect?) would fall under social perceiving.

*Social focusing* is about the norms of concentration that tell us to what to notice and what to ignore. Attending to how a soldier was killed (e.g., by enemy fire or friendly fire), while not attending to the uniform the soldier was wearing at the moment of death would fall under social focusing. So would highlighting the exploits of warriors (e.g., combat ground troops and fighter pilots), while disregarding the contributions of non-combat personnel (e.g., clerks and mechanics).

*Social signifying* is about symbols (conventional signs rather than natural signs) and how they are socially constructed and utilized in various situations. Military

regulations specifying who among family and friends should be formally presented with a U.S. flag at a veteran's funeral would fall under social signifying, as would the assumption, held by some, that a picture of a grieving mother is more iconic than a picture of a grieving father.

*Social timing* is about scheduling, whether prompted by events or by a clock. Public debates about when a war "really" got under way and when it "really" was over, and how many stages there were in between, would fall under social timing (for beginnings, endings, and periodizations are, to a certain degree, also socially constructed). Concerns about the age at which a child can be drafted (is 16 too young?) or about how long is too long (or too short) for a war to continue also have to do with social timing.

*Social remembering* is about collective memory and the selective recall of past incidents, including those that we may not have directly experienced (e.g., America's Revolutionary War). How we recall earlier wars and historically frame subsequent wars also would fall under social remembering (e.g., do we believe the Iraq War is analogous to World War II, or do we believe it is analogous to the Vietnam War?).

*Social classifying* is central to all the other acts and has to do with the cultural and political drawing of boundaries and borders, and the polarizing, stratifying, and reifying that often ensue from this process. The cultural and political demarcation of sharp gender distinctions (fathers *vs.* mothers) and the cultural and political crafting of antithetical dissimilarities in allegiance (e.g., friend *vs.* foe) would fall under classifying and, in particular, under *polarizing*. Deeming one cognitive category as superior to another would fall under classifying as well, and, in particular under *stratifying* (e.g., ranking "our side" above "their side"). Mistaking culturally and politically shaped differences for natural differences also would fall under classifying and, in particular, under *reifying* (e.g., asserting that maternal "instincts" invariably predispose mothers to mourn more than fathers, when in fact both women and men are taught how to contemplate death and express sorrow in circumscribed ways) (Zerubavel, 1997; see also Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Zerubavel, 1991, 2006).

The analysis to follow, which builds on these concepts, is divided into two sections. First, I discuss a recently-formulated perspective on the mothers of soldiers and the mothers' enmeshment in a *paradox of care*. Next, I propose a reconfiguration of the paradox to underscore the importance of recognizing fathers as well as mothers and to more fully incorporate the multiplicity of choices that supra-parents face. Throughout the chapter, social perceiving, social focusing, social signifying, social timing, social remembering, and social classifying are reintroduced and integrated (sometimes parenthetically) to demonstrate the utility of a social constructionist approach to understanding military families. (For examples of a social constructionist approach in non-military family research, see LaRossa, 1997, *passim*; LaRossa & Reitzes, 2001; LaRossa & Sinha, 2006; LaRossa, Simonds, & Reitzes, 2005.)

## 6.2 Garner and Slattery's Theoretical Take on the Mothers of Soldiers and the Paradox of Care

Based on an analysis of print and television news from World War II and the Iraq War, Ana C. Garner and Karen Slattery offered a theoretical take on the mothers of soldiers and the paradox of care (Garner & Slattery, 2010; Slattery & Garner, 2007, 2011). Mothers, they noted, generally are expected to protect their children, yet children are needed to defend the nation. What are mothers expected to do if a country is threatened and issues a call to arms? Should they discourage their children from serving in the military or caution them against choosing military occupational specialties (MOS's) that may entail combat (e.g., infantry, artillery), thus doing whatever they can to keep their children safe? Or should they let their children serve and perhaps motivate them to volunteer for dangerous assignments, thus showing their willingness to sacrifice their children in the defense of the country? Yet another option would be not to discourage or encourage, but to remain non-committal (at least publicly) and allow their children to make their own decisions when it came to the military.

At the heart of the paradox, Garner and Slattery state, are two ostensibly competing archetypes or symbols (i.e., social significations): *the good mother*, on one hand; and *the patriotic mother*, on the other. Whereas the good mother satisfies "the duties of mother *qua* mother," the patriotic mother fulfills "the duties of mother *qua* citizen" (Slattery & Garner, 2011, p. 88). Simply characterized, one "protects her children from harm"; the other "puts her children directly into harm's way" (Garner & Slattery, 2010, p. 144; see also Slattery & Garner, 2007).

Garner and Slattery's views were based, in part, on ideas about maternal practice and maternal thinking that were first advanced by Sara Ruddick (1989). As Ruddick phrased it: "Maternal practice begins in response to the reality of a biological child in a particular social world. To be a 'mother' is to take upon oneself the responsibility of child care, making its work a regular and substantial part of one's working life" (p. 17). "Maternal thinking," in turn, derives from maternal practice, in that, especially with small children, mothers are constantly put in the position of having to "think out strategies of protection, nurturance and training" (p. 23).

