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MILITARY-CONNECTED ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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INVISIBLE MINORITY:
MILITARY-CONNECTED ADOLESCENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

A DISSERTATION APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP AND ACADEMIC CURRICULUM

BY

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To Chris, who will always be my favorite soldier.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Abstract

Military families and military-connected children are a vital source of support – the backbone for soldiers fighting in our armed forces. There are currently four million military-connected children in the U.S. and 80% of them attend public schools. Schools can play a key role in helping to support military-connected adolescents, yet this group remains unacknowledged. Even though many students are part of this invisible minority, little is known about how military-connected adolescents view themselves and their experiences as part of the military culture.

The purpose of this study is the better understand the life of military-connected adolescents to help inform teaching and learning in secondary schools. Narrative inquiry works to restory a participant's life by gathering, analyzing, and rewriting data in a sequence that makes sense, and searching for themes.

Co-constructed narratives were developed for each of nine participants. Themes that emerged reveal the invisible lives of these military-connected adolescents. Themes include confidence, empathy, maturity, and adaptability. Military-connected adolescents experience life on the move, new schools, being the new kid on the block, repeatedly saying goodbye, and (hopefully) reunification. Military-connected adolescents respond through a series of different coping strategies as they struggle to make sense of military life.

Implications and recommendations for findings include 1) identifying military-connected adolescents in secondary schools, 2) including information on military culture as a part of pre-service teaching and professional development for educators, 3) supporting military-connected adolescents in schools; and 4) reinforcing resiliency.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Prelude

November 6, 2017

"Excuse me, ma'am. Are you, um … Mrs. Hanna?"

It is passing time before the last class of the day. I stand up, having collected the box filled with the overused copies of A Raisin in the Sun we will start reading tomorrow, silently hoping they will survive this year's reading. I turn around to address who just spoke, to see a young man, clutching a sheet of white paper that clearly shows signs of having to be folded and unfolded all day.

"That's me. Let me guess, you must be Tomás," I reply as I look at the young man. "Is that your schedule?" I ask, reaching my hand out to look, knowing one can learn a lot about the type of student based upon their classes. It all seems stand fair for a junior: U.S. History, Geometry and so on when I notice his 6th hour class: JROTC.

"Military?" I ask, glancing up.

"Yes ma'am," he says, looking me directly in the eyes. It is then I realize I could have guessed that if I had looked a little closer when he walked in. Clean haircut, straight posture, not to mention the fact that he had called me ma'am in the first place, a rarity among youth today.

"Where were you stationed before?" I ask.

"San Antonio, ma'am."

"Let me guess, ADA?"

"Yes ma'am," Tomás hesitates, furrowing his brow.

"14 Juliet or 14 Sierra?"

A small smile graces his lips. "14 Juliet, ma'am." Tomás pauses for a moment and then asks, "Were you a soldier?"

"Yep. 88 Mike. I got to drive the PLS trucks you'll probably see on post. 16-ton, 16-wheel vehicles and I loved every minute of it," I smile. "Are you staying on post or in the city?"

"Well, we are in a hotel right now; my mom is still back in San Antonio packing everything up with my baby sister and they should be here next week. My younger brother and I came with my dad so we wouldn't miss too much school. We will start looking for a house to rent when she gets here I guess," he says.

"That's got be hard to be separated," I tell him. "Well, BAH covers a lot of really nice homes on this side of town, so hopefully you won't be having to be in that hotel for too long." I give him an understanding smile.

"It's fine, ma'am," Tomas quickly states, clearly not one to complain.

"All right, let's find you a seat." I look around the room to see what is available and notice the desk next to Alexis is open. Knowing she is active in the high school's JROTC program, I guide him over to the empty seat and make quick introductions. Before I leave, I hand Tomás back his schedule. "Tell your dad to try out Murray Hall, best DFAC on post," I whisper, giving him a light touch on his shoulder. I then add, "Welcome to our class and to Midwest High."

"Thanks ma'am. I will," he says, smiling as he folds his schedule back up, placing it in the pocket of his coat as I head to the front of the classroom to start the day's lesson.

Introduction

Getting a new student during the school year is a common occurrence for any teacher, but for those in a military community, it is just an SOP – standard operating procedure. Orders come down, soldiers report to new duty stations and the family follows. As someone who holds membership within the military culture, I find it helps to communicate this connection to military-connected students as soon as possible. To let them know there is at least someone at the new school who understands the expectations of military families.

This study seeks to better comprehend military-connected adolescents as an invisible minority within secondary schools. The purpose is to illuminate how military-connected adolescents define themselves and their experiences within the military culture and to explore how educators and schools can use the knowledge of military-connected adolescents to help better educate and assist them.

The classroom is an ideal place to increase tolerance and diversity awareness. In general, children who are supported by a caring adult tend to thrive educationally, emotionally, and socially (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg & Lerner, 2013; Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006). Since schools are the closest communities and social networks outside of the home, it is vital to find ways to help all students feel accepted and encouraged. Multicultural education is a staple in both preservice teacher training and professional development. However, one culture is often overlooked: the culture of the military.

The U.S. military consists of five service branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard. Each branch of service has its own full-time or active duty component along with a part-time or reserve section, both with the mission to fight for and protect the citizens of the

United States of America. The Army and Air Force also have National Guard units, which have a dual duty to support at the national and state level (Department of Defense, 2009).

Core values are unchanging foundational elements within a certain group or culture. They provide a sense of group identity and govern how people interact both within the organization and others outside the group or culture (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2009). The Department of Defense emphasizes core values in all branches including duty, integrity, ethics, honor, courage, loyalty, leadership, and professionalism (Military Leadership Diversity Commission, 2009).

While the U.S. military consists of a multitude of different cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities, it can also be considered a distinctive culture itself (Hall, 2011). Membership may not include prejudices that come with other marginalized groups (Ender, 2005), yet military-connected children remain on the fringe as one of the most invisible minorities in public education (Clever & Segal, 2013; Esqueda, Astor & De Pedro, 2012; Wertsch, 1991). Since they look the same as civilian youth, it can be hard to identify military-connected children based solely upon appearances (Atuel, Esqueda & Jacobson, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). In fact, often the first time that military-connected children learn they are different from their civilian peers is when they start attending public school (Wertsch, 1991).

The lives of military-connected children can be full of challenges including feelings of isolation due to high mobility, anxiety during parental deployment, and issues with personal and cultural identity development. Yet these stressors should not automatically be viewed as hindrances (Park, 2011) since military-connected children often display resiliency at higher levels than their civilian peers (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). O'Leary & Ickovics' (1995) research on thriving focused on women overcoming health issues however they envisioned their findings

spurring further research on how other groups might thrive in response to adversity. Looking into how military-connected children might learn to thrive despite the experiences that come with being a part of the military culture seems worthy of investigation.

Youth should not be viewed as problems but potential resources (Bowers, Geldhof, Johnson, Lerner & Lerner, 2014). Military-connected children are active participants in military culture, which is made up of experiences, networks, and relationships often unseen by "outsiders" (Jordan, 2002). As such, the life stories of military-connected children can offer an opportunity to look deeper at not only youth within this culture, but how they develop a sense of self as a part of the culture and also independently (Masten, 2013).

Problem Statement

Four million U.S. children currently could be considered military-connected children (Lester & Flake, 2013). While there are nearly 200 Department of Defense (DoD) schools, most DoD schools are overseas (Clever & Segal, 2013); so, 80% of military-connected children in the U.S. attend public schools (Military Child Education Coalition, 2011). Only 12 counties in the entire U.S. have no military-connected children, yet they remain unacknowledged in public schools (Clever & Segal, 2013). Although these children share the experience of the military culture, most schools do nothing to recognize or support military-connected children (Esqueda et al., 2012).

Purpose of Study

Despite large numbers, military-connected children comprise an invisible minority (Clever & Segal, 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012; Wertsch, 1991). The purpose of this study is to understand and illuminate how military-connected adolescents define themselves and their

experiences as part of the military culture and explore how this understanding could better inform teaching and learning in secondary schools.

Since military-connected children have unique experiences not commonly recognized, this study explores the following:

1. The invisible lived experience of military-connected adolescents, and
2. Implications for teaching and learning in secondary schools based upon knowledge of military-connected adolescents.

Research Questions

To make visible the unacknowledged or unrecognized experiences of military-connected adolescents, three research questions were used for this study:

1. How do military-connected adolescents perceive and define themselves as it relates to their membership within the military culture?
2. What kinds of experiences do military-connected adolescents have (or perceive themselves as having) because of their membership within the military culture?
3. How do military-connected adolescents perceive, respond to, or make sense of these experiences?

Significance of the Study

Beginning around World War II, research on military-connected children was initiated for two purposes: 1) to understand the military family and 2) to understand how stress affects these families (McCubbin, Dahl & Hunter, 1976). Early focuses on military-connected children in research included geographic mobility, adjustment to deployment, separation and loss, family reunions, families in transition, and services available (McCubbin, Dahl & Hunter, 1976). These are still important topics; however, the landscape and experiences have changed.

Some early studies offered only observation and data collected retrospectively (McCubbin, Dahl & Hunter, 1976). Even studies conducted as recently as Operation Desert Storm in the early 1990s may not necessarily apply to the current population of military-connected children. Recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan differ vastly from previous military conflicts (Chartrand & Siegel, 2007). This study takes a deeper look at the current population of military-connected adolescents, who have grown up during a continual wave of deployments and conflict abroad throughout their formative years (Olsen, 2012; Torres, 2006).

The White House put forth a government initiative in 2011 to help support and strengthen military families (White House, 2011). By using resources and expertise within the federal government, the initiative attempted to ensure the military remains a strong fighting force by understanding, appreciating, and supporting military families. The report focused on improving the quality of the educational experience, reducing negative impacts of frequent relocations, and encouraging the healthy development of military children as avenues to help.

On a social level, military families and military-connected children are often referred to as the backbone of the armed forces, so ensuring ways to support military-connected adolescents also supports national defense (Dagher et al., 2010). The stronger the military family is at home, the more a soldier can focus on the task at hand in a conflict zone.

While learning more about this invisible minority could be of great value within education, membership within the military culture is a dynamic part of my own identity on multiple levels. I grew up as a part-time military-connected adolescent when I spent summers and holidays with my father, a 30-year retired Command Sergeant Major in the Army National Guard. It was his service that influenced me to join the military. However, I only served four years with the National Guard. I see now that many of my memories of my father were colored

by his military service. Everything was done by following specific rules and procedures, including how one places groceries on the conveyor in the store. I also attribute the military culture to why my father has difficulty showing emotion because I now know that following orders without question and devoid of emotion – it is the only way soldiers can run into battle without hesitation.

The military is also what brought my husband and me together. We were assigned to the same companies for both our Basic Combat and Advanced Individual Training where we learned to be soldiers and military transporters. After training, when he was stationed here, I decided to move and also take on the role of a military spouse and we have been happily married for 18 years. We have also raised our own military-connected adolescent, a son who is now a senior in high school. While my husband is not an active duty soldier anymore – we decided that seven years and two tours in Iraq was enough for our family – he still works for the armed forces as a civil service employee, helping soldiers maintain safety on the shooting ranges. There is no way I could imagine my life not being linked to the military in some fashion.

However, my husband's time deployed changed him. I can confidently say he is not the same man I married. He suffers from tinnitus, nerve damage in his arms, and a fairly serious case of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as a result of war. While the first two are physical challenges and manageable, PTSD has changed the way our family operates. For years my husband checked and rechecked doors and locks in the house at night. We must sit in specific places in restaurants, avoid large crowds if possible, and we have even left in the middle of a movie because his anxiety about fellow patrons in the theater was elevated. I have been grabbed, had my arms twisted, and even put in a few headlocks at night because he was startled and mistook me for an enemy. My son and I have learned that you don't sneak up on dad and you

always make your presence known when moving through the house. One night he mistook our son for a burglar and pointed a gun at him. While these things have made our lives different, I have heard stories of people who are suffering from much more.

As a secondary teacher in a school district with a large military presence, I believe my membership in military culture makes me sensitive to the needs of military-connected adolescents. My hope is that my previous experience and links to the military will help me to better understand the participants in my study.

Assumptions and Delimitations

I assume that all adolescents that will be interviewed for the study will provide honest and accurate responses during the interviews. I also assume that responses will provide valuable information concerning perceptions of self. Another assumption is that youth between the ages of 14 to 18 years of age will have lived enough to be able to reflect on their past experiences.

Lived experiences rely on context, so while I may be able to collect the current participant's perceptions of how they view themselves and their experiences, the data might not completely match or agree with the rest of other military-connected adolescents.

Key Word Definitions

The following key terms are using within the context of research in the areas of military culture, military children, and positive psychology. Although they are not verbatim what might be found in the literature, they seek to blend available descriptions and definitions used within the previous educational and adolescent research in these areas and help to clarify the definitions of the terms as they are used in this body of research.

Military culture: a dynamic and, at times, fluid framework that includes observable and not observable behaviors (words and actions), interpretations (feelings, belief systems, and

norms of behavior), and core values (learned code of conduct and rituals) used by current or past service members of any branch of the U.S. military to express membership, validate identity, and make sense of the world as a part of the group.

Military-connected children: any child under the age of 18 with one or more parent/guardian who is currently serving of any branch of the U.S. military including active duty soldiers in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard, National Guardsmen, Reservists, veterans, civil service employees and military or government contractors.

Military family: membership, including soldiers, spouses, children, siblings, and other extended family members, who are connected to any branch of the U.S. military including Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard, National Guardsmen, Reservists, veterans, civil service employees and military or government contractors.

Positive Psychology: psychology that is defined by its preoccupation with the positive factors that enable one to develop a life worth living including wellbeing, contentment, satisfaction, hope, optimism, flow, happiness, resiliency, thriving, and flourishing.

Resiliency: sustained, positive effort in the face of an adversity to rise above the circumstances and move forward with confidence and optimism.

Thriving: successful response to challenges where people not only survive the obstacle but emerge actually better off afterward than they were beforehand.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter serves to provide a synthesis of existing literature in the major areas related to the research questions of the current study: *how military-connected children perceive and define themselves and what kind of experiences do they have as part of the military culture and how military-connected children perceive, respond to, or seek to make sense of these experiences*. The chapter is divided into two major sections: Military Culture and Positive Psychology. Each section will begin with an overview of the related literature before narrowing the focus to specific research on topics that align with the characteristics and concerns of military-connected adolescents. The chapter examines possible gaps in current research and describes how the current study fits into the body of research of military-connected adolescents.

Military Culture

Military-connected children live in our neighborhoods, go to our schools, are members of the quintessential American family, and there is much to learn from them (Park, 2011). Despite the increase in service members over the year, there is surprisingly little research on military-connected adolescents, especially in terms of understanding who they are and how they perceive their place in the world.

Military Families

With 3.2 million personnel stationed in all 50 states and 150 countries worldwide, the United States armed forces is one of the largest employers in the world (McCarthy, 2015). While some join as part of a family tradition or to fulfill a desire to serve their country, many sign up because it is a secure source of employment. In fact, the military is a younger workforce when

compared to other lifelong professions, since many join right out of high school (Clever & Segal, 2013).

When the government moved forward with an all-volunteer force in 1973 (Clever & Segal, 2013), the military culture underwent a drastic makeover. As more soldiers opted to join, not for a term of service, but for a full-blown career, ranks of young, single soldiers were joined by spouses and parents. The subculture families create as a result of their shared experiences within the military is distinctive as any race or ethnicity within the larger population (Hall, 2011; Montalvo, 1976).

There is an unspoken understanding that when a soldier joins the military, their family also enlists for the cause (Park, 2011). It becomes abundantly clear to most spouses and children that the mission of the military will always come first and the family second. During the Vietnam War, only 10% of the fighting force was married (Lester & Flake, 2013), but now more than 50% are married and 70% have at least one child (Huebner et al., 2009; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Park, 2011).

Military families come in many different types including nuclear, single parent, blended, and multigenerational. A growing number are dual military, where both serve as soldiers (Clever & Segal, 2013, Knox & Price, 1999). The age of military personnel (active duty, National Guard or Reserves, and civil service) typically ranges from 28 to 32-years-old. 80% are male, more than 70% are white, non-Hispanic; more than 90% have a high school degree or higher (Clever & Segal, 2013). 7% of all soldiers are single parents. Of female soldiers, 30% are also mothers (Lester & Flake, 2013).

High mobility and parental deployments are hard on all military families. Yet higher risks for anxiety, poor academic performance, and depression are more common for certain types of

military families, such as spouses who are young, those who are foreign-born, and those who are married to someone in the lower enlisted ranks (Park, 2011). Risks are also more likely to occur among military families of National Guard and Reservists who are forced to adjust to serving in a fulltime capacity as opposed to one weekend a month (Sherman & Glenn, 2006).

Military-Connected Children

For every soldier, there are on average 1.4 military-connected children, with a larger percentage elementary-aged or below, since soldiers tend to enlist for 10 years or less (Clever & Segal, 2013). The only exception is among National Guardsmen and Reservists who often serve longer terms and tend to have older children (Sherman & Glenn, 2006).