Mothers are not the only ones who can engage in maternal thinking. Fathers (and others) can as well. But, according to Ruddick (1989), for them to do so they must be immersed (or have been immersed) in maternal practice. Thus, maternal thinking is less a product of biological dispositions and more a consequence of social circumstances, making it a socially constructed mindset.

With Ruddick's (1989) ideas in the mix, the archetype of the good mother and the archetype of the patriotic mother--as cultural forms--would seem to be polarized opposites; likewise, maternal thinking and patriotic thinking would seem to be sharply at odds. Garner and Slattery, however, found that although the two sets of

assumptions "appear to conflict," (Slattery & Garner, 2007, p. 430), in actuality (i.e., in the press reports examined) the two can be sociomentally reconciled.

Garner and Slattery pointed out, for example, that government agencies often have pushed the idea that a patriotic mother might also be considered a good mother, in that a good mother is willing to subordinate her desire to personally protect her children if it ultimately meant safeguarding the nation. A patriotic mother, they said, is "valued for her willingness to look the other way [i.e., redirect her perceiving] while her child face[s] injury or death" (Garner & Slattery, 2010, p. 152). In cognitive sociological terms, a patriotic mother is said to know not only when to "let go" (honoring a culturally and politically constructed boundary between her and her child) but also when not to think too much about what might happen to her child on the battlefield ("Mother, you would do well to dwell on something else").

The "push" to reinforce this sociomental association is manifested in the symbolic work (again, social signifying) that is carried out to honor the mothers of soldiers and hold them up as paragons of virtue. Examples of this symbolic work include the propaganda posters that government offices produce and distribute. ("Here he is, sir," says a mother in an early 20<sup>th</sup> century recruiting poster, as she hands her son over to Uncle Sam for conscription [Garner & Slattery, 2010, p. 145].) More subtle but no less effective is the belief in some circles that mothers, more so than fathers, find it difficult to cope with the deployment of a child and require a level of emotional support far above what fathers might require (LaRossa, 2011). What is implied is that without these efforts--without these *cognitive structures*--mothers would staunchly oppose the government's recruiting efforts, and express moral outrage if a daughter or son or theirs were to become a casualty. Widespread resistance to children being pulled into battle would make it difficult, if not impossible, for a country to engage in armed conflict, hence the use of marketing campaigns and other rhetorical devices to frame military service in noble terms (Lorentzen & Turpin, 1998).

Garner and Slattery found as well that mothers could reconcile the good mother versus patriotic mother paradox by believing that they were able to nurture their children from afar. In the news items studied, mothers enveloped maternal thinking and maternal practice within the patriotic mother archetype--thus categorizing one symbol (good motherhood) under the other (patriotic motherhood). For example, mothers of servicemen and servicewomen regularly kept a "watchful eye" on their children by monitoring (socially attending to) reports about the war zones where their daughters and sons were stationed. Demonstrating that they not only could care about but also care for their children, mothers also sent "packages, food, blankets, and clothing, in an attempt to meet physical needs that might otherwise remain unmet"; offered children "maternal advice on safety"(e.g., "keep [your] gas mask on"); and lent "emotional and spiritual support" when they felt it might help (e.g., counseling that God would forgive a U.S. soldier "if he [or she] had to kill someone") (Slattery & Garner, 2007, p. 436-437; see also Garner & Slattery, 2010; Slattery & Garner, 2011).

## 6.3 The Social Logic of Child and National Protection

### 6.3.1 *Reconfiguring the Paradox*

Garner and Slattery maintained that their conceptualization--and especially their documenting how women continued to care for their children, even from a distance--offered a portrait of wartime motherhood that was "more nuanced and complex than the myth of the patriotic mother allowed" (Slattery & Garner, 2007, p. 440). In this, they were correct. Their research does make an important contribution to our understanding of mothers and war. By their own admission, however, their conceptualization is limited, in that it provides only minimal information about the fathers of soldiers. These men, it was said, also "deserve serious scholarly attention" (Slattery & Garner, 2007, p. 441).

The relational nature of roles, in and of itself, underscores the necessity of looking beyond mothers, for how mothers think in times of war cannot be fully understood without taking into account the influence of the mothers' counter-role partners (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Thus, a mother's freedom to openly express her sorrow about a child's death may be contingent on a father keeping his own sorrow a secret (whereby he socially--and stoically--fashions a *misperception* about how he genuinely feels).