Military-connected children face a wide array of adversities including isolation, low socioeconomic status, parental absence, mission importance over family, and an authoritarian culture (Hall, 2011). Difficulties are even more common for children of National Guard and Reserve soldiers who find themselves facing a major lifestyle change when suddenly thrust deeper into the military culture during parental deployments (Harrison & Vannest, 2008; Olsen, 2012).

As an often-unidentified culture within schools, most educators are unaware of strategies to help support the social, emotional, and academic growth the members of this invisible minority (Bolton, 2006; Mmari et al., 2009). To address the needs of military-connected children, a Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Department of Defense and the Department of Education was developed in 2008 (Memorandum of Understanding, 2008). Designed as a "framework for collaboration," the objectives of the partnership were to increase efforts to support military-connected children in terms the development of academic and coping skills to help support education, transition, and deployment issues (Memorandum of

understanding, 2008, p. 1). President Obama took it a step further with a presidential directive to all federal agencies to make the education of military-connected children a top priority (Esqueda et al., 2012; White House, 2011). This directive included four major priorities:

1. enhancing the well-being and psychological health of military families and military-connected children,

2. ensuring excellence among military-connected children educators,

3. developing career and educational opportunities for military spouses,

4. increasing child care availability and quality for military-connected children (White House, 2011).

Because of the distinctiveness of the military culture, most military-connected adolescents tend to seek each other out for friendship because of the comfortable understanding among military-connect children of the demands and expectations (Hall, 2011; Moore & Baker, 2011). Since adolescent identity development is linked to the ability to develop strong interpersonal friendships, the high mobility of the military family makes identity development problematic for military-connected children (Williams & Mariglia, 2002). Learning to blend in amid the "new kid" label becomes a double-edged sword for military-connected youth because it may allow them to learn how to fit in and make friends quickly, yet there is an unspoken urge to keep others at a distance to protect themselves from the potential pain that comes with moving (Bradshaw et al., 2010; McDonald, 2010). Youth consistently emphasize that the military also serves as a source of support despite issues that come with being a part of the culture (Clever & Segal, 2013; Tyler, 2002).

Military Brats and Third Culture Kids

Two books that examine the invisible minority of military-connected children include Mary Edwards Wertsch's (1991) *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* and David C. Pollock and Ruth E. Van Reken's (2009) *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds*. Wertsch's work is the result of five years of in-depth interviews with 80 adult military "brats," a self-imposed moniker that, despite its pejorative connotation, military-connected children often use to signify their affiliation within the military culture, along with physicians, teachers, psychologists, social workers, and others to present a pattern of characteristics, both positive and negative, that unite military-connected children under a hidden yet common cultural identity (book jacket). Pollock and Van Reken's (2009) book attempts to explain the group identity of third culture kids – children of expatriates, missionaries, military personnel and others who live and work abroad – which is characterized by identity development influenced by formative years immersed in other cultures, creating a "third" culture. A deeper look at both works is presented below.

Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood inside the Fortress.

There may be little to no outward differences between military brats and civilians (Wertsch, 1991). However, hidden beneath the surface is a culture defined by raising a child with "rigid discipline, nomadic rootlessness, [a] dedication to the military mission, and the threat of war and personal loss" (book jacket). In fact, 80% of all military families could be described as authoritarian (Wertsch, 1991, p. 22). Being a member of the military comes with a fair amount of stress, which can result in issues such as alcoholism. Wertsch found more than half of her participants had at least one alcoholic parent (p. 51). Wertsch claims that military-connected children develop special adaptations to help them survive and even thrive, including a special

antenna to identify fellow military brats, the ability to mimic others to blend in, forced extroversion to help make new connections, knowledge about traveling light, and expertise in saying goodbye. Because of the stress of mobility and parental deployment, some military-connected children have problems with trust, attachment, and security.

The home parent, often the mother, becomes an important figure in the military family as a touchstone, a source of stability, and go-between during a crisis (Wertsch, 1991). Despite the mother's central role, women tend to be less valued in the military, resulting in a patriarchal culture (p. 94). As a rule, soldiers are taught to hide emotions and to explicitly follow orders to prepare for combat, they often keep their feelings at home hidden as well, having difficulty in expressing love to even their family for fear of looking weak. As such, military-connected children can feel as though they are supposed to be seen and not heard and often expected to wear masks of secrecy, stoicism, and even denial of fear. In the military culture, there is a hidden hierarchy of priority and importance:

1. the mission,
2. the soldier,
3. the spouse, and
4. the children.

Identity development and feelings of belonging are affected when the military-connected adolescents' needs are placed at such a low priority.

Wertsch (1991) also noticed a pattern of behavior in terms of how boys and girls are raised in military families. Daughters are viewed as pretty and doted on during their younger years but claim to feel invisible in the eyes of the military parent when they grow up (p. 94-95). In fact, the more authoritarian the parent, the more invisible the daughter becomes, making it

harder to forge connections between daughter and parents that impacts adolescent identity development into adulthood. Many daughters feel the only way to be seen by the military parent is to either act out in rebellious and destructive ways or become more masculine, often going as far as joining the military service. Daughters quickly learn that they remain invisible whether they rebel or conform to what society personifies, which can lead to control issues in their own life (p. 110, 118).

Sons, on the other hand, are never invisible in the military family, especially in the eyes of the military parent and even more so if they are the first-born son. Boys are held to higher standards, taught to be more aggressive, endure tougher punishments, suffer from less privacy than their sisters, feel unable to express any emotion other than anger, and often face rampant homophobia (p. 144-149). Sons, whether they want to or not, often internalize the warrior spirit, feeling unable to pass up a dare or a fist fight, something that follows them into adulthood. Sports can provide an avenue for boys to release aggression, but involvement can be detrimental if the military parent looks at the hobby as a means to toughen up the son. Many sons claim that the only ways to escape the military parent's eyes are when he is physically strong enough to best the parent or is old enough to finally move way (p. 154).

Issues of feeling a lack of control manifest themselves in different ways in boys and girls, where daughters tend to gravitate toward eating disorders and self-harming behaviors and sons either take a passive stance on everything or become obsessive perfectionists throughout life. Whether the military-connected child is male or female, those who come out as LGBTQ face difficulties with acceptance in the uber-masculine culture (p. 177).

Wertsch published *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* in 1991, and research was collected during the 1980s, more than 30 years ago. The book featured only the

father as the soldier. Wertsch focused on the father as the soldier-partner with little acknowledgment of women as soldiers. While the military is male-oriented, the gender gap is decreasing, and more families now fall under the dual military status. The participants in Wertsch's *Military Brats: Legacies of Childhood Inside the Fortress* were all children in the 1950s to 1970s, meaning they went through being a military brat during World War II and the Korean and Vietnam Wars. Since the book was published, the U.S. has been involved in different global conflicts including the Persian Gulf in the 1990s and the massive number of continued military deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan since 2001, all of which have been characterized as vastly different types of warfare than previous conflicts. The data was also collected by adults only as they reflected on their time as military brats. While the book appears to be well researched, it is not necessarily as methodologically rigorous as studies published in academic and psychological journals.

Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds.

Two of the most detested questions posed to third culture kids are "where are you from" and "where is home" (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Coined by Ruth Hill Useem and John Useem in the 1950s, third culture kids are those who spend a significant amount of time during their formative years – birth to age 18 – growing up outside of their parent's home culture. These children tend to build relationships within a foreign culture and even begin to identify with the new culture. The melding of the home and foreign cultures into a "third" culture is where these kids claim membership.

Military-connected children find themselves joined by missionary, business, and expatriate kids who all fit the third culture definition. Personal characteristics of third culture kids include:

1. adaptability, but lack of true cultural balance
2. the ability to blend in but difficulty in defining individual differences
3. having fewer feelings of prejudice, but being more aware of it in the world
4. a focus on living in the now, but at the detriment of knowing they have no choice in the future at times and
5. an appreciation of authority, yet mistrustful of its intrusion (p. 99-110).

Two realities that apply to third culture kids across the board include being raised in genuinely cross-cultural and highly mobile worlds. Pollock and Van Reken (2009) developed the PolVan Cultural Identity Model, which looks at adolescent identity in two ways: the changing nature of how individuals relate to their surrounding culture and how their identity is constantly being redefined in contrast or comparison to whichever culture they are currently in (p. 54). The PolVan Cultural Identity Model contains four sections: the *foreigner* who look different and think differently from the current culture, the *adopted* who look different but tend to think alike, the *mirror* who look alike and think alike, and the *hidden immigrant* – which include military-connected adolescents – who may look alike but think differently.

Pollock and Van Reken updated their research since *Third Culture Kids* first published back in 1999. One update was the inclusion of cross-cultural kids, which "include all children who for any reason have grown up deeply interacting with two or more cultural worlds during childhood," which is more common in a world where multicultural families are the norm (p. xiii). Cross-cultural kids are separated into 10 different categories, a graphic representation of them is presented in Figure 1.

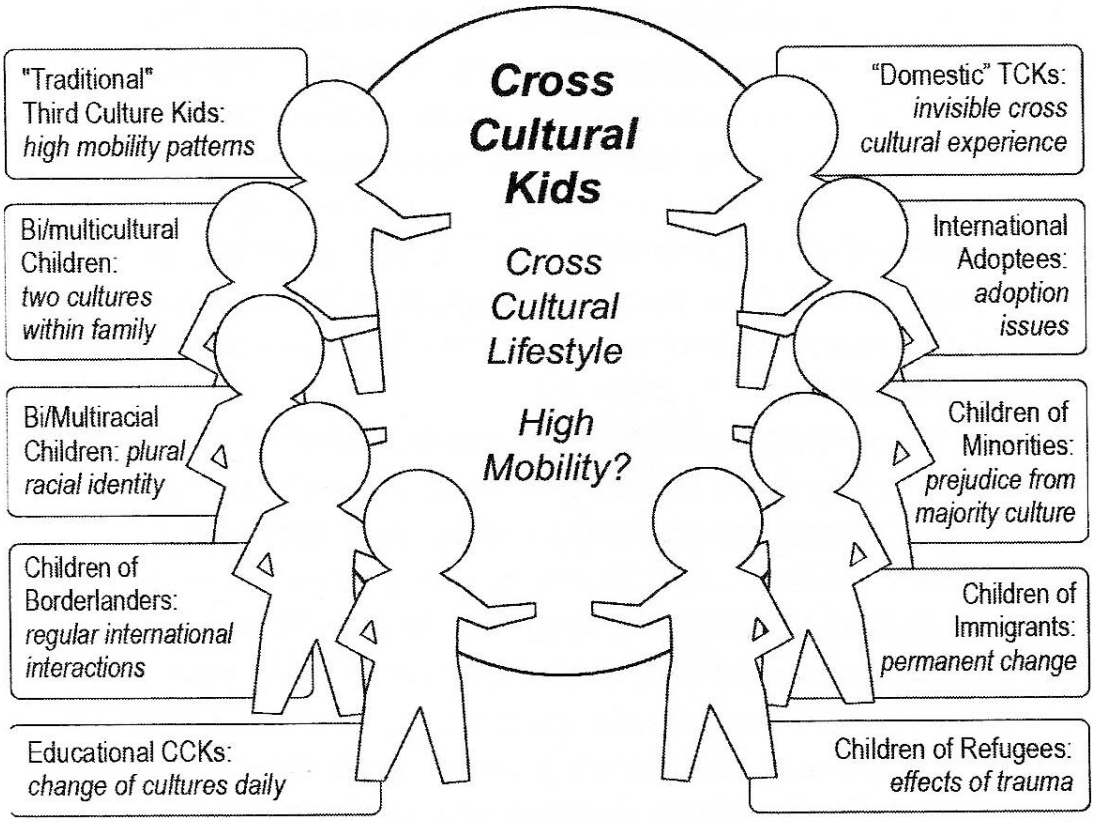

Figure 1: Cross-Cultural Kids: Potential Commonalities and Differences by Pollock and Van Reken (2009)

Under this classification, military-connected children would be considered both traditional and domestic third culture kids as their lifestyle is both highly mobile and features invisible cross-cultural experiences between military and civilian worlds (p. 35). Pollock and Van Reken (2009) note each cross-cultural kid could fall under multiple categories or may have additional subgroups with a category, group membership may not depend on where the child grows up, cross-cultural categories may represent any and all nationalities, ethnicities, and economic groups and authentic cross-cultural kids do not merely live side by side with other cultures but interact with other cultures in meaningful ways.

Third culture kids endure difficulties as part of their transient upbringing. Each move to a new place forces them to change worldviews, expectations for behavior, and even languages

rapidly (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Many cross-cultural kids also have difficulties developing personal and cultural identities as their environment consistently shifts (p. 59). When reentering their home culture, third culture kids often take on one of three roles:

1. the chameleon who mimics others in hopes of achieving peer acceptance,
2. the screamer who makes sure everyone is aware of how they are different,
3. the wallflower who just hopes to blend in and go undetected.

One should not misinterpret challenges as liabilities among third culture kids, who often view obstacles as ways to better themselves and build resiliency. Third culture kids know they are given the opportunity to experience the world in a way others can only do through books, movies, and the news.

Pollock and Van Reken's (2009) *Third Culture Kids: Growing Up Among Worlds* provides in-depth information but lacks clearly-defined strategies to help third culture and cross-cultural kids. Although military-connected children fall within the definitions of both third culture and cross-cultural kids, there is limited information presented that relates specifically to military-connected adolescents.

Identity Theory and the Military-Connected Child

Culture isn't something that just surrounds a person, it impacts them and can serve as the glue that holds groups together (Hylmö, 2002; Moore & Baker, 2011). How individuals develop personal identity in conjunction with group or cultural identity has been well-researched (Erickson, 1959; Schwartz, Donnellan, Ravert, Luyckx & Zamboanga, 2012). Teenage years can be tumultuous, but military-connected adolescents are additionally impacted by the expectations of the military culture. To understand identity development and how it pertains to military-

connected adolescents, we must first look at individual and cultural identity theories and how these theories have adapted over time.

Individual identity development.

Erik Erikson became a well-known theorist in 1968 with the publication of *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (Muuss, 1988). Under the premise of his philosophy, the identity of an individual and the crisis society is currently engaged in cannot be separated, because both help to define and impact one another. Erikson points out one should not use the denotative meaning to the word *crisis*, as challenges should be viewed as opportunities and avenues for change and not as adverse events (Muuss, 1988).

Erikson posits a lifespan theory of identity development, where one acquires an ego-identity and confronts various identity issues throughout life. Identity arises from a psychological connection between childhood and adulthood, where a healthy ego-identity develops from consistent and meaningful recognition of accomplishments at eight stages of development (Muuss, 1988). Each stage is characterized by a conflict or crisis with the possibility of polar outcomes. A positive quality becomes the dominant part of the identity if the adverse event is worked out, or the negative quality takes over if the conflict goes unresolved, which can manifest into issues with self-concept and mental health (Muuss, 1988). Erikson claims all eight stages are present, and all exist as a part of the whole, but individuals must arrive at each stage at the right time to have healthy identity development.

Being a part of the military culture during the formative years of childhood can impact adolescent identity development. The identity development stage normally takes place during adolescence, yet Erikson claims identity development remains a lifelong concern (Muuss, 1988). During identity development, teens no longer rely on adults for guidance, instead placing an

overwhelming focus on what peers think while developing high levels of self-obsession (Muuss, 1988). Military-connected adolescents who undergo high mobility have difficulties in establishing strong peer relationships, which can impact identity development. If they are unable to develop the positive qualities needed at this stage, military-connected adolescents may end up confused about who they are, which may result in delinquent behavior and self-destructive practices. A military hierarchy that places the needs of military-connected adolescents behind the mission and the soldier is not conducive to positive identity development.

Goal development also begins during the adolescent identity development stage, where teens leave dreams of becoming superheroes behind and instead think practically about career and lifestyle aspirations (Muuss, 1988). Fidelity, introduced in infancy during the trust stage, makes a reappearance as a source of strength during identity development, allowing teens to build autonomy and resiliency. Like any child that deals with parental abandonment during their youth, military-connected children that face parental deployment may develop trust issues that can start to manifest as an issue during adolescence.

Cultural identity development.

Erikson pointed out that specific qualities of individual identity may differ from group to group, but different stages of development have common elements across cultures (Muuss, 1988). *Personal identity* refers to the individual goals, values, and beliefs, while *cultural identity* encompasses the extent to which one considers group identification significant and seeks to develop solidarity within it (Schwartz et al., 2012).

Adopting an identity after a considerable exploration yields the most success, while personal agency during adolescent identity development is vital as it allows for a better understanding of individual identity within a cultural context (Schwartz et al., 2012). Hylmö

(2002) points out that perceived membership within subgroups shapes individual experiences and identity differently, so promoting healthy adolescent identity development in correlation with cultural identity development is crucial.

Developing a stronger cultural identity can help individuals to find their place within society, boost personal self-esteem and sense of belonging, and serve as a protection to overcome discrimination (Schwartz et al., 2012). As military-connected adolescents consistently move into new cultures and regions of the world, their sense of cultural identity is affected. This might be why military-connected adolescent develop friendships with fellow military youth as their cultural identity is shaded by the affiliation with the military.

Military-Connected Adolescent Stressors

Military life is too fluid to encapsulate into one set of characteristics. As the interloper in most situations, military-connected adolescents live with an outsider identity, feeling they only fit in within the margins (Wertsch, 1991). When military-connected adolescents start to believe their lives are normal, it only takes moving to a new post or parental deployment to a war zone to bring them back to reality (Atuel et al., 2011; Tyler, 2002). In fact, when trying to compare military-connected adolescent stressors with stressors of civilian children it is useful to keep in mind that the sources of their obstacles come from vastly different places (Olsen, 2012). Stressors like high mobility, separation, and anxiety due to parental deployment, academic and school issues, and personal and cultural identity development issues are common among military-connected children of all ages (Bolton, 2006).

High mobility.

Military-connected children move to a new duty station an average of every three years, 2.4 times often more than civilians (Clever & Segal, 2013; Wertsch, 1991). The military family

is impacted financially during these moves. Each move requires the nonmilitary spouse to secure new employment, resulting in a tumultuous work history, an inability to secure managerial positions, and even earning up to 2% less in salary each time (Clever & Segal, 2013).

A mobile lifestyle impacts adolescent identity development as peer approval is restricted when friends are left behind each time the family moves (Moore & Baker, 2011). Being stationed overseas can intensify issues with identity development. Military-connected adolescents claim the first year of an overseas tour is the most difficult not because of culture shock but due to loss of friends and difficulties in developing new relationships (Tyler, 2002). The number of times the family relocates, the timing of the move, and the length of time at duty station, especially during the adolescent years, all impact military-connected adolescents (Clever & Segal, 2013, Bradshaw et al., 2010).

Over time, military-connected adolescents learn to develop relationships with a wide range of peers while simultaneously not becoming attached so saying goodbye is not as difficult (Wertsch, 1991). Sometimes superficial friendships prevent the military-connected adolescent from developing strong connections with peers. However, in the new digital age, maintaining relationships with friends through social media and other technology has reduced some of these issues (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

While the mobile, nomadic lifestyle is not ideal, there are some silver linings in being able to move to new places throughout childhood. Moving allows military-connected adolescents an opportunity to be more self-reflective (Ender, 2005). Military-connected adolescents also get a chance to leave a school that is not conducive to learning or a chance to reinvent themselves as they enroll in a new school (Easterbrooks et al., 2013).

Parental deployment.

Parental separation is difficult for all children, but the danger of a parent deploying to a war zone adds an extra layer of stress for military-connected children (Lester & Flake, 2013). Of the four million military-connected children in the U.S., nearly 900,000 have had at least one parent deployed since 2001(Park, 2011), with 212,000 who deployed twice and 103,000 deployed three or more times to conflict regions (Chandra et al., 2010). The number of service members deployed from 2001 to 2007 jumped from 8% to 38% and length of deployments increased from six to 15 months at a time (Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2008).

Erickson's first identity stage concerning trust is important not at infancy, but also during adolescence. Military-connected adolescents who experience parental separation during identity development are more susceptible to attachment issues, especially if forced to endure multiple deployment cycles (Huebner et al., 2007; Williams & Mariglia, 2002). Stress during parental deployment stem not only from worrying while the parent is away but also how the family will adjust to the soldier's return (Lester & Flake, 2013; Lester at al., 2010; Segal, 1986).

Separation impacts military-connected adolescents differently than elementary-aged children since teenagers take on more responsibility in the home while the parent is gone (Clever & Segal, 2013). Military-connected adolescents dealing with parental deployments are at risk for higher levels of anxiety, anger, depression and rebellious behavior (Lester et al., 2010; Masten, Best & Garmezy, 1990; Olsen, 2012). Some military-connected adolescents take advantage of the reduced parental governance, which can cause an issue when the parent returns home (Wertsch, 1991). Research does show boys tend to handle parental deployments better than girls (Olsen, 2012).

While the fear of losing a parent is debilitating, a soldier's death can impact the military-connected family and adolescents beyond the loss of a parent. Military benefits only last six months beyond death and families are forced to leave military housing, which, in a sense, strips a part of the military-connected adolescent with a layer of their cultural identity (Wertsch, 1991).

Academic and school issues.

Department of Defense schools are trained to understand and support the needs of military-connected students. Even though 80% of military-connected children attend public schools, most teachers simply are not trained to support this invisible minority (Military Child Education Coalition, 2011). Educators need to know military-connected children might have gaps in their academic skills and development because of continued mobility and parental deployment (Harrison & Vannest, 2008). As such, teacher preparation programs need to foster an awareness of the military-connected child to meet their social, emotional, and learning needs and work to honor the military culture (Military Child Education Coalition, 2011).

There are other issues military-connected adolescents face in public education. Some schools, especially smaller ones, do not have access to resources or the ability to offer a wide range of courses, while others are hesitant to put military-connected adolescents in key positions on athletic teams or in extracurricular groups for fear of them moving away (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Supportive relationships with peers and adults are important in the life of a military adolescent, especially in the classroom (Bolton, 2006). Well-developed and supportive student-teacher relationships can serve to buffer the stress military-connected adolescents feel.

Moving is even more difficult when military-connected adolescents are asked to take or repeat classes for high school credit because of divergent schedules or different graduation requirements (Clever & Segal, 2013). The Department of Defense, the Military Child Education

Coalition, and the Department of Education worked together to establish the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children in 2011 (Masten, 2013). This compact was designed to help reduce and facilitate achievement among military-connected students by focusing issues that arise during enrollment in new schools, including the transfer of records, access to special programs and extra-curriculum activities, and course requirements to help military-connected adolescents graduate on time.

Identity development issues.

By the time a military-connected child is the age of five, he or she have already internalized many of the values inherent in the military culture (Wertsch, 1991). As they grow up, many military-connected adolescents claim the military lifestyle can feel like assimilation as they feel forced to suppress individual identity or beliefs to perpetuate the myth of always being prepared and exemplifying perfection (Litwack & Foster, 1981). The inculcation of the mission-first mentality passes from the soldier to the child and can lead to issues with personal identity and even outright rebellion among military-connected adolescents.

Military-connected adolescent identity is shaded by affiliation with the military culture, so feelings of isolation when off base or around civilian peers are common (Ender, 2005; Litwack & Foster, 1981). This outsider mentality is even more common among military-connected adolescents whose parents are veterans or soldiers in the National Guard and Reserves than those whose parents are on active duty and stationed near a military base (Clever & Segal, 2013).

The stressors of high mobility, deployment, and academics issues encountered military-connected adolescents come at the cost of developing a strong sense of self and personal identity. A common issue among military-connected adolescents is prolonged or delayed adolescent

maturity (McDonald, 2010; Moore & Baker, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991). When military-connected adolescents move, they are forced to restart the process of forging new friendships and developing a sense of belonging. Since adolescent identity development hinges on peer interaction, the time spent trying to forge those new friendships put them further behind their peers. Military-connected adolescents given the opportunity to live abroad may adapt elements of their identity to fit into the dominant culture. However, changing too much each time they move can lead military-connected adolescents to feel culturally homeless (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011).

Some military-connected adolescents self-identify as biethnic or bicultural since they may not be confused about who they are, but they have a hard time getting others to recognize the invisible part of their identity (Moore & Baker 2011). This consistent reaffirmation of their membership within the military culture can cause weariness to the point that military-connected adolescents simply suppress certain parts of their identity to avoid the conversation (Jordan, 2002).

Although the practice has gone out of favor, soldiers used to be held accountable for the actions of their children, facing punishment or loss of rank depending on the offense the child committed (Wertsch, 1991). As such, high expectations were set for behavior, academics, and conduct within the home for military-connected adolescents to ensure they always reflect the best version of the military culture. Although a soldier might no longer be reprimanded for their child's indiscretion, those rigid expectations are still the norm for most military families.

While the military is one group, a soldier's identity can still be divided into their branches of service. Many military-connected adolescents often feel compelled to participate in the joking and rivalry they see adults participate in among the branches, a little like representing a

neighborhood or a set in a gang (Williams & Mariglia, 2002). It is important to remember that having a cultural identity and feeling as though one belongs is not the same thing, so while some are a part of the military culture, they might not feel as those all facets of their identity are welcome (Moore & Baker, 2011).

The military culture is made up of different races, ethnicities, and religions, so conflicts can arise, despite being a part of the larger entity. Prejudice tends to fade when one must rely on another for survival, and while the military is accepting of diversity, black military-connected adolescents grow up more acutely aware of their differences, which can result in a double dose of marginalism (Wertsch, 1991). Prior to 1948, black soldiers served in segregated companies until President Truman signed an executive order reversing this separation (Wertsch, 1991). Although the military sought to end segregation years before it was enacted in education, elements of bias concerning race, gender, and sexual orientation exist in today's military, which is perceived by military-connected adolescents (Clever & Segal, 2013).

Having multiple group and cultural memberships can serve as sources of support or protection to help adolescent during major transitions and life events (Scarf et al., 2016). Perhaps military-connected adolescents appear resilient because the challenges that come from being a part of this culture gives them opportunities to develop relationships with several different groups.

Military-Connected Adolescent Strengths

Despite stressors, military-connected adolescents often have strengths associated with being a member of this invisible minority. Military-connected adolescents come to cultivate personal strength through passive acceptance that the world is always going to change. They develop the resilient skill of learning to adapt to any situation (Wertsch, 1991). Military-

connected adolescent obstacles are numerous, as they deal with difficulties in building nurturing relationships and developing personal autonomy, facing these challenges and living to tell the tale can help them develop resiliency (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).

Socially, military-connected adolescents develop a better sense of well-being, a greater respect for authority, and are more likely to befriend someone different from them (Park, 2011). Youth within the military culture also tend to fare better because of access to quality healthcare, at least one steady stream of income for the family, and access to better resources and equal opportunities (Clever & Segal, 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Even though high mobility can hinder military-connected adolescents, learning how to meet new people and quickly develop extrovert behaviors can help military-connected adolescents learn to be resilient in both social and work environments (Blum, 2005).

Soldiers must have a high school diploma to enlist and 25% go on to earn college degrees (Clever & Segal, 2013, Knox & Price, 1999). Military-connected adolescents are four times more likely to attend college than nonmilitary-connected kids (Third culture kids, 2005). The military has been recognized as a viable path for many youths, especially those with high-risk backgrounds, which translates into better opportunities (Masten, 2013).

Despite challenges, military families and the military culture give adolescents a meaningful identity associated with strength, service, and sacrifice (Lester & Flake, 2013). Military-connected children develop resiliency and engage in fewer high-risk behaviors than their peers (Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013). Strengths military-connected adolescents can develop include better self-regulation, academic performance, emotional well-being, and a better community and cultural sense (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). Moreover, the military is built upon the notion of service and sacrifice for others, so military-connected adolescents raised in a

culture that exemplifies these principles are more likely to internalize them as a part of their own identity (Wertsch, 1991).

During time stationed in a different country, military-connected adolescents are more likely to seek out international experiences and travel, allowing them to grow up open-minded (Tyler, 2002; Wertsch, 1991). Military-connected adolescents, whether they remain a part of the military as adults, still internalize the idea that they will always be welcomed and accepted by the culture (Huebner et al., 2009; Wertsch, 1991). Perhaps the best strength military-connected adolescents gain from being part of the military is the reliability that membership in this culture endures throughout their lives.

Positive Psychology

The purpose of this study is to understand how military-connected adolescents define themselves as part of the military culture and explore how this knowledge could better inform learning and teaching among military-connected adolescents in secondary schools. Previous literature has presented military-connected adolescents as being resilient despite obstacles that are common among this demographic (Clever & Segal, 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Torres, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). The previous findings concerning military-connected adolescent resiliency warrants looking deeper into the realm of positive psychology, resiliency, and thriving to better understand these constructs in order to see if they present themselves among participants in this study.

History of positive psychology

G. Stanley Hall (1904), in his book *Adolescence: Its Psychology, and Its Relations to Anthropology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education*, stated adolescence is worthy of deeper investigation. He coined the phrase "storm and stress" to describe how teenagers are often

involved in a period of great conflict (p. 377). Although heredity impacted early development, he felt environmental factors played an important role during adolescence (Dubas et al., 2003). Thus, began the time of looking at the formative teenage years through the lens of deficits instead of strengths that remained for decades.

In the field of adolescent psychology, there has been a recent shift away from a negative focus on adolescence to one that highlights the positive (King et al., 2005; Scales et al., 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). In 2000, researchers Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi presented an introduction to what would become and new focus within the field of adolescent psychological development: positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Both researchers presented individual reasoning behind their conviction that a movement toward positive psychology was warranted in adolescent research. For Seligman, it was a desire to focus not on fixing adolescents but identifying and nurturing their strongest positive qualities, while Csikszentmihalyi wanted to better understand the sources of strength that adolescents drew from to remain positive and flourish in life (p. 6-7).

In a nutshell, positive psychology concerns healthy, positive well-being and focuses on how enhancing optimistic aspects of psychological development can promote resiliency, thriving, and flourishing (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Positive psychology focuses on three major areas: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction concerning the past; hope and optimism for the future; and flow and happiness in the present (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Since 1978, negative articles concerning adolescents were published 14 times more than positive ones (Norrish & Vella-Brodrick, 2009). Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) mused that the pressing or urgent feelings associated with the adverse aspects of adolescent psychological development might account for the overwhelmingly negative focus that cloaked

previous research. However, viewing adolescents through a negative lens forces support for teens to be reactive, whereas positive psychology allows for a proactive approach to helping youth. Furthermore, an excessive focus on the negative characteristics of adolescent development "demonizes" youth, where adults shrink away from adolescents in fear instead of supporting them (Benson, 2012, p. 16).

Resiliency in adolescents

No matter how much parents wish it, they will not raise invulnerable kids. The next best thing is for parents to help their children learn how to handle the bumps and bruises the world has in store for them (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006). Learning to develop a stronger sense of resiliency, the ability to rise above a difficult situation to continue to live in a positive and optimistic way should be a goal for all parents (Masten et al., 1990; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Research on resilience as a positive construct emerged in the 1970s as researchers first used it to describe a small group of black children living in dire circumstances who conquered obstacles and grew up to live well-adjusted and confident lives (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Since military-connected adolescents endure stressors as part of the military culture on top of general teenage issues, resiliency is a skill they have learned to harness (Clever & Segal, 2013; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Torres, 2006; Wertsch, 1991).

In their book, *Building Resilience in Children and Teens*, Ginsburg and Jablow (2006) broke resiliency down into seven crucial Cs: competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control. These seven components, when developed, help youth to internalize resiliency as a construct to battle adverse events. A focus on positive over negative, a

resilient adolescent can look at the world with optimism, allowing them to achieve more (Seligman, 2011).

In 1990, Search Institute researched and developed a framework to help respond to human growth and understanding that narrowed down 40 internal and external developmental assets. This list of developmental assets showed that not one factor but the presence of many make the difference in terms of adolescent resiliency (Mannes, Roehlkepartain & Benson, 2005; Scales & Roehlkepartain, 2003). Over 3 million middle and high school students have taken Search Institutes Developmental Asset survey since its inception (Scales et al., 2011). Adolescents who reported a higher number of assets did correlate to better protection from developing at-risk behaviors above and beyond basic demographics (Mannes et al., 2005; Scales, Benson, & Leffert, 2000). However, a massive majority of adolescents claimed to have only developed an average of 19 assets.

Research studies have linked several protective factors to building the resiliency needed to respond to an adverse event and avoid negative outcomes (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). These factors include

1. pronounced autonomy,
2. strong social orientation,
3. a close caregiver bond within the first year of life,
4. a strong sense of independence,
5. an optimistic view of life experiences,
6. an active engagement in selfless service toward others,
7. an easy-going temperament,
8. good self-regulation,

9. being able to view adversities as learning experiences,
10. a positive self-esteem, and
11. having responsive yet demanding adults in the youth's life

Research on resiliency has fluctuated between a focus on preventing the development of psychopathology to detecting the process and regulatory systems that govern the resiliency's protective factors and promoting prevention, intervention, and policy to help youth facing adversity to develop resiliency (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012).

Multiple quantitative instruments to identify resiliency in both adults and adolescents have also been established (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). This has helped to develop six different models of resiliency including:

1. *compensatory model*, which neutralizes exposure to risks
2. *challenge model*, where a stressor is treated as a possible way to challenge the individual to enhance competency
3. *protective factor model*, where personal attributes can hinder or amplify the individual response to the adverse stress
4. *protective-stabilizing model*, where protective factors are present can assist in reducing the effects risks have on an individual
5. *protective-reactive model*, where there is an understanding that protective factors can weaken the impact of risk, but not completely remove them
6. *protective-protective model*, where the presence of one protective factor can help to increase the presence of other protective factors in helping to reduce risks for the person.