Garner and Slattery's theoretical take on the paradox of care is limited as well in another way. Not only does it offer minimal information about fathers, it also fails to take into account the full complement of cognitive options. In light of this, I propose that, in addition to including father and mothers, the paradox be reconfigured so that it allows for the consideration of more decision nodes. Thus, I suggest that, rather than speak about a good mother archetype versus a patriotic mother archetype, as Garner and Slattery do, we envisage instead two mandates that apply to all caregivers. The first mandate is to *protect the children*; the second mandate is to *protect the nation*. From this distinction, we may identify five scenarios, each of which can be applied to fathers and/or mothers.

In scenario one, protecting the children takes complete precedence over protecting the nation (i.e., one's own children are kept from military service). In scenario two, just the opposite is true: protecting the nation takes complete precedence over protecting children (i.e., the nation is protected, with the understanding that one's own children can be sacrificed on the battlefield). In scenario three, protecting the children is thought to be primarily important, while protecting the nation is secondarily important (i.e., one's own children may serve in the military but, one hopes or ensures, not in a combat role). In scenario four, protecting the nation is thought to be primarily important, while protecting the children is secondarily important (i.e., one's own children may serve in the military in a combat role but one's

expectation is they will be protected from harm and will return home safe). In scenario five, the two mandates are thought to be overlapping and equally important (i.e., to protect the nation is to protect the children, and vice versa).

It may be hard to imagine scenario two existing in fact. What sort of parent would think that protecting the nation should take complete precedence over protecting her or his children? By way of response, I first would note that the scenarios are options in a theoretical schema and, as such, are meant to convey an array of *possibilities*, not probabilities; they are, in other words, constructs meant to represent a series of "what ifs?" Second, I would submit that scenario two is more prevalent than may be immediately apparent. In a culture that anticipates and sometimes engages in war, soldiers "are expected to *die*" for their country, not just fight for it (Ryan, 2002, p. 20, my italics). That is to say, soldiers are trained to protect the nation, even it means giving up their own lives in the process. If significant numbers of soldiers accept this as their duty, then it is possible that there are also fathers and/or mothers who subscribe to the belief that there can be wartime circumstances where sacrificing children on the battlefield is required for the nation's good and that sometimes protecting the nation must take complete precedence over protecting any given child, even if that child is one's own.

### 6.3.2 *What about Fathers?*

It is perfectly understandable that mothers would find it difficult to reconcile protecting their children with the military's demands to place their children in perilous situations (Garner & Slattery, 2010; Slattery & Garner, 2007, 2011). It must be recognized, too, however, that mothers are not alone in wanting to safeguard their children, nor are they alone in worrying about what can happen to a daughter or son in a war zone; fathers are prone to have these feelings as well. Indeed, when the experiences of fathers are examined, it is clear that men's concern for their children's welfare closely parallels the concern that women have.

Men also have been known to say that they feel "fear" or "dread" or are "scared" when one of their children is deployed. A father of a soldier stationed in the Middle East spoke for many when he said that, although he was certainly "proud" of his son, he was "scared, fearing for his safety and wishing somehow [he] could take his place." Another father talked of the "anxiety, uncertainty, fear and frustration" he felt in "knowing [his son] was going into a very difficult and hostile place . . . ." Yet another referred to "the endless days of worrying for [his son's] safety" (cited in Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011, pp. 171-174).

These qualms are not specific to contemporary fatherhood or manifestations of current wars alone. In previous times and in previous conflicts, fathers have agonized over the fact that children called up to serve (and those already serving) were (or

could be) in great danger. During the Civil War, numbers of fathers did what they could to keep their sons from enlisting or being drafted; and among the men whose sons who were in the field, some went to extraordinary lengths to continue their parental care. There were, for example, fathers who, upon learning that their children had been wounded, traveled great distances to help nurse their children back to health (Frank, 1992).

There are reported cases, too, where a father's anguish over a child's deployment was so intense as to be personally life threatening. During World War II, one father suffered a heart attack within minutes of saying farewell to a son who had been drafted. Several hours later, he had another heart attack and died. He had "tearfully told his family that induction of his second son into the Army would be the death of him" ("2nd son inducted, father dies," 1943). Forty years before, during the Philippine-American War, a father of a soldier was said to be so "worr[ie]d over the fate of [his] son" that he tried to take his own life ("Soldier's father tries suicide," 1900).

The extent to which fathers as well mothers are concerned about their children being in the armed forces can also be gleaned from the Department of Defense (DOD) "Influencer Polls" which are regularly carried out to tap the opinions of adults who are known to affect youngsters' choices in life (i.e., family members, teachers, coaches, guidance counselors, etc.). The polls show that parents currently are not inclined to recommend the service to a daughter or son, and that mothers are less prone than fathers to make such recommendations. Interestingly, however, the difference between fathers' and mothers' attitudes on military service is smaller than might be presumed. One poll, completed in 2003, found that 46% of fathers, compared to 40% of mothers, said they would recommend that a child join the military, while a follow-up poll, completed in 2008, found that only 30% of fathers and 23% of mothers would--a substantial drop over five years. Interviewees indicated that the ongoing war in the Middle East negatively impacted their willingness to endorse the military as a career (Boehmer et al., 2004, p. 14; Carvalho et al., 2008, p. 14).