Previous research on resiliency among military-connected adolescents during parental deployment found resiliency development was dependent on three major factors including the length of the military parent's deployment, the remaining at-home parent's ability to cope during deployment, and whether the military deployment was to a high conflict region (Harrison & Vannest, 2008). Military-connected adolescents interact with their teachers as much if not more than their parents, so public schools can play a key role in increasing resiliency if evidence-based interventions and strategies are used (Atuel et al., 2011).

The development of adolescent resiliency will not happen automatically, yet there is a belief that everyone is born with an innate capacity to develop it (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012). Development of resiliency comes as the result of consistent guidance and support from caring adults in the lives of adolescents (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006). These adults can be parents, family members, teachers, pastors, and any other influential community members capable of offering help to youth. The key is to remember resiliency is not something that can be physically given to teenagers, it must be developed and strengthened by surrendering control over choices to the adolescent in favor of guidance, attention, and support so they can find and develop their own inner strength (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006).

Thriving during adolescence

In the same way parents need to help their children learn resiliency, it is also possible to help them take it a step further and learn to not just overcome but flourish over struggles. Ginsburg et al., (2015) state that thriving:

> … is a process whereby our children's survival depends on us less and less … With each new skill, they move closer to the day when they could survive without us. But surviving and thriving are two different things. In some ways, as our children

grow older they need us more. Their need becomes far more complex than survival. They must learn to find their place in an increasingly complicated world. (p. 71)

Adolescents gain certain skills from learning to ride the waves of life on their own that simply cannot be taught to them by even the best of parents. Adults need to allow adolescents the opportunity to figure things out on their own to build confidence and the ability to transcend adversity.

Up until recently, thriving was only mentioned in research as it pertained to babies during their first few moments of life (Benson & Scales, 2009). Positive experiences with stress can serve as a catalyst for developing growth and thriving among adolescents (Easterbrooks et al., 2013; Ginsburg et al., 2015). As such, positive psychology has been a backdrop of many recent research studies concerning adolescent thriving (Dowling et al., 2003; King et al., 2005; Scales et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2005; Theokas et al., 2005).

Thriving is a successful response to adversity where one comes away better off afterward than they were before (Carver, 1998; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Parry & Chester, 2005). To understand thriving as a skill, one must understand the difference between resilience and thriving. Resiliency is returning to the same place before the problem occurred while thriving is transformative in that it helps the teen rise to a better place than he or she was before the conflict (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995). In looking at how patients respond to battling an illness, O'Leary and Ickovics (1995) developed a model to showcase three different ways in which patients respond to a challenge, including surviving in an impaired fashion, recovering by returning to a homeostasis level, and thriving by overcoming and rising above the obstacle. Carver (1998) later adapted the model to include the concept of succumbing or failing to engage against or resist the

conflict, a route some individuals might take when faced with certain obstacles. A copy of Carver's (1998) model is presented in Figure 2.

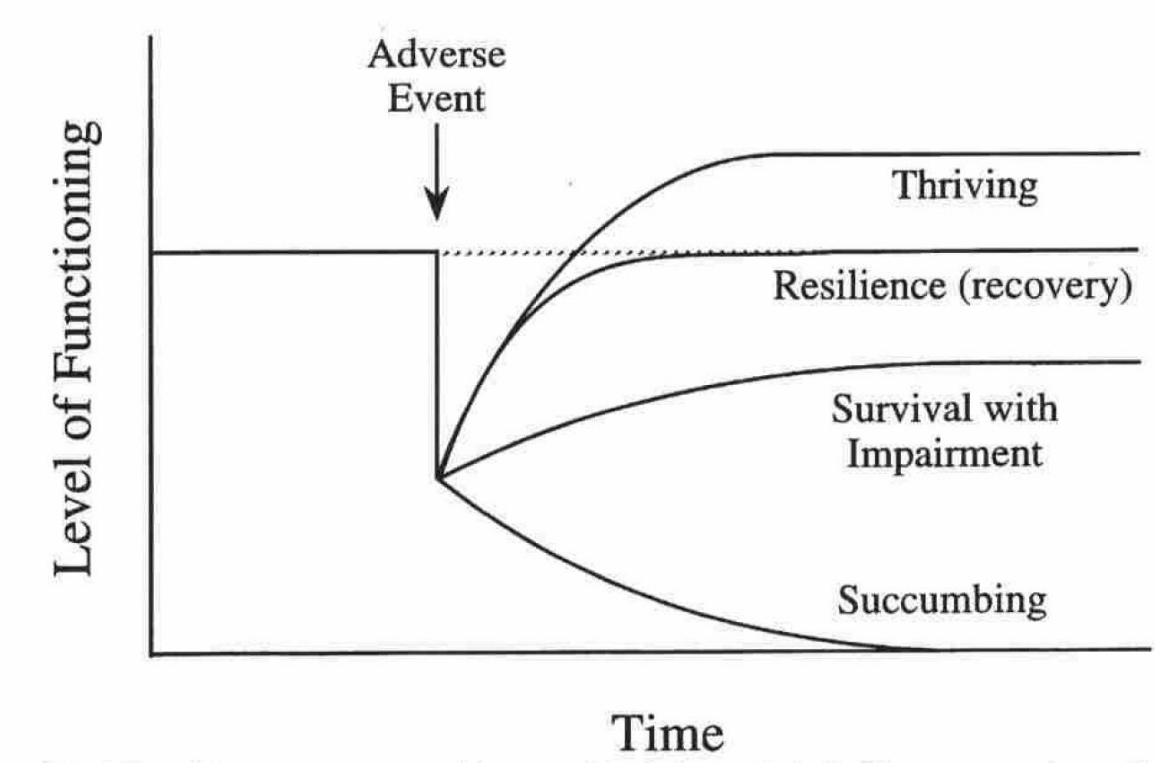

Figure 2: Four potential responses to adversity by Carver (1998).

Society tends to measure success in terms of academic success and persistence toward graduation, but student success is made up of more than just good grades (Schreiner, 2010). Research shows there are seven outcomes or indicators of adolescent thriving including:

1. school success
2. leadership
3. helping others
4. maintenance of physical health
5. delay of gratification
6. valuing diversity

7. overcoming adversity

These adolescent thriving indicators have also been shown to positively relate to Search Institutes 40 Developmental Assets of resiliency (Mannes et al., 2005; Scales et al., 2000).

Findings from studies concerning thriving among other populations could also be of value in understanding its impact on adolescents. Parry & Chester (2005) looked qualitatively at thriving among childhood cancer survivors and found that these children chose to look at their situation in terms of positive outcomes and worked to discover meaning from their experience by finding ways to give back. Wendt, Tuckey & Prosser's (2011) qualitative study used the perceived life experiences, beliefs, and values of social workers and teachers to better understand how they thrive in difficult professions. Shenk, Zablotsky & Croom (2017) looked qualitatively at how self-defined successful older African-American women were able to thrive despite growing up in the Jim Crow South by overcoming feelings of anger and redirecting their focus on goal development and finding a firm sense of self.

The fact that thriving can be described as both a process and an outcome makes inquiry into the phenomenon complex (Parry & Chester, 2005). Biologically the human body was designed to deal with the stress of hunters and gathers – issues not quite applicable in the 21st century (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006). Adolescent empowerment becomes vital to growth development during the transition between middle and high school, so a focus on thriving development could be beneficial if not most optimal since meaning-making is more malleable during adolescence (Parry & Chester, 2005; Scales et al., 2011). For adolescents to develop skills in thriving, they need adults – parents and teachers – who can provide adolescents with 21st-century resources and social skills to help them overcome and flourish despite obstacles (Ginsburg et al., 2015).

Perseverance and grit

Achieving success is important – no one sets out to be a failure. Creating situations to assist adolescents in learning to thrive is vital yet thinking of how to start can feel elusive and intangible. Reframing how one views success by focusing on perseverance and grit is a great place to start.

Children think concretely and live in the now (Ginsburg and Jablow, 2006). However, a failure to focus on future consequences and the development of a sense of delayed gratification can lead to issues with impatience and intolerance (Ginsburg et al. 2015). Seligman (1998) states talent is overrated and can be an imperfect measurement and predictor of success. *Perseverance* comes when one behaves in an engaged, focused, and persistent manner to achieve long-term goals (Farrington et al., 2012). Ginsburg and Jablow (2006) state success cannot just include reaching a goal or getting the right answer, but should also consist of

1. happiness
2. resilience
3. generosity
4. compassion
5. the desire to contribute
6. a capacity to build and maintain meaningful relationships
7. the ability able to collaborate
8. remaining committed to hard work with effort and tenacity
9. welcoming constructive criticism, and
10. the ability to wield creativity and innovation

Each of these elements positively strengthened within adolescents can help them work toward developing perseverance.

Student-centered learning with a focus on growth mindset can also help in assisting with perseverance (Dweck, 2016). Academic perseverance hinges on both the grit and self-esteem of the individual. *Grit* is the ability to sustain effort over long periods of time to achieve success, often done by developing a tenacity or the ability to persist and withstand challenges along the way (Farrington et al., 2012). Researcher Angela Duckworth claims grit goes beyond individual intelligence into an ability to focus more on intestinal fortitude (Farrington et al., 2012). In fact, grit is seen as the primary driver of performance and, in many ways, may be a better predictor of real-world success (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006).

Helping parents and educators learn how to cultivate resiliency and thriving among adolescents is not something that comes with a how-to manual. Subsequently, manifesting resiliency and thriving within youth will undoubtedly change them, but success is not always guaranteed as the outcome depends on the nature of the challenge and the individual response to it (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).

As teenage brains are works in progress, the best thing adults can do is to support positive mindsets and develop effective learning strategies among adolescents (Farrington, 2012; Ginsburg & Jablow, 2006). Dweck (2016) points out that praising effort and not intelligence or the final product is also beneficial in helping to develop perseverance, grit, and tenacity in youth. Thriving is a process (Lerner, Dowling & Anderson, 2003) as each challenge gives adolescents opportunities to change, it also forces them to confront personal priorities and re-examine who they want to be (O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995).

Gaps in current research

When it comes to research concerning military families, the career soldier and the family as a unit have been well studied, but a specific focus on what is like to be an adolescent in a career military family remains relatively unknown.

The literature that does exist concerning military-connected children tends to be either older, overly concerned with deficits instead of strengths, a result of smaller findings within the context of a larger study, uses a limited definition of military-connected children, and not methodologically rigorous (Clever & Segal, 2013; Cozza & Lerner, 2013; Knox & Price, 1999; McDonald, 2010; Park, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991). Much of the research tends to focus on observation and quantitative data or reflection as adults instead of inquiring directly from military-connected adolescents to query how they perceive and describe themselves and their experiences while in the middle of their formative adolescent years.

The focus on a reactive approach over a proactive one, of wanting to help military-connected children after they have endured obstacles within the military culture as opposed to finding out how to help them avoid or overcome conflict before it happens, is overwhelming (Clever & Segal, 2013; Lester & Flake, 2013; Tyler, 2002). Additionally, focusing only on the stressors and not the strengths associated with this population favors the view of military-connected children as victims of their circumstances instead of fighters.

It is important to view thriving as a process of experiences throughout life. Context often influences experience. Thinking of thriving as a lifelong process allows individual to explain not only if they felt, believed or acted in a specific way, but why and what influenced those experiences (Massey et al., 1998). Since a quantitative approach predicts values and boundaries of thriving as opposed to allowing opportunities to see or hear various ways in which people

might perceive themselves as thriving, a qualitative look at thriving can show how the process pertains to individuals as they construct their own narrative and give meaning to their lives and experiences (Massey et al., 1998).

For youth to handle the ups and downs of adolescence, they need access to a toolbox filled with self-care, self-advocacy, and peer relation strategies. This need is even more imperative for military-connected adolescents who may feel like outsiders in the world (Ginsburg, Ginsburg & Ginsburg, 2015). The lack of research identifying the individual perceptions related to this invisible minority makes it difficult to develop high-quality programs and policies to support military-connected adolescents. As such, this study seeks to understand how military-connected adolescents make sense of their reality and experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology used to discern the perceptions and experiences of military-connected adolescents. The conceptual framework, research design, sampling, data collection and analysis, and the role of the researcher are discussed.

Overview

The overall purpose of this narrative inquiry study will be three-fold: one, to explore military-connected adolescent's perceptions of themselves and their lived experiences; two, to situate those perceptions within the constructs of resiliency and thriving, and three, to present a view of the different and diverse backgrounds of military-connected adolescents.

Much previous research on military-connected adolescents is quantitative or has been primarily led by adult voices (Clever, 2013; Dagher et al., 2010; McCubbin et al., 1976; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991). This study gives military-connected adolescents an opportunity to contribute to the conversation through in-depth interviews. While each participant's story is unique, I work to identify emergent and resonant themes among the experiences and perceptions of military-connected adolescents and situate commonalities within the current research on adolescent resiliency and thriving.

Conceptual Framework of Inquiry

Qualitative research is guided by paradigms that include the researcher's epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises, which help to guide beliefs and feelings about the world and how it should be understood and studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Each paradigm makes certain demands on the researcher including the questions they ask and the interpretations they make. Since there is not an abundance of relevant research focusing on the lived

experiences of military-connected adolescents from their own perspective (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991), this interpretive inquiry study will fall under the umbrella of constructivism and social constructionism. Constructivism and social constructionism are important conceptual frameworks within this interpretive narrative inquiry as I sought to discover the subjective meaning military-connected adolescents perceive concerning who they are and how they assign meaning and make sense of their experiences.

Under the constructivist paradigm, the researcher assumes a relativist ontology, where multiple realities exist in the world, a subjectivist epistemology, where meaning is created not just independently, but developed when we engage with others and the world itself, and a naturalistic set of methodological procedures (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 35). Crotty's (1998) description of social constructionism also applies to this narrative inquiry. From the moment we are born, we begin to use our minds to construct meaning based upon what we see, hear, feel, and experience. However, depending upon the culture, race, or religion we grow up among, we construct multiple meanings through the lens of these social groups in which we belong (p. 54). Since military-connected adolescents are a part of the military culture, this membership impacts how they see themselves and the world.

Research Design

Identity is something understood at a personal level. The stories shed light on how we see ourselves through what is revealed to others.

Since the intent of my study is to gather an in-depth understanding of military-connected adolescent's perceptions of themselves and their experiences as part of the military culture, narrative inquiry was selected as the methodology. Narrative inquiry helps give a voice to participants as they unpack their identity through the sharing of experiences and life stories

within various social, historical, and cultural contexts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Experiences are subjective, emotional, and personal, so collecting them through the study and development of narratives seemed an opportunity to gain insight into how to best support military-connected adolescents.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe narrative inquiry as both a phenomenon and a methodology (p. 2). In the context of this study, participant narratives are a means for military-connected adolescents to think about their experiences and perceptions, a way for them to understand those experiences, and a chance for them to share their stories.

It is important to be able to articulate a connection between one's own personal interests and larger social concerns as expressed through the works and lives of others (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Since my identity is interwoven with military culture and military-connected adolescents make up nearly a quarter of the students that attend the school district in which I teach, understanding their stories through narrative inquiry was a logical choice.

Many erroneously believe narrative inquiry is simply a process of telling stories, but in reality, it is more complex. Narrative inquiry is a search for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes that shape memories as data is arranged in different ways to bring forth experiences in light of previous research and theories (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000, p. 131-133). As experience relates to individual growth and transformation, the goal is to get participants to reflect and share experiences in an authentic way. A reflexive relationship exists amidst living a story, telling the story, retelling the story and reliving a story (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Narrative inquiry allows for distinctions that might be overlooked using other methods (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000; Massey, 1998). For instance, approaching a research problem with preconceptions can cloud the ability to see how individuals perceive and react to

experiences and make meaning in their life (Massey, 1998). This is not to say that narrative inquiry is done without a purpose. In fact, purpose is what helps to drive the inquiry. However, narrative researchers understand that purposes may shift, and focuses may blur as participants share experiences in unanticipated ways.

Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) offer the metaphor of three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which combines interaction (personal-social), continuity (the temporal understanding of past, present, and future), and situation (place) to help one focus on "the four directions in any inquiry: inward and outward, backward and forward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). For this study, inward will refer to the participant's internal feelings, hopes, dreams, beliefs, and thoughts, while outward will be their surroundings, including home, school, family, peers, and the various military communities in which they have grown up. Backward and forward relate to the concept of temporality where the past, present, and future impact the perception of experience. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) recommend that narrative inquiry should take all four directions into consideration when studying life stories.

Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

Participants in the study will be selected using a criterion-based approach to ensure that they meet the following requirements:

1. 14- to 18-years-old
2. Have at least one parent or guardian that is a member of the military under the expanded definition of active duty soldiers, National Guardsmen, Reservists, or military veterans, and
3. have moved to new duty stations multiple times and endured parental deployment during their childhood as part of the military culture.

To gather a list of possible participants, the researcher obtained permission from an urban school district with a high school adjacent to a U.S. military post in the midwestern part of the United States. A list of all military-connected adolescents within the high school was compiled and, along with help from the school administration, narrowed down to include all possible participants who meet the previously set criteria. Students were eliminated from the list if they had any current connection to the researcher to avoid any possible issues of undue influence or coercion.