The simple truth is that fathers, like mothers, care about the safety of their daughters and sons and find themselves caught between the mandate to protect the children and the mandate to protect the nation. Interestingly enough, however, some communities do not necessarily think of fathers in this way--or, if they do, they sociomentally separate fathers from mothers. For example, websites and self-help books for mothers of soldiers abound; less perceptible are support services for dads. Remarkable, too, are some of the comments that emerge during discussions of what it means to have a child in the military. In one Internet-based survey of parents of service members, several mothers complained about the lack of support they felt they received from their partners (but the reverse situation was not mentioned), and two mothers, in particular, seemed to place fathers in a cognitive space that was reserved for supporters alone (e.g., friends, coworkers, religious organizations). One father did talk about the comfort that he and his wife had provided to each other (and it is likely

that in many instances partners kept each other's spirits alive); but another said that the support he had gotten from his son, who was deployed, allowed him to support his wife--which raised the question of whether his wife felt the support that she had gotten from others provided additional strength for her to support her husband (Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011). In short, when it comes to dealing with the absence of a child in the service, some might tend to think that the role of the father is in a different class from that of the mother. The father's job, in certain people's minds, is more to give assistance than to receive it.

The social construction of polarized roles seems particularly acute when a serviceman or servicewoman dies and condolences are offered to the family. In these circumstances, it is not uncommon for mothers to be accorded greater sympathy. Consider the cognitive boundary of Gold Star Motherhood. In the late 1920s, a group of mothers who had lost their daughters or sons in World War I came together to establish an organization called the American Gold Star Mothers (AGSM). The stated purpose of the AGSM was "[t]o unite with loyalty, sympathy and love for each other, mothers whose sons or daughters have made the supreme sacrifice while in the Service of the United States of America, or a result of such service" (meaning that a child had been killed while on active duty). In the late 1930s, a bill was brought to the U.S. House of Representative to incorporate the AGSM. From the very beginning, as the very name of the organization makes clear, only mothers could be given full Gold Star status. Fathers, in contrast, were restricted to being "honorary members" or "associate members" and thus were relegated to the periphery (American Gold Star Mothers, 2013; LaRossa, 2011, pp. 58-59).

In the years since it was formed, AGSM has become a revered American institution. By Presidential proclamation, the last Sunday in September is "Gold Star Mothers and Families Day" (Presidential Proclamation, 2012). Other organizations, in support of the fathers of the fallen, have recently emerged. None has the government imprimatur--or *symbolism*--that the AGSM has.

Some might claim that fathers are naturally less attached to their children than are mothers, and find it easier to accept the death of a daughter or son. But these assertions reify what, in fact, are socially established gender distinctions, and fail to take into account the considerable correspondence in men's and women's feelings.

### ***6.3.3 Protecting the Nation: Not Just an Abstraction***

In their interpretation of the paradox, Garner and Slattery characterize a mother's choice as between whether to care for a child or whether to care for a nation. One side of the equation is said to be in the private sphere; the other is said to be in the public sphere (Slattery & Garner, 2007). Whereas the private sphere is a personal

world of flesh-and-blood children and families, the public sphere is an impersonal world of abstract nations, governments, or states (Garner & Slattery, 2010, p. 144).

From an egocentric viewpoint, parents may very well think of the paradox as a choice between the personal and impersonal, and they may very well speak of the nation or government or state as an incorporeal entity. But this is not necessarily how every parent thinks of it, nor is it the most theoretically informative way to describe the breadth and complexity of the paradox.

When Garner and Slattery present the paradox as a choice between children and the nation, without saying precisely what they mean by "the nation," they come close to objectifying the nation/government/state to such a degree that they obscure the fact that the nation is made up of people. In other words, it is not some abstract nation that is in danger and in need of defense in times of war; rather it is the occupants of a specified territory who are vulnerable. Indeed, the extent to which a population feels directly threatened can influence how the paradox is cognitively framed--something that Garner and Slattery (2010, p. 153) briefly discuss but do not fully explore.

Although there are not many studies that have empirically looked at how parents of soldiers think about specific threats in a war, there are writings that provide insights into how soldiers themselves think about the threats. Even with the recognition that soldiers can get caught up in nationalistic zeal and vow allegiance to their country (Marvin & Ingle, 1999), especially at the beginning of a war and in response to an enemy assault (e.g., the attack on Pearl Harbor), the question of why soldiers fight comes down, for the most part, to a commitment to (a) safeguard their homes and (b) shield and support their comrades in arms (who, in turn, are shielding and supporting them).