The remaining students on the list were given a letter from the researcher informing them about the study and inviting them to an informational meeting under the direction of the researcher (Appendix A). This meeting allowed possible participants to hear about the purpose of the study in more detail and what their participation would entail. Those who were interested in submitting their name for participation were given parental permission forms (Appendix B) and assent to participate in research forms (Appendix C) to take home for their parents. Of the 10 participants who brought back signed paperwork by the deadline, nine were selected for the study. All nine met the criterion-based requirements.

Data Collection

In the field

Narrative inquiry refers to data collection as being "in the field," which means being in that three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, nestled within their stories and our own as we travel through participant's shared lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Of course, participants' stories do not start when the research begins, nor do they end once the research is over. Stories continue so there is always going to be some tension as the researcher works to

overcome an outsider status to properly enter the field of inquiry. Negotiating relationships with participants are vital. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out:

> the researcher needs to be there long enough and to be a sensitive enough reader of and questioner of situations in an effort to grasp the huge number of events and stories, the many twisting and turning narrative threads that pulse through every moment and show up in what appears to the new and inexperienced eyes of the researcher as a mysterious code. (p. 77)

Since the researcher is only able to gather data through what participants perceive and choose to share, researchers need to work to build a sense of trust with participants. Participants who are comfortable are more likely to share honest insight and details of their experiences. To protect confidentiality, participants' identity remained confidential. They could pass on any question during interviews and could leave the study at any time. Additionally, a neutral location for interviews, the high school library, was used so that participants did not feel pressured.

Interviews as field texts

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) distinguish between two types of data that comes from narrative inquiry. The first is called *field texts,* which are the notes, recordings, and transcriptions collected during interactions with participants and supporting observations. The second is *research texts,* which is what field texts eventually turn into through iterative readings to search for patterns and themes.

Data was collected from in-depth, semi-structured narrative interviews with nine military-connected adolescent participants. These interviews were appropriate both for obtaining thick textural descriptions of participant's experiences as part of the military culture and for capturing participants' perceptions of themselves and their experiences.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one and tape recorder to be transcribed by the researcher. Additionally, field notes and observations during the interview were recorded to help create a more complete picture of the interview. Interviews ranged from 15 to 49 minutes and, to get a complete picture of the story of their lives and experiences as military-connected adolescents, each participant was interviewed at least three separate times over the span of three months. Semi-structured interview questions were used to help guide each of the three interviews (Appendix D).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Field texts to research texts

A goal in the data analysis process was to co-construct life stories and experience since stories are the ways in which individuals share part of themselves and their identity (Esterberg, 2002). Meaning in life is continuously constructed and reconstructed as one lives and shares his or her life through stories. “Language helps the researcher see how the storyteller speaks about himself or herself, about the relationships in his or her life, and about the environments in which his or her life has been or is being lived” (McCormack, 2000, p. 287). Field texts were read and reread to identify emergent patterns and resonant themes across participants.

Data analysis consisted of several layers. First, the collected data, including all participant interviews as well as field notes taken during interviews, were transcribed and organized into field texts. From there, the field texts were read and reread to ensure saturation of the participant’s experiences and perceptions by the researcher. Since stories are often not presented in a chronological manner, interview responses were re-sequenced to better present a linear view of the participant’s narrative. However, to ensure the voices of the participants are present, narratives were constructed using participants own words so the meaning within their

story remained true to how they perceived themselves and their experiences as military-connected adolescents. The researcher's words were only included to make sense of individual responses to interview questions and to link story elements together to make for a coherent story. These narratives served the first layer of research texts.

Emergent patterns and resonant themes

The next layer to come from the field texts grew out of the repeated asking of questions concerning "meaning and significance" as interviews and narratives were iteratively read and reread to ascertain emergent patterns and resonant themes across participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 132). Emergent patterns and resonate themes were sought as they related to the perceptions that military-connected adolescents shared about themselves and their experiences and how those perceptions and experiences related to current research and literature on adolescent positive psychology (particularly with regards to resiliency and thriving).

By using the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to frame the interpretations of participant perspectives and experiences, interviews were coded to identify patterns, narrative threads, and tensions within and across participant's shared experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). These overlapping patterns were developed into themes and interpreted under the frames of three-dimensional narrative inquiry.

Participant involvement in data analysis

As a major part of the narrative inquiry included honoring the experiences of participants, I collaborated with participants in the creation of their narratives. Since participants were the only ones who could legitimately ascertain the credibility of the findings and ensure restoried narratives authentically reflected their own voices, member checking with all participants was conducted. This allowed participants the chance to review transcripts and restoried narratives to

check for factual errors and completeness. It also allowed them to add anything they deemed might be important to ensure that their story was presented honestly, authentically, and accurately.

Role of researcher

While there is some disagreement on the researcher's role, most scholars acknowledge the importance of the researcher's relationship with the subject they are studying (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As an educator who works with military-connected adolescents, I was in a unique position to interact daily with students within the culture. I worked to remain purposefully engaged with the students to gain an authentic look at the experience from the student's perspective.

Evidence of Quality

Sometimes qualitative researchers have challenges regarding establishing trustworthiness. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out, researchers can bring biases and preconceptions to studies since they cannot be "disembodied recorders of someone else's experiences" (p. 81). Inevitably qualitative researchers find themselves in the dual role of inquiring about experiences while simultaneously becoming a part of the experience themselves. To establish trustworthiness and authenticity, I documented all details of procedures used during the study. Member checks with all participants were conducted to allow them the opportunity to review transcripts of interviews and restoried narratives to help ensure descriptions were authentic, honest reflections of the participant's lived experiences.

Trustworthiness is established by four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 2013). Credibility was established by gaining trust and developing rapport with participants over time. Comparing findings in this study to previous

studies helped to support study credibility. Providing rich, thick descriptions supported transferability. Dependability was striven for by employing self-reflection throughout the process of data collection and analysis to ensure the focus remained grounded. Finally, to support confirmability, an audit trail was created using recorded interviews, transcriptions, field notes, narratives, and emergent data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4: Findings

Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings from the current study concerning the perceptions and experiences of military-connected adolescents. This includes study participant demographics, the process of collecting field texts, the co-construction of participant narratives, and a brief synopsis of emergent themes as they relate to military-connected adolescents. Chapter 5 provides a deeper discussion of these themes as they relate to areas of commonality or differences across the narratives and existing literature.

Overview

A major part of narrative inquiry as a qualitative research methodology relies upon one construct: trust. Over the course of three months, nine participants showed they not only trusted *me* to tell their truth but trusted in *themselves* and the relevancy and meaningfulness of their own perceptions and experiences as military-connected adolescents.

Each of the nine participants – Bailey, Brandon, Daisy, Elias, Frank, Leslie, Lindsey, Sage, and Zion – allowed me the privilege of entering their world through the course of our interviews together. Their stories presented lives filled with accomplishments and adversity, setbacks and successes as they moved around the globe. They disclosed how they embraced their role as a part of the military community and learned to survive, and in some cases thrive, despite the demands of being a part of this culture. After recording and transcribing each of their interviews, participants' responses were restructured into cohesive narratives for participants using their own words. Interviews were then analyzed to identify emergent themes across participants.

Participant demographics

Participants were selected using a criterion-based approach to ensure age, parent or guardian connection to the military, parental deployment, and duty stations mobility during their formative years. Below is a table with the basic demographic information about the nine participants in the study.

Table 1: Participant Demographics.

Name	Age	Race	Gender	Grade	Branch of service	Military-connected parent/ guardian
Bailey	18	Caucasian	Female	12th	Army	Sister, active duty
Brandon	16	Black	Male (trans)	11th	Army	Mother, active duty; Father, retired
Daisy	17	Caucasian	Female	12th	Marines	Father, active duty
Elias	16	Hispanic & Asian	Male	10th	Army	Father, active duty
Frank	16	Caucasian	Male	10th	Army	Father, active duty
Leslie	18	Caucasian & Black	Female	12th	Army and Civilian Contractor	Father, retired
Lindsey	17	Black	Female	12th	Army	Father, active duty
Sage	18	Black	Male	12th	Army	Father, active duty
Zion	18	Black	Male	12th	Army	Mother, retired; Father, retired; Stepmom, prior service; Stepdad, retired

A part of the set criteria for participation included moving to multiple duty stations and parental deployment around the globe. The maps in Figure 3 use hearts to indicate duty stations and stars to indicate deployment regions for the nine participants in this study.

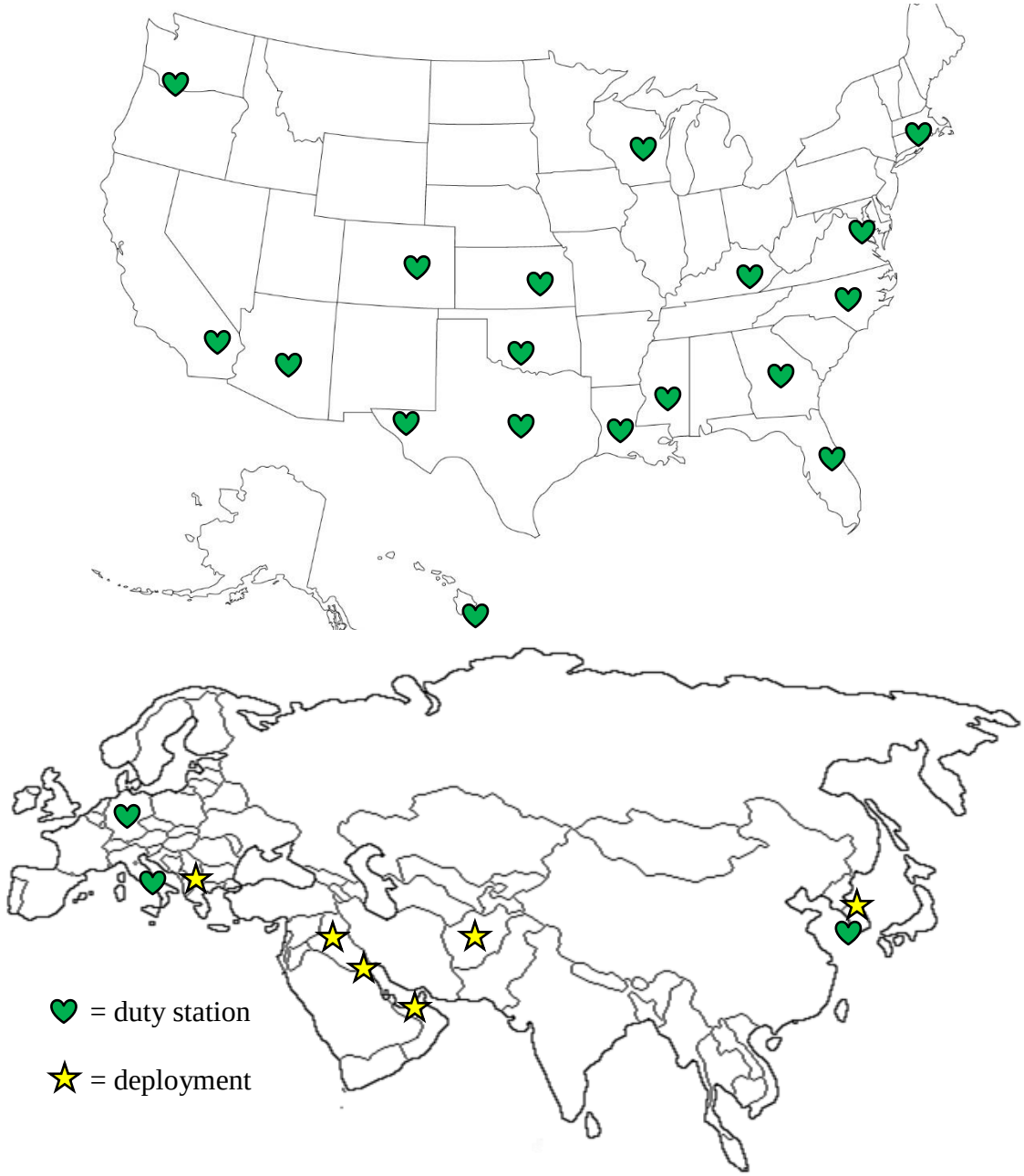

Figure 3: Participant Duty Station and Deployments. Images by Bruce Jones (2009)

Collecting Field Texts

Since the purpose of this study was to better understand how military-connected adolescents perceive and define themselves and their experiences as a part of the military culture and how they perceive, respond to or make sense of those experiences, one-on-one interviews

were conducted with all nine participants. Each interview, which ranged from 15 minutes to 49 minutes, were digitally recorded and individually transcribed. Semi-structured interview questions were used and allowed each of the three rounds of interviews to focus on a specific area including: an overview of the family and school, a focus on mobility and parental deployment, and individual perception as a part of the military culture and future plans. Interviews were done in three rounds, which allowed the researcher an opportunity to read through previously transcribed interviews prior to each round. This allowed the researcher a chance to make a list of additional individual questions to better understand a participant's response or generate additional questions to ask all participants as commonalities across participants began to emerge.

Transcripts were then compiled into one document, or research text, for each of the nine participants. Individual responses were color-coded in Word to indicate key areas in the participant's three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), including family dynamics, academic issues, peer interactions, mobility as a military-connected adolescent, parental deployment, perceptions of identity, and hopes or goals for the future. Responses were then restructured into a coherent narrative for each participant to showcase their life as a military-connected adolescent using their own words. Copies were then given to each participant for member checking for three reasons: to ensure restoried narratives were an authentic representation of their perceptions and experiences, to ensure all details were accurate, and to allow participants to ascertain the presence of their own voice within the narrative.

Once the narratives were complete, research texts were iteratively read and reread before being coded to detect emergent patterns and resonant themes across participants. A deeper

identification and discussion of these emergent themes as they relate to participant narratives and existing literature will be presented in Chapter 5.

Co-constructed Narratives

Participant narratives use their own words as much as possible, so they are written from a first-person perspective. Names of family members or friends were changed along with the name of their current high school to Midwest High to protect confidentiality. Participant narratives for Bailey, Brandon, Daisy, Elias, Frank, Leslie, Lindsey, Sage, and Zion are presented alphabetically by first name below.

Bailey's Narrative

Since I was little, my sister took me under her wing. I always wanted to be with my sister. If I had to pick like one person I couldn't live without, it would be her.

My sister moved out when she graduated high school. She is twelve years older than me, so I was six when she left. She always played my mom *and* my sister. She went to basic training when she was 21 after she went to college for a few years first. She was in ROTC and then joined the Army Reserves before going active duty.

I was born and raised in Louisiana and I stayed there with my mom until I was 12 or 13. That was when my mom and I moved up to Kansas to live with my sister, and basically, I have lived with her ever since. I had one year in 9th grade where I lived in Louisiana with a family friend while my sister was gone, but then I decided to move back to Kansas with my sister for my sophomore year just before she went active duty.

I remember ever since I was little, my sister always wanted me to go live with her and my mom would say, "No, no. I'm not..." When we lived with her during my sophomore year, my mom wanted me to move away again with her. I was playing in a volleyball game when she told

me and told her I didn’t want to go with her. She said, "Well, I can ask your sister if you can stay with her." I knew she would say yes. My mom ... I guess she tries to see through it, but she knows that she can't take care of me. She knows that about herself and she knows that my sister will.

I watched my sister go to college and party when I was younger. She wasn't focused at first, but I watched her change her life around and go to the Army. That matured her and look at how successful she is now. In fact, she just got promoted to First Lieutenant and I am so proud of her. It shows me that anything is possible. I mean, if my own sister can do it, so can I.

There were times when I didn’t feel in control in my life because of the choices my mom made and how they controlled the life I lived. When I decided I wanted to stay with my sister, that's when I really saw I had a choice in my life. I said to my mom, “Look, I know that I'll focus better and do better with my sister.” So, that's when I took control and decided to stay. I feel like this is when I really realized what was going on with my mom.

My sister, we just understand each other and what our family is like. For example, she recently booked a flight for me, she said, "I put this in to sit by yourself because I know you don't like people." She just *knows* me. She also pushes me to do better. I know that I can always go to her and I focus better. My grades are better than they ever were. I feel my mom was hard on me, but not like my sister is. My sister is hard on me because she knows I can do better and can be something. And my mom just ... isn’t. She is laid back, but with my sister, if I make a C, she's fussing at me and she always like, "You need to get your ACT up." When I was back in Louisiana, I went to school, but I just *went* to school. There was no effort in it. Since I moved here, my grades are better than they ever were, because my sister pushes me to do better. I can see that I made the right decision moving with my sister.

My mom still lives in Louisiana and I do have a little sister who still lives with her. She's 10. My mom has big gaps between kids, I guess. To be honest, my little sister acts like my mom. Not that she tries to boss me, but she manipulates, and she reminds us – me and my sister – of our mom. She's like my mom's best friend and acts too old for her age. I can tell she is going to grow up and be just like my mom. The worst part is that she's going to grow up thinking that this is normal. That life with my mom is the best it will ever be and that makes me sad to think that that could have been me. I don't really talk to my mom or her much. We are just too different.