During the Civil War, for example, "For Union and Confederate volunteers alike, abstract symbols or concepts such as country, flag, Constitution, liberty, and legacy of the [American] Revolution figured prominently in their explanations of why they enlisted." But "[f]or Confederate soldiers a more concrete, visceral, and perhaps more powerful motive came into play: defense of home and hearth against an invading enemy" (McPherson, 1997, p. 21). This is not meant to convey that Union soldiers did not fight to defend their homes, but Northern nationalism, albeit "just as real and as deeply felt," was different from Southern nationalism. Union soldiers, more often than not, "did not think they could 'retire into their own country' if they lost the war 'and possess everything they enjoyed before the war began.'" As one Northern officer succinctly put it, "If we lose in this war, the country is lost and if we win it is saved" (p. 99).

Similar sentiments were voiced in World War II. Within 24 h after learning that one of his boys had been killed in action, a Gloversville, New York, man took his other son to the induction station and insisted that he enlist. "It is better that these sacrifices be made *than to be ruled by the Axis*," said the father ("Brother killed, enlists," 1942, my

italics). War and survival appeared also to be on my father's mind when he was serving as a radioman in the air corps during World War II. In a letter that he wrote to my mother in 1942, he declared: "Darling I have an important job to do, we all have. We have to go overseas, so you my wife and our children to come, my parents and your parents and I can live in peace. That is why I am fighting . . . , for *peace on Earth*" (emphasis in original).

World War II posters rhetorically appropriated patriotic symbols (e.g., Uncle Sam) in order to encourage people to ration goods, buy war bonds, and enlist in the military. But there were also posters that were deliberately intended to instill in Americans a deep and abiding fear of what some government officials believed would happen if Germany and Japan were victorious. One poster, with a picture of two German soldiers, proclaimed: "If they win, only our dead are free. These are our enemies. They have only one idea--to kill, and kill, and kill, until they conquer the world." Another showed a Japanese soldier grabbing a young woman by the throat. Its warning: "Keep this horror from your home." (On the opposing side, the citizens of Germany and Japan were taught to believe that the United States was equally vicious and bent on destruction.) (LaRossa, 2011, pp. 19, 20).

People thus may not necessarily view the paradox as a zero-sum choice between country and family, because they may think that fighting for one's country is equivalent to--that is, in the same classification as--fighting for (and safeguarding) one's family. For example, letters written during the Civil War indicate "[m]any soldiers reconciled their dual responsibilities to country and family by the conviction that *in fighting for the one they were protecting the other*" (McPherson, 1997, p. 95, my italics). The fathers and mothers of these soldier may have thought as well that country and family were intimately bound.

To put it in starker terms, there is an arithmetic of war that goes beyond the strategy of having more combatants than the enemy has, and figuring that your side will have greater numbers standing in the end. There is also a social logic that involves calculations of generalized exchange, whereby people think that in contributing to a greater good they will personally benefit as well (Ekeh, 1974; Yagamashi & Cook, 1993).

The reasoning is thus: What would have happened in World War II if America's parents had kept their children from serving in the military? The United States would have been forced to surrender and the very children the parents were trying to protect would not have been protected at all. But suppose only a small percentage of parents kept their children from serving, while the vast majority did not? In this instance, the United States would have a chance to win the war because there would be enough soldiers to protect the nation (i.e., its people).

This is the very paradox that some fathers and mothers, under certain circumstances, believe they face in trying to decide whether to encourage their children to serve. For them, it is not a question of deciding whether to protect their

children or protect the nation, because, in their minds, protecting their children and protecting the nation are overlapping goals. According to their calculations, if no child were to serve in the military, the nation (and the children in it) would be doomed. Parents who utilize this social logic would encourage their children's enlistment. They also would think of themselves as good parents, because they would believe that, by encouraging enlistment, they were protecting their children (and their children's children, etc.). This mode of thinking is more likely if the external threat is thought to be great and if people fear that the homeland is going to be directly attacked.

There is yet another way to view the paradox and still feel that one is protecting children and also protecting the nation. Some parents may be conscientious objectors (CO) who hold that all wars--or certain wars--endanger both their children and the nation. From a cognitive sociological perspective, CO parents might classify themselves as not only good parents but also ardent patriots who believe that they are trying to protect both their children and the nation through non-violent means. Embracing this idea, however, brings into bold relief the fine line that CO parents must walk, similar to the one that conscientious objectors in general must walk (e.g., see Baskir & Strauss, 1978, pp. 40-41). For if it appears to friends and neighbors that the parents are adopting a CO mindset *only* to protect their children, the parents' motives could be classified as selfish (because their sole concern seems simply to be the safety of their own kids). To avoid this categorization, conscientious objectors strive to get others to define their efforts as patriotic (Burk, 1995). They, for example, endeavor to make the case that they are as loyal to the nation as the fathers and mothers who encourage their children to join the military. What is "different," they suggest, is how they exhibit their loyalty. Thus, during a Vietnam War protest in Washington, D. C., in October of 1969, antiwar demonstrators appropriated the symbolism (social significance) of the American flag as an emblem of patriotism and encouraged antiwar sympathizers to lower their flags to half-staff. In response, prowar demonstrators encouraged prowar sympathizers to fly their flags at full-staff "as a symbol of confidence in the President [i.e., Nixon]" (Bigart, 1969). Another illustration--one that is especially powerful and poignant--is the Los Angeles mother of two who set herself on fire to express her opposition to the Vietnam War ("Woman, in War Protest, Burns Herself to Death, 1967). Some observers might classify the mother as un-American. Others might classify her as a martyr for a patriotic cause.