I moved here September of my junior year because this is where my sister was stationed. I don't really like moving from place to place because while you get to meet new people, you have to say goodbye to others. However, that was something I did learn from my mom – how to deal with moving so much. Whenever I go to a new school, I'm always like "okay, don't be as shy," because I am shy when I first meet people. So, I tell myself don't be shy. Talk. I just have to think, "well, they're not going to talk to me if I don't talk to them." So, I try to open up more.

Volleyball is one of my favorite things and it has helped me meet people when I move to a new place. Last year, I was sad because I didn't get to play much. At the beginning of the season in my other school, I had a concussion, so I had to sit out. Then I ended up moving here the week after I got cleared. I came here to Midwest High ready to play but their season was almost over, which was tough.

I went to practice that first day, and everybody said, "You must be the new girl." Then on my first or second day here, I saw some of the players at school and I asked, "Can I eat lunch with you all?" I didn't know anybody, so they were the first ones I made friends with and then I guess, as time went on, more people started talking to me.

It was also hard academically when I moved here because we worked on computers more at my last school. I was so stressed because it was a big change. I feel I work harder than I used to when it comes to my school work. And I feel like over here, some teachers are more willing to help than others, which makes it easier.

My senior year has been more difficult because of what I need to graduate. It's a weird situation. Most students have 23 credits and I have 26. I have way more than I needed, but there were still classes I had to take before I could graduate. That is something military kids have to deal with – graduation requirements that are different in each state. Also, we have to stay the whole day even if we don't need to. Back home, if you only need three classes, you take those classes and you go home, but here we have to stay the whole day. So, I am taking classes I don't need, but I have to because that is the rule for the school. So, I just do the work because I know I have to keep up my GPA.

While I did make some good friends there, I don't really keep in contact with those I made back in Kansas. I still have very close friends back in Louisiana though. In fact, I would say all my best friends are back there. We talk every day and I visit them when I go home. It's like nothing really changed even though I live somewhere else. I still feel like Louisiana is home because I was there the longest, plus I was born and raised there when I was little.

I think most people say I'm goofy and I have a contagious laugh, but I am still pretty shy most days. This has made it harder to meet new people whenever I moved – both as a military and civilian kid. I consider myself very trustworthy and a team player too. I feel like most people can see this about me. I think if you put me side by side with most of my peers, you would say she has discipline and they don't. People see me as a disciplined child, but I am just really hard on myself. I think I'm hard on myself more than anything. Probably because growing up with my

mom, I feel I want to do better than what she did. So, I try to push myself and I stress myself out trying to be better so that I'm not like she was or is. I feel that's one of my weaknesses, but I just don't show it to anyone, except my sister.

My sister just deployed for the second time in her career this month. It's been tough these past few weeks. The first time she deployed to Kuwait and this time she is in the United Arab Emirates. When she went to Kuwait, that wasn't too bad because she was in a company that didn't really fight. Thankfully she is in a company like that this time too.

She found out last year that she would possibly deploy, but she didn't know where. She got her orders back in February, so she knew she was going, she just didn't know the date for sure until this month and time just flew. I didn't want her to go, but she will be back in nine months, so that is a lot shorter than other military kids have to deal with. Plus, it's better knowing that at least she is somewhere sort-of safer than other soldiers when they deploy. I remember when she came back home after the last deployment, we had a welcome home family day. I am really looking forward to doing that again and having her home with me.

It's honestly really stressful to be at the end of high school and 18 without her here. I have to do all kinds of stuff before I graduate and go to college and she won't be here for it. It's hard. I just want to do good to show that I can.

My sister is the only family here, but I am able to stay at home with her girlfriend until I finish high school. Mom was trying to get me to go back to live with her while my sister is gone. She asked me, "Well, where are you going to go?" and I told her, "I'll graduate here, I'm not coming back right now." My sister's girlfriend moved in with us a few months before she deployed. I think she moved in quicker because my sister was leaving. I think she wanted us to

be able to get along before my sister left and to make sure I was taken care of until I graduate and leave for college.

It has been okay so far with her deployment and we get to talk a lot, but I didn't tell a whole lot of people that she was going to deploy. I don't really like to tell people my business. It's not like I keep it hidden, but I just don't say, "My sister left by the way," you know? Those who are close to me know and that's all that matters.

You think I would be used to it more since she was always going on extended training trips for weeks at a time at a time. The last few times she had to go to the field, I would either stay home by myself or go stay at a friend's house, so I would be alone, but I always knew that she would be back soon. Sometimes she would have a shift where she would work overnight, so we wouldn't see each other much then either. But I woke up every day and see her on those days at least and now I don't even get that.

Without her there, it is up to me to take care of myself and be self-reliant. I just have to push myself and get it done. She's still on me to make sure I graduate but now she's doing it nine hours ahead. I'm just kind of used to it, but it's just like when it first happens it hurts and then you get used to it. I was used to being apart and now it's harder because it is more than just for a few weeks or some overnight shift. It's a struggle every day.

Right now, I'm looking at two colleges I hope to sign with for volleyball, but they are either in this state or one close by. I know lots of students are worried about moving far away, but that isn't it. I guess because I moved so much as a kid, it doesn't bother me anymore. It's easy for me. Even though my sister is gone right now, when she gets back, I still want to be close by. She has plans to take the Army Captain's course when she returns, and they said she should

be stationed here three or four more years, so I want to stay close and that did factor into the colleges that I picked.

My goal right now is to major in nursing. I've always liked the medical field and my mom's a nurse. Plus, I feel like helping people in medical ways. I feel that being a military kid and watching my sister fight for our country helped me to develop this desire to help others. It goes back to the example she set because I want to help people like she does.

My sister wants me to join the Army though. Even her commander has come by the house and said so too. He even said he would write a letter to help get me in. I've taken the ASVAB and going the military route has been on my mind because of my sister, but I don't know yet what I will do. She wants me to go to OCS (Officer Candidate School). I thought about being a nurse in the Army, so, it's all on my mind. I'm not ruling anything out yet.

Having lived both lives, I can see the pros and cons of the military life. I feel coming into this, being a military kid, it can be better than living a normal, civilian life. I feel at home within the military because I'm involved in the military community as much as I can. When my sister goes to FRG (Family Readiness Group) meetings, I go with her to support her. They're boring and I still go –I want to be a part of it. I feel like being a part of the military life is one of the aspects of myself that I really like.

Looking back on it, when I would live with my mom I feel like I didn't have any goals for myself and I just didn't care. Kind of like, if something happens, it just happens. Being with my mom, I did whatever I wanted. I didn't care about my grades – I mean, I *cared* but it was just like I took the easy route. But being with my sister, she gave me structure because it is part of her life, her world. It makes me want to set goals for myself, make sure I get things done. I mean, I never was a bad child, but I feel like the way I approach things is different because I grew up

with my sister. It's a better way to live. Being able to grow up with her as a military kid made me a better person.

Brandon's Narrative

I believe my parents being in the military made me stronger as a person. I've always been pretty adaptable. I think to survive anything, even being a military child, it really is just a mindset. My mom knows I will always do stuff for me and my little brother like waking him up in the morning, taking him to school, picking him up, making sure he eats. I feel like if I was somebody who didn't have to deal with the military lifestyle, I wouldn't be able to do all that.

I was born in Texas. El Paso, Texas. We lived there for two years until we moved to Virginia. We were only there a few years until I was five or so. I remember my little brother was born in Virginia and then we moved to Germany after that. We were stationed in Germany until I was 10. We lived on two different bases while we were there – Schweinfurt and Grafenwoehr. I wasn't a big fan of Germany. I remember that in the school they were forcing German stuff down our throats, so that was kind of annoying. Plus, it was really cold. I just don't have a lot of good memories there.

Then we went back in the states, to Kentucky, but only stayed there a few years before we moved to Georgia. I remember starting 7th grade there and being in Georgia for 7th, 8th and 9th grade. Then we moved here the summer before my sophomore year and I have been here ever since. I should be able to graduate from high school here next year without having to move again.

In my house, there is me, my little brother, who is 11, and my mom. She is in the Army and works in the Equal Opportunity Department. She has been in for 19 or 20 years now and is a

Sergeant First Class. She can retire soon, but she says she might want to try to earn the next rank, so she might stay in longer.

My mom got remarried this past Christmas to my stepdad. She has known him for some time because he would visit us back when we used to live in Georgia, so we already kind of bond together. He would fly here to visit us until they decided to get married and now he lives here.

My dad was in the military too, but he is retired now. I don't remember him being in the Army because he got out when I was three. They got divorced some years ago and he lives in Georgia, but we talk on the phone and Facetime a lot. I remember road trips I would take with him when I was younger. We would listen to songs in the car, so when I hear them now I think about being with him. Those are some of my favorite memories.

What I do remember about my mom and dad being together is that he kind of relied on her a lot because my mom is really independent. I remember one time we were at a McDonald's in Germany and it was really crowded in there. He was looking for a place to sit for a really long time. I even pointed out a few places we could sit, but he couldn't decide, because he was waiting on mom to pick. It felt like he depended on her for everything, the same way *we* did, but we were kids. In fact, I feel like the military parent is the one with the control and the spouse seems always a little bit more dismissive and kinda like a pushover. They're not as assertive – that's how my dad was. I have a couple other military friends whose parents are like that too– they're so needy on to the other person.

Since I am the oldest child, my mom and I are really close. I remember times when it was just her and me growing up and we did basically everything together. Me and my brother, we are close too. We mess with each other and he tries to fight me, and I try to fight him back. Even though we are five years apart in age, we just get each other.

I think having a strong, supportive family made it easier for me to transition. See I'm a dude, but my body didn't match when I was younger.

I remember living in Kentucky, I was with my cousin and we were playing house and stuff. I'd always wanna be the dad or the brother or whatever, and my cousin, she wouldn't say anything 'cuz we always needed someone to play that role anyway.

When I was 13, living in Georgia, I remember going to middle school and we had to wear uniforms. There's a different cut for girl shirts and guy shirts. So, my mom went to the store without me and I remember she got girl shirts and I was kinda mad 'cuz I didn't get to go with her to get the ones I wanted. But she already bought the girl cuts, so she made me wear those. I remember how uncomfortable I felt.

Just before summer that year, I also cut my hair short. My mom said she didn't really care, but I think she *did* care, but she didn't say it. And my grandma told her, "oh you know, he's always been different." I think my grandma knew what I was really doing – maybe even before I really did. She would always be the one to basically talk to my mom because I think at first, my mom denied what I was doing. What these changes *really* meant.

My mom has always kept her feelings inside. We had this thing where we, mom and I, knew we must stay strong in each other's eyes. I remember the first time I'd seen my mom cry was when I was like 10, so, I felt like I had to do the same thing. When I cut my hair, she was neutral about it, but at the end of that summer, I went to the store with her and got the boy's clothes I wanted for school.

In 8th grade, I started wearing the boy's cut uniform and I didn't really think about it, but the kids were really tripping about it. It was kinda like a bubble there where people got their own ways of how they think. I got some comments from people when I cut my hair, but that was it. I

had like three or four girlfriends in middle school already and they didn't really care about, it, but some of the guys were kinda saying stuff to make fun or whatever.

I remember one time when a teacher that year used the word “he” to refer to me in front of my mom, she said, “you didn’t correct him.” I told her it didn’t really matter to me. She didn’t say anything about it after that, but I think she understood then.

My 9th grade year is when it *really* started. That grade … it was horrible. I call it the worst year. I was still in Georgia at that same school and everybody was growing up. So, I watched all the guys go from a squeaky voice to a deep voice and all the girls started looking different too. I didn’t know where I was supposed to fit. I remembered getting bullied then. I didn't really consider bullying back then, but now I look back on and I got *bullied*.

One memory that sticks out was in English class when we read *Romeo and Juliet*. There was this one chick, her name was Ingrid. There were actually two Ingrids, one was my girlfriend at the time and the other one, everybody called her the mean one. In class one day I said I wanna read Romeo’s part and the teacher said okay. But Mean Ingrid made a scene in front of the whole class, saying, “you can't be Romeo. You can't be Romeo because you’re not a dude.” She made a huge scene about it and I was pretty timid back then. If it happened now, I would have checked her, but back then, I was timid, so I said nothing.

One of the worst things that ever happened was when this girl in 8th grade called me 'it'. She was like “I don't care what it wants.” That hurt my soul. I was so torn up about it. So, when mom got orders for here, I wanted a fresh start. I asked if I could start taking testosterone and that changed everything. I never really thought about the fact that if mom wasn’t in the military, maybe she could have moved us back then, and I could have gone to a different school until

someone pointed it out later. I never really thought about it like that. I just knew this was the situation I was in, so I had to figure it out.

But one of the biggest things, like a victory for me, when I first started to use the dude's bathroom. I remember, I just walked in. This one dude who was on crutches – he was in one of my classes in 7th grade, so he knew who I was – he'd seen me walking in. He looked at me, he looked up to the side where the boy's bathroom sign like was, and then he looked back at me. And then he just kept on going. That was it. I remember, it was like a title of victory for me. That's why when trans people tell me now that they are afraid to go into the bathroom they want, I'm like, "just walk in, it's not that big of a deal. Unless, you make it a big deal, no one else is."

There was another time in ROTC when I first got to wear the men's uniform. I'll always remember when I got it, the teacher asked all the girls to stand up and go get their uniforms. And, so, I stood up and he told me to sit down. He said, "were you not listening?" he said, "only girls." So, I sat down and that's how I got the dude's uniform.

Those middle years were horrible, but then I moved here and it's completely different. This school is way better than my old school. Not only do we have way more activities, but nobody really says anything to me about being a dude here. And if they do have something to say, they are not as straightforward like they were in Georgia. Maybe just more curious than mean. I did see a few people at the very beginning who were kinda saying the same thing other people used to say, but it didn't bother me at all anymore. That's probably like when I decided I wouldn't let it bother me no more.

I mean the only *real* problem with moving is having to tell them my name each time. While that happens to all military kids when they move, mine is even harder because I don't go by the name on my official paperwork, so I have to tell all my teachers I go by Brandon and

remind them until they get it. This year, my junior year, it was different before because I have been on testosterone, so I didn't look the same or sound the same as I did before. So now when I walked into a room that's full of people, like they don't say anything or question that I'm a dude.

I think going through all of that worked out well because it made me grow up and grow as a person. I gained more confidence. I don't think I would've grown as much staying in Georgia though, because when you have all those people putting you down, it's harder. Here you have people pulling you up. Here we have GSA and people who are going through the same thing and people who care.

The sad thing is that I did have some good friends in Georgia even though it was a tough time for me. And I like living in the South. My family is from the South, so, I liked living there, so even though it was kinda hard for me, it was even harder to leave and come here. I like the hospitality there because when I came here, people are not as welcoming. Like if I'm walking on the street in Georgia, everyone waves and asks how you are doing, but here it's not like that so much. It's not the same. If I could take this school and move it to the South, that would be the best.

When it comes to moving so much as a military child, me and my brother don't really trip. I know how some military kids are like, "oh man, I have my friends I have to leave them now," but I don't feel that way. I feel like I'm a tough person. I kind of felt like I couldn't control that part of my life, but I've always just liked living for the next adventure. And my mom likes to travel, so even though we've moved a lot, we have visited a lot of different place at each duty station.

I don't think I had any trouble making and keeping friends, even when we moved, because of the technology. I feel like if I was somebody who is older, or it was back when there

weren’t any cell phones or anything, that would be hard. But, I have friends from Kentucky and Georgia I still talk to like every few weeks or so. I still have people from my old school on my Instagram and Facebook and all that. Plus, I don't really sit back for somebody to come talk to me. I think I am confident enough to just go up and talk to people.

I don’t tell everyone that I am a military child though. I don’t hide it, but it just doesn’t come up when I meet new people. Like if people ask me where I am from, I am more likely to say Florida because that is where my mom and her family is from instead of having to go into all the questions that come when I say I am a military child. Some people say it makes sense when they find out because of my respect and manners, but I don’t bring it up too much. In fact, the only obstacle with having friends is just being trans and that was only early on.

I felt like I was behind in school when I moved here. The system in Georgia wasn't as structured as this one. When I got here, my grades were slipping. They just make you work harder here as opposed to there. But I would see how hard my mom works at her job and knew I just had to keep going and eventually it got easier. I have been a part of the JROTC program in both Georgia and here, but the program here is trash, so I am not going to do it my senior year. That will let me focus on my grades for my senior year, which is good.

Thinking back, I don’t remember most of the times from when my mom went to training or deployed. I’m sure I didn’t like it when she was gone, and I was excited when she came home, but she must have made it easy for us, so it doesn’t stick out as a bad thing or bad memory.

Since I have been older, I do remember times she went away to training for four to six weeks at a time. I think it gets easier each time she goes. I love my mom – I'm like a mama's boy, but sometimes I don't be missing her too much. I'll be chilling in my room and I don't really think

about it. I guess because she'd been gone before, it just kind of gets easier. I know how to care of myself and my little brother without my mom because her being gone has taught me to do that.