Central to the CO position and central also to those who take a position in support of a war or against it are the collective memories that people have of past wars (Zerubavel, 2003). For conscientious objectors, their memories might be that "wars have never solved anything" or that "wars are futile and only make things worse." Those who believe that wars are inevitable and sometimes necessary might have a different recall of the historical consequences of past conflicts. They might craft a narrative of how terrible things would be "if certain wars were not fought and won."

Collective memories are selective, with different thought communities having different ideas on what should be included in a narrative and what should be ignored (Gillis, 1994), and thus it should not be surprising if those who believed in the utility of war were to socially focus on what they felt were "successful" wars, whereas those who believed in the futility of war were to socially focus on what they felt were "unsuccessful" wars. (The perceived success of any war, needless to say, depends on who was victorious and who was not.) How current military actions sociomentally compare to past military actions is a crucial element in the social logic of child and national protection. How different wars are cognitively compartmentalized is fundamental to people's attitudes toward war and children's role in war (Schuman & Rieger, 1992).

#### *6.3.4 Circumstances Where Protecting the Child is Thought of as Paramount*

During much of the Civil War, Robert Todd Lincoln--the son of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln--was an undergraduate at Harvard University and far from front. As the war dragged on, he, however, expressed a strong desire to enter the military, in part to answer critics who were calling him a "shirker" for not being in the fight while, at the same time, being "old enough and strong enough to serve his country." The President and First Lady had earlier lost two sons (though not to the war), and Mrs. Lincoln was afraid that she would lose another if Robert were to join the battle. ("Of course, Mr. Lincoln, I know that Robert's plan to go into the Army is manly and noble and I want him to go, but oh! I am frightened he may never come back to us.") Putting aside his wife's reservations, Lincoln determined that Robert could enlist after graduation; but, sensitive to her fears (and perhaps also his own), he took the initiative to write Commanding General Ulysses S. Grant to ask whether his son could be given "some nominal rank" but not be placed "in the ranks." ("Please read and answer this letter as though I was not President, but only a friend. My son, now in his twenty second year, having graduated at Harvard, wishes to see something of the war before it ends . . .") Grant expeditiously replied to the President's request and conferred upon Robert the rank of Captain. He also gave Robert a staff position that "made sure that [he] was not exposed to danger" (Donald, 1995; Lincoln, 1865).

The military posting that Lincoln was able to arrange for his son illustrates what is a fairly common but not frequently touted option in the paradox, where a parent endorses the notion of a child being in the military (or endorses the notion of a child being at risk of having to join in the military)--thus seeming to certify the parent's (and child's) patriotism--*but* instead of the child's contribution to the protection of the nation being first and foremost in the parent's mind, it is the

protection of the child that is paramount. It is not that the parent is uninterested in protecting the nation (Lincoln clearly wanted to preserve the union). The parent, however, is less inclined to want to place her or his own child in harm's way in support of that goal.

A context for this scenario (and essential to understanding it) is that being in the military but not actually in the fight is what happens to most soldiers in times of war. In the military as a whole and in various armed conflicts, the majority of soldiers will never personally know what it means to be in battle. In World War II, for example, of the more 16 million Americans who served, only 10% saw combat, and even fewer (about 800,000) "took part in any extended combat" as army infantrymen or marine rifleman (Linderman, 1997, p. 1; see also LaRossa, 2011). In the Vietnam War, of the 2.5 million Americans in the military, from 10% to 25%, depending on the stage of the war and the location of a soldier's unit, were involved in combat (Lair, 2011, p. 25).

For some soldiers, whether they end up in combat is a matter of chance, much the same as it is often luck (and a difference of inches or milliseconds) that separates those who survive a military encounter from those who do not. It is possible, however, for a soldier (or a potential recruit/draftee) to game the system and decrease the risks associated with being in the service. A case in point is that, during the Vietnam War, enrollment in college could make one exempt from the draft; and many young men, with the full endorsement of their parents, chose to go to college and remain in college not because they necessarily prized getting a degree but because they wanted to avoid being sent to Vietnam (Baskir & Strauss, 1978, pp. 29-32; Curry, 1985, pp. 66-67).