This past time was the first time that she went away since she married my stepdad, but it was okay. We get along fine and I just do what he says. I do respect him, so even if I didn't agree, I'll probably just do what he says, depending on what it is. I think if my brother sees me talking back to him, he would probably think it is okay to do it too, so, it's about setting an example and doing things that are going to cause the least extraness, so when my mom comes back she won't be upset with us.

The person who had the hardest time with mom being deployed was my brother. Those younger years for me, it seemed like she was always around. I know she deployed and went to training, but I feel like it would have been harder if I felt like I didn't have her around when I was younger. When mom deployed to Iraq, we lived with dad and I was around eight, so my brother was like three. My mom told me when she came home, she called my brother over to her and he was kinda hesitant to go to her 'cuz she had been gone for a while. She was hurt about that, but she said she understood that dad was the only parent he saw while he was that young. So, I guess that's why I'm really hooked on to my mom and my brother is hooked on to my dad.

I have one more year of school before college and one plus is that I know I and my brother will have our parent's GI Bill to help pay for college. But the focus now is just to get through senior year. I even made it into the leadership class at Midwest High, which is cool. When I did my essay for leadership, I did it on how she should choose me 'cuz I am a military kid. I have the confidence now because I've been to a lot of places and I know how to work with different people. I'm a lot more resilient than I felt I would've been if I wasn't a military child. I think my essay really helped to show how being a military kid is a big part of who I am.

When I was younger, I used to watch videos of people at basic training on my phone all the time and thought it would be cool to join myself, but now, I don't know. I know from my mom, because of her job, that it might be harder for me now too because I'm trans, but if I wanted to be in, I know nothing would stop me. I know I will miss this life when I go to college in a year. Seeing my mom in her uniform, and how everyone respects her and thanks her for her service and all of that, I know that is going to go away when I am no longer a military child.

As of right now, I think I want to go back down South for school. I know my dad likes that idea, so I could stay with him because he wants to see me more. But I don't know what I'd do in school because there's like a lot of things I like. My mom, she wants me to do engineering. I can be doing anything, and she would be like, "that's why you should do engineering." But I also like video producing and stuff. I also started cutting hair on the side and I really like it. I started that as a second job while I still work at Arby's, but I also make videos while I cut hair to post and I really am liking that. I just need to figure it out, but I have a little time.

I think the one thing I will take from this life is that you should think about another's situation before you judge them. I have empathy and try and understand a person better first. Whenever somebody does something in a certain way I'll think maybe they got this going on at home or something and just try to understand that everybody comes from a different walk of life. I just want people to know they have someone who gets it that we are all different when they are around me.

Daisy's Narrative

Being a military kid has its ups and down, but that is because I think we just take whatever my dad wants to do and we're just gonna follow along. It has kind of been like our motto for years, but I would never change it.

I was born in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. From there, we moved to Rhode Island two years later and then to Italy when I was three, so I don't really remember it much. We were only there for 11 months before we moved back to North Carolina because my mom was pregnant with my brother and they didn't have the resources to deliver him. So, we came back to North Carolina for three years and then lived in Virginia for eight years until we came here in 2016.

We're very traditional though, as a family. We're Roman Catholic and so we follow like *all* of the rules. We go to the church every Sunday. It's a big part of our lives obviously because my dad was going to be a priest before he became a Marine.

My parents both met at a Catholic college back in Virginia. My dad was studying to become a priest and my mom, she essentially went to college to find a husband. He ended up getting a degree in history of military warfare instead and decided he wanted to join the military. He has worked his way up to the rank of Colonel over the years.

My family is very big – we are a Catholic family after all. There are 10 kids – nine plus me. I have five older siblings who don't live at home – three sisters and two brothers. Then there is me and I am 17. I have two younger brothers, both at Midwest High with me, followed by two younger sisters, with the littlest one being four. My mom decided to become a stay at home mom because our family is so big. They both decided that she would work at home and dad would have the paid job.

In my family, there are so many moving parts all the time. I work with my parents so I'm not always saying, "I want to do this, I want to do that," because I know they have other things they have to do in order to be successful. We only have two cars, so I can't drive whenever I want whenever I want. I have to make sure that I plan for things if I want to do something. I have to make sure that everything goes according to plan so that I can get what I want.

I'm kind of like my mom in that I'm more understanding of like my dad's life. I think you just have to understand that he can get really angry, but it's just because he's worried a lot about us kids and wondering where they are all the time. I think it's different with me because it's no secret that I'm the favorite. I mean, I might not be, but my siblings always say I am because I don't really *do* anything. I don't talk back, so obviously I'm going to have less rules on me. I don't really do that much compared to my older sister who had a boyfriend and was very wild with tattoos and piercings. I actually get in trouble more with my mom honestly because I think we do have the same kind of personality, so we clash sometimes. I think that my dad understands me a little more than her. We bond over different things like Marvel movies and stuff like that, but our whole family is pretty close. My siblings call home all the time because they just like my parent's advice and stuff like that.

In thinking about it, I am probably closer with my sisters. Obviously, we can connect more because we are girls and we understand each other. I do have two younger brothers that go to high school with me, but my brother who is closest to my age, we kind of clash because his personality is more like my dad's where he stresses and angry. I also have a younger brother with Down Syndrome who attends high school here too, so making sure he gets what he needs is also a major focus in our family.

Even though our life revolves around dad, my mom has always been really good about making sure we have everything and that we feel like we're a part of his life. It is obviously hard for her when he is gone. My dad gets stressed out a lot, especially when he came back from war, so she helps him to figure out his feelings and stuff. He's not good with showing emotion, but she's really compassionate, she cares a lot about his work and she's actually really involved with

the Patriot Spouses' Club on post. She's involved in a lot of different organizations to help with his work and make everything run more smoothly at home.

Being a military child and having to switch schools is always difficult. The major problem is finding a school for my younger brother, Nicholas, who has different needs because of his Down Syndrome. We have to find a school that is going to that accept him and give him the education he needs. We were very lucky to have found such a good program here at Midwest High because it hasn't always been so easy in the past.

Since I lived in Virginia for eight years, I hadn't had to move to a new school for a while until we moved here last year, so it was kind of weird coming in on that first day. When we move, the transition and trying to figure out what groups I fit in with and what I wanted to do, was kind of difficult. I do appreciate what my dad is doing for the country and I obviously wanna go with him and support him in what he's doing so, so I just try to make myself fit in and do stuff to make sure he can do what he needs to get done.

I joined the swim team here and we just went to state, which was awesome. Getting to bond with people on the team is great. I also joined the school's Key Club and it was cool getting to support all the people in our community. These groups helped me to make some great memories for my senior year.

As far as school, I would say it got better when we moved here. I struggled a lot, mostly in math because math has always been like not my strongest suit. But since I've been here and since I've like really focused on AP courses and doing concurrent classes with the local college – I am going to be able to graduate with 12 college credits this year – I've been able to bring up my GPA. I really think my whole experience has been better than maybe what it could have been if

I stayed in Virginia because the academics were just so different over there compared to here. I think I thrived more here than I would have over there.

Making new friends each time we move is another hard part of this life. I've actually met a lot of friends wherever we moved, which is cool. One of my closest friends back in Virginia came from Norway through the military, which is really cool. I also made a lot of friends here, on the swim team mostly. I guess you just find your group and find things you like to do. I liked to Irish Dance back in Virginia and had friends through that, so I think you have to find things you have in common with others, like swimming here. Connecting with people, that's ultimately gonna make your experience growing up and going through school better.

One of my current friends, she's actually a military child too that came from Texas, so we connected really well. She understands what it is like to have a military dad and what we go through and why we have to make the sacrifices we do. Whenever I like to hang out with my friends, I hate when they do like last minute plans because I have to make sure that I can be there and I can get a ride, so I can't always go out and do stuff with my friends at like the 11th hour or something. Sometimes they don't really understand the sacrifices we have to make so, it is nice when I can find another military kid who gets that this is our life. It's just part of the Marine Corps because we are invested just like he is, and civilians are just like, "oh, yeah, my dad's in this, but it's not like I'm a part of his work." But we needed to be like proper and make sure that we're presenting ourselves in a way that reflects well on him and the Marine Corps, and my other civilian friends don't get that sometimes.

The other really difficult thing is the fact that we do have to move. Of course, it is not all bad. You get to travel as a military family, which is so cool because you get to see different places. I don't really remember much of Italy because I was three, but I hear the family talk about

what that was like. Especially the meals because the meals there are like a full-day event. It’s not like getting fast food. It's like you sit down and you enjoy it, and you talk to people. They say a lot that people were very friendly there and so they would like to go out to eat and there would be people carrying me around the restaurant and stuff like that. We went to Mt. Vesuvius and we climbed up there, and my dad has been to England a bunch of times and Russia too and he would always bring treats and stuff back for us.

I almost thought that I was going to be at Virginia for the rest of school, but when dad got his orders, I knew that this last move meant I would have to move to a new school in a new state during the middle of high school. The culture shock of leaving the East coast and moving here was also different – it was kind of weird for all of us at first. It was especially hard on my younger sister because her whole life was spent there and even though she has friends here, she's like, "Oh, I don't really like it here. I don't like the weather. I've like got nothing to do." She misses it a lot, but we tried to make the most out of it here. We started going to festivals and stuff, so we started making this place home.

Of all the places we lived, North Carolina would have to be my favorite. In fact, if someone asks where I am from, I will probably say North Carolina since I have some family there and most of my siblings were born there too. It was such a tight-knit community and even though we were there at three different times, the same people were there when we were, so we got to connect with them a lot. My school was awesome, and I had a best friend down the street and we always used to have sleepovers. There were these giant ditches near the houses and when it rained, they would be filled with water, so we would go ditch diving. I think that was my favorite thing.

Virginia would be the worst place we lived. Even though we were there for so many years all at once, we didn't know anyone. Plus, the traffic was awful – you're in traffic for like three hours to get to a place only an hour away. We had to live in a neighborhood that was off-base, which we don't usually do, but on-post housing isn't always the best for such large families – we have learned that over the years. So, we bought a house there instead and my parents still own it. I guess I kind of got sick of living there because I knew everyone from third grade to sophomore year. I was ready to do something new, experience something new especially because once I have a job and settle somewhere, I don't know how much I'm going to be traveling and get to experience new things.

The first time my dad deployed was in 1998 before I was born. He went to Iraq for about nine months. He went again in 2007 to Iraq for 11 months. I remember that my mom was pregnant with my sister at the time, so it was harder for her to get around and help all of us. We actually had a friend of my dad's named Ms. Amy who came to come stay with us just to help out while he was gone.

I remember that the school, which was a DoD (Department of Defense) school since we lived on base, was very supportive of the students during deployment because so many people's parents were gone. A lot of people were deployed from there at that time. We had assemblies and stuff to support the families who had a parent gone, and so that was nice. It was nice to have people understand.

We were also on CNN while he was deployed then because we had such a big family – there were eight kids at the time – so we were put on the news and that was a little weird. They were shooting shots of him over there and then how we were dealing with it back in America. It was like a Valentine's Day special for them. I don't remember that much of it, but I remember

my mom saying that video people followed us around, there was this kind of like this fake letter from my dad that I had to open – I can see now that it was very mediazed.

When he came back, we had made a sign for him on our garage and he also came into my class to surprise me. I mean, he walked behind me, and I was so happy. I was in the computer lab, playing some game and he had come up. He yelled, "Surprise!" and then I was crying because I was so happy that he was back. It was really nice to have him back. I wrote like a little book about it when I was seven. We used to make books about him coming back and us going bowling and doing different things. I know my mom obviously felt such relief because she just had a baby and him coming back and supporting us. Him coming back was such a relief.

I do remember it was weird having him back too. I remember it was kind of tense. He's always had like kind of a temper, I mean because he gets stressed out and worried a lot. And so, he was a little rougher I guess, obviously, for coming back from war that's going to be how it's going to be. But other than that, I don't remember much. It was difficult obviously for my mom having to deal with all of us at once, dealing with war in general and then dealing with him coming back and being different, obviously more affected by the world because he had been in war. I didn't really remember much of it because I was only seven, but my siblings say he changed a lot when he came back and so dealing with that must be hard and we have to deal with stuff like that.

Dad doesn’t talk about his deployments very often. Probably because he doesn't want to worry us about what he's seen or what he's had to experience. I remember we saw a movie – that *American Sniper* one – and he had a hard time. He was kind of just quiet. This one time he talked about this girl over there – I think something happened to her. She might have been shot or something, but there were a lot of children that were like her and had problems, he said. I mean,

it's war. He told us had to make certain plans of how they were going to go into a situation. I remember because he was talking about how hot it was and it was so hard to concentrate and how one night he was like, “oh my gosh, this is how we're going to go through this.” I think he made plans on how they were going to do stuff and go into towns and help children. I don't know if he did much like breaking in the house or interrogating people, but I think that he was more to help the citizens there.

I think the dynamic of our family changed more when he came home from war this last time. My older sister talks about how she was affected because she was in the 5th grade at the time. I’m pretty sure my other older siblings were impacted as well because they used to have very good relationships with dad, but it's tense now because I don't think they really truly understand like what he went through. They're just like, “why aren't you the same person?” so it's harder for them to adapt to it.

My dad is retiring next summer, so he's looking at places like North Carolina for his next job. All the military families we have met over the year are helping him in trying to find a civilian job when he gets out, so that shows how close military families really are. He's also looking at Virginia because our house is there, so we might end up going back there and we'd be close to my oldest sister which would be nice.

Since I am graduating from high school, I plan to continue living at home and attending the local university and hopefully transfer to like George Mason University or the University of Mary Washington when we move and major in business. I am going to try to get my basics done here first and they go into marketing or advertising. I want to do ads for companies. I like being able to find out what someone wants and give it to them.

Being a military child has helped me in my pursuit toward college. It certainly helped with scholarships because I recently got a $1,000 scholarship from one of the spouse's club on base, which I wouldn't have been able to get if I wasn't a military child. I also like to think I have a lot of determination that's based on what my parents taught me. That if you want something, you go for it.

I would say I am also quiet at times and very independent. Since things are often hectic, you got to try and figure out how to deal with that and sometimes you just have to be by yourself to figure out what you want. I also like doing things my own way. Not that I can't do things like other people, but I like to do things how *I* want. I know it's sometimes hard to see what other people want done because I really just want to do it my way.

I know that I will not be a soldier in the future – maybe I will do what my parent's always talk about and marry one – but I don't think I'll ever completely sever my connection to the military. It has not always great at times but living as a military family is really fun and I've been able to grow up with a really good community and that's what counts.

Elias' Narrative

I'm not going to lie. I'm not going to sugarcoat either. I'm just going to tell it as blunt as I can. It doesn't affect me anymore when my dad is gone. It has just become part of this life. I think we all have gotten used to it. I mean you never completely get used to being apart, but dad feels confident that me, my mom, and my brother will be okay alone because, well … we will. Because we have to be.

In my family, it is me, my mom and dad, and my little brother who is 12. I think we are a pretty typical family. My dad's a real family man because he was raised in a military family himself, so he never really got to spend time with his dad. He kind of wants us to have what he

never really got as a child. For instance, dinner at our house might be an hour long, because he feels it's the only time we really get to talk, and I understand that.

Dad was in college and left to join the air defense in the Army and is reaching 20 years in the military soon and could easily retire. He's a First Sergeant now, but if he makes the E-9 list, he said he might stay in a little longer. He didn't have a lot growing up and was raised in sort-of a poor, ghetto area in California. Joining the military, he said, helped him to kind of rise up and he is grateful because everything he gets, he earned it himself. My dad's philosophy is you're never given anything in life – you have to earn it.

My mom was there for me and my brother growing up because she decided not to work when we were young. Once we started getting older, she worked first at the daycare on post because she always wanted to pursue teaching. She now works as an assistant teacher at one of the elementary schools here in town. That was always her goal in life so now she's doing what she wants.

With a military family, you have to have a tough spouse because it is a hard life to handle. My mother, I feel she's a really strong, independent woman because she's having to raise me and my brother on her own a lot of the time, and I'm grateful because we're a handful. In fact, while I'm scared of my dad, I'm scared of my mom even more. While dad has high expectations, my mom is pickier. For dad, if you do your best and behave, he says it's all he could ask from us. With my mom, we could *always* do better.

When it comes to my brother and me, I think I am the tougher one and he's more emotional and that's okay, I'm proud of him for that. Of course, he took it harder when dad deployed, but I think he is now more mature at 12 then I was at that age. But I think it kind of hardened him too because he is a little distant. He's in middle school, so he's still going through

that phase where he’s figuring things out, but I wish he wasn’t so disconnected. I think the military life is taking a toll on him.

My life started in California, but dad was stationed in Georgia at the time and then we moved to El Paso when I was eight months old. We moved around a few times while I was there – I remember a big move was when I was like six, but we were still in the same city. That's where I have most my memories, most of my history from. Then we moved here when I was eight and I have been lucky enough to live here ever since.

In school, my brother and I are different. He's very smart but lazy whereas I am more driven. Academics was the main focus growing up with my mom and dad, but I still have responsibilities at home. I remembered there were times when I needed to study, but my parents wouldn’t let me until my chores or responsibilities in the house were done. I'll be crying, but they'll tell me, "Hey, it's your fault you didn't plan your time better." Of course, being the older sibling, I feel they're also tougher on me, so maybe that is why I think my brother and I are different.