Toward the end of the Vietnam War, getting military deferments had become systematic and, for some, a family affair. The director of Selective Service in New York City commented, "[P]eople want to fail [service-induction examinations] and they're finding ways to do it." Said a draft counselor, "When I first started out, you didn't get anybody whose families were behind [children seeking to avoid the draft]. *Now their fathers come in with them*" (my italics). Not every parent was keen on the draft counseling their sons might seek. One college-age youngster, who was worried about being inducted and who was trying to get an educational deferment (e.g., as an apprentice welder), disclosed: "When my father heard I was trying to get out, he was angry. Called me a traitor; said he fought in World War II" (Braun, 1970). The intergenerational conflicts between World War II veterans and their children were especially acute during the Vietnam War (Rosenheck & Fontana, 1998). It also is true, however, that some World War II combat veterans--knowing the horrors of war all too well--hoped to shield their children from going through what they had.

Those who felt it was inevitable that they would be called up to serve, and who were not eager to flee the country (e.g., head to Canada), could wait to see what would happen to them when they were drafted (would they be required to be foot soldiers or would they be assigned to the motor pool?). Or they could visit a recruiting center and

negotiate for a branch of service that would pose less risk. Thus, for example, some men in the 1960s, rather than wait to be drafted, enlisted in the National Guard. At the time, National Guard units rarely were sent overseas (Ryan, 2009, p. 110).

For some parents, it may not have made any difference to them that their children were trying to avoid combat and they may have been fine with the idea that friends and neighbors might challenge their efforts to protect their children above all else. This would be more likely if there was a sense that a particular war was unjust, as the Vietnam War was thought by many to be. There could be circumstances however, where even if a war was socially classified as illegitimate, to acknowledge that one had volunteered for a particular branch of service for the express purpose of escaping the fight would mean risking being called a chickenhawk. This is the classification that some tried to apply to George W. Bush during the 2000 Presidential election. Records indicate that Bush, who graduated from Yale University in 1968, gained rapid entry to the Texas Air National Guard soon after Yale's commencement, possibly moving ahead of thousands of others who were on a waiting list. Because it could be unseemly for a Presidential candidate--and possible future Commander in Chief--to be thought of as a shirker, the Bush campaign vigorously denied that Bush's father (a World War II combat pilot and future President) and/or Bush's well-connected friends had worked behind the scenes to ensure that the younger Bush would be given preferential treatment (Ryan, 2009, pp. 109-111).

How one answers the question, "What were Bush's true motives?" is, of course, contingent on one's political thinking (i.e., party leanings). In response to the Bush story, conservatively-minded folk might be quick to note that, during his run for the Presidency, William Jefferson Clinton also was accused of having dodged the draft, by enrolling for a brief period in a Reserve Officer Training Corps (R.O.T.C.) program after he graduated in 1968 from Georgetown University, but not continuing with the program once he felt he no longer would be drafted and possibly sent to Vietnam ("Bill Clinton's Vietnam War Test," 1992; Ryan, 2009, p. 109).

Another tactic that has been used to minimize wartime risk involves deciphering which military occupational specialties are more likely to keep a soldier out of battle and away from combat zones. Thus, when someone is being actively recruited for military service or susceptible to being drafted, he or she might negotiate not only for a branch of service but also for an MOS that would pose less danger. The Vietnam War again provides examples. Some men, figuring they were going to get called up no matter what, volunteered for military duty in the hope that, by taking the initiative, they could exercise some control over what their MOS would be (Curry, 1985, p. 81).

Because the missions of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and National Guard tend to be broad, all four branches have a number of MOS's that, relatively speaking, are low-risk. Even the Marine Corps--recognized for its combat history--has MOS's with different levels of possible peril. In a study of 163,939 Marines, it was found that an

infantry MOS posed the greatest risk (40,760 of the Marines in the sample, or about 25%, were categorized as infantry), whereas other specialties posed less risk. Some of these non-infantry specialties included aircraft maintenance, logistics, and supply administration and operations (Gronroos, Zouris, & Wade, 2009).

War, of course, is ruthless and capricious, and there is conceivable danger for anyone who serves. Still, there is no denying that some military assignments are more hazardous than others. Soldiers fully recognize this and will openly talk about it, even if civilians may not. At the end of World War II when the military was making decisions as to who would get to go home first, some fighters took exception to the fact that there were men who were included in the early rounds of re-deployment even though they had not seen combat, but who were technically assigned to combat units (and hence socially classified within the units) and had received the same combat credits as those who had been in the thick of it (LaRossa, 2011, pp. 69-70). "To me, there were two different wars," said one former Marine (E. B. [Sledgehammer] Sledge) who ventured to describe the border between the two. "There was the war of the guy on the front lines. You don't come off until you're wounded or killed. Or, if lucky, relieved. Then there was the support personnel. In the Pacific, for every rifleman on the front lines there were nineteen people in the back" (cited in Terkel, 1984, p. 57).

Presently, there is no draft in the United States and the military relies entirely on volunteers. Yet the country is at war. American's parents want the nation to be protected, but fewer than one in three fathers and one in four mothers have said they would recommend military service to a child (Carvalho et al., 2008, p. 14). Proportionately, the number of men and women in the military is but a small fraction of the U.S. population. Most parents thus do not want their children to serve and do not have children who are in uniform, but benefit from the fact that *other people's children* are on the front lines protecting them and their families. Some have questioned the fairness of this scenario (Ryan, 2002, 2009).

## 6.4 Conclusion

My objective in this chapter--theoretical in its expression--has been to describe the quandaries that arise in times of war and articulate the social mindsets of parents of soldiers (or potential recruits/draftees), as they prioritize--and, in some cases, reconcile--protecting their children, on one hand, and protecting the nation, on the other. Employing a social constructionist approach and drawing on key concepts in cognitive sociology (i.e., social perceiving, social focusing, social signifying, social timing, social remembering, and social classifying), I proposed a reconfiguration of a paradox of care that acknowledges both fathers and mothers and lays out five possible scenarios of protection. In scenario one, protecting the children takes complete precedence over protecting the nation (i.e., one's own children are kept from military

service). In scenario two, just the opposite is true: protecting the nation takes complete precedence over protecting children (i.e., the nation is protected, with the understanding that one's own children can be sacrificed on the battlefield). In scenario three, protecting the children is thought to be primarily important, while protecting the nation is secondarily important (i.e., one's own children may serve in the military but, one hopes or ensures, not in a combat role). In scenario four, protecting the nation is thought to be primarily important, while protecting the children is secondarily important (i.e., one's own children may serve in the military in a combat role but one's expectation is they will be protected from harm and will return home safe). In scenario five, the two mandates are thought to be overlapping and equally important (i.e., to protect the nation is to protect the children, and vice versa).

The scenarios raise a number of questions for military family researchers to ponder. One that is germane to the issues presented here is whether fathers and mothers tend to think differently about the paradox. Are mothers more likely than fathers to think that protecting the children should come first (scenario three)? Are fathers more likely than mothers to think that protecting the nation should be primary (scenario four)? If a father and mother subscribe to different scenarios, how are the conflicting opinions communicated (not just to each other but also to their children), and how do the opinions play out in terms of their children's military-service decisions?

Also worth asking is whether the gender of the child makes a difference. Might a father or mother be more protective of a daughter who chooses to serve? What if that daughter has a good chance of being sent into combat? One DOD study found that fathers were less likely to support a daughter's decision (vs. a son's decision) to join the military. The same study found that mothers were equally supportive of either a son or daughter deciding to join. (Fathers, however, were more supportive of a child's decision to join than were mothers.) (Carvalho et al., 2008, p. 18). Yet another question is, what happens if a family has two or more children in the military. Is there a feeling among some parents that only one of their children should be in combat role at any given time? In a full-scale war, however, this may not be a guaranteed option.

What about a parent's veteran status; how might it play a part? DOD research shows that veterans and active-duty personnel are more likely to recommend military service to youth (Boehmer et al., 2004, p. 37). Since fathers are more likely than mothers to have served in the military, fathers tend to be more supportive of a child's decision to enlist. How might this manifest itself, when it comes to the paradox? One possibility is that veteran fathers might be more likely than non-veteran fathers to think that there can be circumstances where protecting the nation should be primarily important (scenario three). Another possibility is that veteran-fathers might be more likely than non-veteran fathers to think there can be circumstances where protecting the nation should be exclusively important (scenario two). Whatever the scenario, it is likely that veteran fathers, compared to non-veteran fathers, would be more familiar

with, and more watchful of, the preparation for battle that their children receive. Said a dad who had served: "I was fearful for his safety. But I thought that he is a professional soldier, *well trained, . . .*" Military experience can, in addition, be a source of pride and an important factor in calculating the depth of a person's obligation to protect the homeland. Said the same dad: "My son, like his father and grandfather, is a member of what I would call America's warrior class. I felt that *when America needs hard men to answer the call, then [my son] will be there . . .*" (cited in Crow & Myers-Bowman, 2011, pp. 174, 181, my italics).

As for the cognitive acts themselves, they figure into how the scenarios are imagined and enacted. Indeed, defining what it means to protect children and/or the nation requires an invocation of the cognitive acts. How do we know protection when we see it? What exactly are we supposed to identify and judge? Which elements of care (of children or nation) are fundamental? Which are immaterial? When is protection symbolically sacred? When is it medal-deserving brave? At what point should protection begin? How long should it last? Whose toils should never be forgotten? Whose should not be recalled?

Finally, there can be value in considering the myriad ways that parents try to protect their children (not just from enemy attack, but from disease and assault and psychological pain) and in investigating how the dilemmas that parents confront in times of war are similar to, but also different from, the dilemmas they have to deal with throughout their children's lives. Parents want to keep their kids safe. The central question always has been--and continues to be--*how*.

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