Personally, I feel that I am tougher on myself as well. I'm lucky because I am smart, but I feel like I could always do better. I always feel I have that insecurity that I'm not smart enough or good enough because I always have higher expectations and feel like I'm not there yet. I need to reach it. So, then there is always that stress – the expectation to reach that limit.

I remember the first time I got like a lower grade than A. I was like in tears and my mom saw me, so she didn't go too hard on me. She was just looked and said, "At least you know. At least you know what's expected of you. Just raise it. Do better.” To me, academics is the most important. Plus, JROTC is a big part of my life right now. My dad never pushed that on to me, I just kind of told him, "I want to try it on." It does put stress on me. I will be drill team

commander next year, so it is a huge responsibility. Plus, I get to do it as a junior, which is an honor.

When you hear that you are going to be moving, you don't really get an idea of how far away you are going to be when you are younger. All you know is that you're going away from your friends and from where you're comfortable. I'm blessed though because my dad, who grew up as a military kid where his dad was gone on tours in the Navy all the time, he remembers growing up having to move all over the place, so he tried to keep it where we only moved a few times during his career.

For instance, a few years ago, when he came back from deployment, he got orders for Fort Bliss, and instead of having us move for that year, he just traveled back and forth on the weekends to see us when he could. My mom and dad just agreed on this. It was tough, you can imagine, with all that time driving, and he tried to put up a good front for us, but you could see it was hard. I've been in this world for only 16 years, and while I may never truly get comfortable with it, I know that moving is part of our reality. I could see the stress it caused him to not be able to live at home – he always apologized for missing out on certain things, but I know what a gift his sacrifice was for us.

While moving and being the new kid is a little nerve-wracking, I feel it did give me practice in meeting new people, so it just came natural eventually to me. You get used to having to go out there and meet new people as a part of a routine. So, when you move, it is first about being comfortable in the new school. Once you get over that, it's a worry about if they are going to like you. Like, are you going to be a cool kid and all that, but eventually that all goes away too because you realized it's not important. That might just be me, but I felt it wasn't really important. To me, it was more about being able to feel comfortable period.

Whenever people asked me where my home is – I tend to ask them what do they mean by home. Do they mean where I was born? Where I spent most of my life? Home could be defined in so many ways. Home could be where your loved ones are. Home could be where you grew up and home could be where you had most of your memories. It could be where you're comfortable and it just all depends on what they mean. But, when I get that question, I usually just give them a whole timeline from California to Texas and then here, so when they go, "Where are you from?" I'm like, "Well, I'm from here, here, here, here, here." It defines who I am because I'm from a bunch of different places.

I feel like moving is something almost *every* kid will probably have to do at some point – even if it is just to a new home in the same city. But for military brats, moving is a consistent part of our life. I do remember when I was younger the huge fear at the end of the school year thinking we might move. I used to have the idea that being a military family means you would always move, move, move, because not only did I do it, but I had a bunch of friends that were always leaving around me because of the military too.

Since I have always lived in military communities, it is only natural that many of my friends will be military brats. I think we can relate to each other. Of course, I do have friends that are not from a military family, but you can tell the difference. It's funny because you could tell there's more discipline in a military family. I have civilian friends who do something and get away with it where me and my other military friends look at them and know there is no way we could do that and *not* get in trouble. Like some friends, they don't talk back to their parents but they kind of argue with them a little, where if I did that, I would get set straight real quick. Also, we tend to say, "yes sir" and "yes ma'am" when talking to adults and share an understanding that

if we are told to do something, it needs to get done now. It seems like my civilian friends lack that motivation and understanding.

Moving and keeping friends can be hard. It's weird because you don't forget the people you had in your life, but you just kind of move forward. You always expect it to be all dramatic and like, "I'll never leave you. Never forget me," but you do kind of forget them because you start to grow up and grow as a person without them. I did have one military friend who lived here before and moved back. Not many people recognized him because he changed so much over those years, but I knew immediately that it was him and happy to have my friend back.

My friends come in all different types. While many are military, I end up hanging around a lot of different people – those you could consider the bad kids along with smart kids and athletes. I feel I just have a good way of connecting with people – that's what I've been told my whole life by friends, by teachers, by my family. I like to think that I am a good friend, a good listener.

School here has been good, but I felt like there were rockier times when I was in school in El Paso. More of the bullying kind and feeling left out because kids were being immature. They felt like they knew everything – that's the funny thing growing up, you always feel like you know, more than everyone else and feel more superior even to adults. So, there are those kids who feel superior and then there is that one kid that's left out. It may have just been luck of the draw that I got in a class in El Paso that was more like this than others. It didn't feel as supportive of an environment as it does here.

The first time my dad deployed was around the same time we moved from California, so I was way too young to remember. I think that time he went to South Korea. The second time he went to Kuwait for a year when I was in 6th grade, and when he came home, that was when they

stationed him at Fort Bliss. So, we went from having him completely gone to only get to see him on weekends for another year, which made that whole situation tougher.

It is a little different to go from living in a two-parent household to a single-parent one. Sometimes your mom or your dad, whoever stays home with you, has to make sacrifices in their everyday life to make more time for your needs and wants. My mom had to take time from work to pick me or my brother up, to cook, to run errands, to do all that. It's hard because I didn't want to burden her with all these responsibilities because I feel like they're *mine*, but back then, as a kiddo, she had to pick me up and drive me around.

I was a little more emotionally detached than my parents or brother during dad's big deployment. When he left, of course I hugged him and said I would miss him and I loved him, but there wasn't any emotion on my half until he left. I just broke down in tears on the drive home. I remember trying to hide it because I felt bad because my dad was there, telling me his feelings and everything, and I couldn't do that back to him. It was not on purpose. I didn't feel like a serial killer, like emotionless, but it was just harder for me to kind of display how I was feeling, and I felt bad because I couldn't give my dad that before he left. It was like that through the whole deployment, like I *had* to be the tough guy and show that it wasn't affecting me too much, but the truth was, I was affected.

When dad was deployed, we were able to keep in touch with him pretty well. It's funny because with him being gone again now for training these past four months, it feels same as when he was over there. But keeping up with him and keeping him updated on us was important during deployment because he couldn't see us every day. It's crazy because it must feel like he traveled in time because he missed all the growing up. I think that's a fear in the soldier's eyes

when they are deployed, that they're going to be out of the loop. To come back and feel like they were frozen in time. Like they just woke up and missed so much of your life.

Dad did try to prepare me to help more while he was gone. I think every military dad if they have an older son, or I guess it could be an older daughter too, but they looked at the son before leave and go, "I'm going to leave so you're the man of the house now. Now it's your obligation to take care of the family." That had a big impression on me – the role of having an obligation to my younger brother. I want to make it more stress-free for him and be someone he could look up to since our father was not there.

There are the things you can't prepare for when you are deployed though. When dad was gone, there was a big storm that came through and did a lot of damage in the state. Luckily it was nothing too much here. The car had to be fixed, but that was all on my mom since dad was gone. I couldn't help my mom with those things, but what I *could* do was help my brother who was really scared then. He handles dad being gone much better now because he is older, but I think, just like the flu or something, he built up an immunity to having him gone. I think he got used it a lot quicker than I did. He's 12 and already more used to all that comes with this life than I am sometimes.

I remember clearly when dad came home from Kuwait. The homecoming ceremony was in a gym and you could see the soldiers marching in. At first, you're just kind of like sitting there thinking, "Okay, let's get dad so we could get home." You figure you will just hug and then get in the car and go home, but in reality, you start going through all these emotions. It was sudden, I just started breaking into tears, hugging him. I remember the first time I saw my dad, I didn't recognize him, he changed so much. When I hugged him, as soon as I broke down, it was funny

because my dad was like telling me, “It's okay, son. It's okay.” My mom and brother broke down too. We were just so happy to see my dad.

I think it is important for everyone to know that deployments take a toll on military kids and we are never sure how we are going to react. For example, I remember I did an English project over about military deployment this year and when I presented it, I don’t know, my emotions just hit while I was in front of my whole class. I started crying a little bit. I wasn’t embarrassed, but my friends were so confused. They were like, “Wow, he's crying. He never cries. He's emotionless.” I'm like, “Yeah, yeah, I get it.” But I was just thinking about deployments and what they mean for all of us. That whole sense of if your dad is going to come home or not. If he does come home, how is it going to be different? How's it going to change? How *has* he changed? It's just the over-exaggerated fear of not knowing what is going to happen next.

In looking to the future, I have two more years of high school to finish. I am trying to work on my schedule so that I can go to the local tech center, take some AP classes and continue with JROTC, so we are trying to figure it all out. My hope is the major in engineering when I finish high school and go to college, so the tech center classes can help with that, but I might have to take a summer school class or something somewhere to fit it all in.

Honestly, it's a little intimidating but since my goal is to go to either West Point or the Naval Academy, so it's getting to the point where I need to learn more about how to take more responsibility for myself. I need to push my stress to the limits. I need to push my capabilities as far as they can go. I need to learn how to be able to handle about like six, seven different scenarios at once and still keep my sanity and keep my anger in check because I do have a temper. I feel this is more of a need more than a want right now.

It's looking like the military could be either a stepping stone or even my main career. My plan is to get in, serve my four years – maybe a little extra, but then get out and start my career as an engineer. I did talk with some Academy graduates who said they planned on going in and not making it a career, but you kind of get so used to it that you end up staying in, so that is a possibility too.

Most people think that because I am a military kid that I must be forced to join when I get older – or at least that the is the question I get most of the time. My dad has always made it an option and wants me to have the choice and everything. I like the whole idea that you're supposed to go into the military as a boy and get out as a man and that whole transformation where you go from being from one person to a better person really appeals to me.

I feel when you see a military kid, we're either held to a higher standard or we're seen as a little bit of an outsider. For some of us, this is our life, our identity, and our future path. Image as a family is a huge thing for military brats, military families. Good or bad, we always represent our parents, our family name. In the same way that we are proud of the branch in which we serve, our last name is kind of like a crest, a family crest – especially since everyone in the military is identified by their last name.

Frank's Narrative

Growing up in any family is kind of like growing a tree – your roots start in the community in which you live. But you have to know that when you are a military family, it's like ripping your roots out and planting them in a new place again and again. I currently on my seventh time of having to replant my roots.

We have been a military family for 15 years now. My father is a CID (Criminal Investigation Division) officer in the Army at the rank of a CW-3, which is between enlisted and

officers. In addition to me, I also have a younger sister, who is 13 in middle school, and a baby sister who is one-and-a-half. My dad, he had a child when he was 18, a few years before he met and married my mom, so I also have a half-brother who is 23 and he is in the Air Force.

Me and my dad are close, but I probably have a stronger relationship with my mom than my dad just because he's been gone six, seven years of my life. When we lived in Germany, we just kind of functioned alongside each other because he was part of a traveling team in his job and was gone a lot. Plus, he has deployed several times throughout my childhood.

My mom is currently working on her pre-med courses at the local university, but she basically is a stay-at-home mom because we are also a foster family. We have four kids staying with us right now, but we have had 15 different foster kids live with us over the years. Because she juggles a lot of responsibilities, she deals with a lot of stress, so us older kids try to help as much as we can. It feels like more of a teammate situation than a mother-and-son relationship at times.

There's like a hierarchy, like a totem pole, in our house. The babies have most of the attention and then the foster kids, who are five, seven and a set of twins who are 10. They get a huge chunk of our mom's attention. And then it's my sister and me. I kind of just shrug it off, like when I get home, I will just say, "Hey, school was good. I have a question on math homework," and then help her out with the kids.

Distant at best is how I would characterize my relationship with my older brother. My dad tried hard to make sure he was a part of our lives, but his mom, she moved him out of state when my dad was at basic training and started sending him to visit us less and less over the years. We do text each other every once in a while, but that is about it.

Michigan is my birth state, but we only stayed there for about a year and a half until we moved to Kentucky. From there, dad deployed to Korea for the first time when I was in Kindergarten, so we moved back to Michigan, which is where I will always think of as home. I remember I started 1st grade in Michigan but we got orders for Hawaii and I finished out 1st grade there. After Hawaii, the military called us and said you're going Virginia, just outside of Washington, D.C., but I only went to public school there until 4th grade when mom decided it would be easier to homeschool us. We stayed there until I was about 12 when we got orders to go to Germany and spent three years there. We were still homeschooled in Germany, but it was in a group with a few other military kids on post there.

Right before I turned 15, we moved here, and my parents decided to send us back to public school, which was the last few weeks of 8th grade for me. I should be able to hopefully finish out my last two years of high school here because we applied for stabilization, which you can do when your child is a sophomore to avoid having to move until you finish high school. So, if that gets accepted, we won't move, but if he gets denied, we don't know. It's still up in the air. They probably won't move him because of some medical stuff going on with his shoulder and back, but it's still up to the military. If they call us tomorrow, we'd have to move.

Living in Germany had the biggest impact on me of all the places I have lived. I had a group of like six or seven friends and we were all homeschooled, military kids together and that really shaped who I am now. Some of my friends, their parents were higher rank, retired or even contractors, so they were making the big bucks and lived off the post. We could also walk out the main gate of the housing and literally hook a left on the first turn, walk downhill, and be in the middle of a 600,000-population city, so we used to do that and hang out together.

One thing I do remember was the fact that Germans were disgusted by Americans. They didn't do anything bad to us, but that whole viewpoint on Americans really changed me. Plus, it made us military kids, literally living a bubble on post over there, bond even faster because it was you against the world. It was kind of like bullying because they would call us stupid Americans and stuff.

Living there also made me appreciate our freedom of speech. I've seen some stuff that the Polizei (the German police) did that if they were in the U.S., those cops would be blasted. I remember at one point watching someone light a tire and throw it at a cop car and the Polizei just attacked. I'm not saying that our police are great here, but I have been pulled over driving here and I remember thinking, "I'm so happy that they are not the Polizei." I think some people thought Germany was a really safe place too, with no violence, but it could be just as rough as it is here.

My worldview is very different than many of my peers. I'm not trying to be cocky or say mine's better, but I would say that most military kids who have moved around a lot and have been introduced to different cultures, find it will change their whole outlook. Moving could be seen as a positive because it lets you see the world differently. Ever since I was little, my parents reared me to see that racism is bad, bullying is bad, misogynism is bad. Plus, I did learn a lot culturally living in all these different places. It taught me that we are all the same even though our melatonin levels are different. I also feel like I'm more ready to be an adult, or at least more mature than my peers.

One memory I have flying from Germany to Baltimore on a C-17 military plane, which is something offered to military families for really cheap. It is really loud, and I remember the lady speaking in a bullhorn to talk to us over the sound of the engines. You have to buckle yourself in

like you see in the movies and they give you headsets, so you can talk to each other. It was actually a medical flight we went on, so there were stretchers right in the middle of the plane and there was a woman right in front of me who was waiting for a spinal tap because of an injury she sustained in the Army. And they gave us this meal and it was *the best*. I remember it took us 12 hours on that plane but when we took a commercial plane back to Germany it was only six hours, but it still was really fun.

It just blows my mind when I hear people haven't moved around like I have. Especially in the military. My neighbor kid who goes to my school said she only lived in three states, and I was like, oh my goodness – I've been to 30 here and, at last tally, visited 14 different countries. When I say that to other people or in class, it comes off as showing off, but I'm not. I just think my worldview as a teenager, to most of my peers, is so different and living across the globe, like most military kids, factors into it.

I think Germany would have to be my favorite place to live. Some of it might be because it was most recent, and all the other places were when I was younger. But I think Germany was where I really discovered myself. I don't think I have a least favorite place, because they're all unique and different in their own way. I think living in Virginia is where I learned national pride, and maybe patience because traffic was crazy. Also, it was where I first started doing Scouting, so I have good memories camping there. Hawaii was a good place to visit, but not really to live. Now my parents like Hawaii a lot, but I was like "it's just a beach," so I wasn't too impressed. It was kind of cool that you could be standing outside, without a cloud in the sky, and it could be raining though.

I would say the biggest obstacle, for all military kids is trying to connect with a new community every time you move. I do have some friends from Germany and other places that I

can still hook up on social media, but I'll probably never be able to see them again in real life. I think that's the hardest thing about being a military kid.

I myself, as a child, would just go out and try to meet new people each time we moved. I remember in Germany just exploring and, in our apartment, I would just go to the playground and meet the kids there. You just have to get out there and meet people, like try and start building a community for yourself. But it was easier in Germany because they were all military, but here, you just have to find things that you have in common and go from there.

I know some people think the DoD schools are better than public schools, but I would disagree. In fact, because my dad is a CID officer, he would tell us that the drug reports in those schools over in Germany were high and that even some of the teachers had issues with it too. It wasn't that great of an environment, even though the facility was nicer because it was government paid and all. So, it was just easier to do homeschooling there.

I will say that it was hard for me when I moved here, but I think it was because I hadn't been public schooled for five years, so it was a big change. The transition from one school to another is always hard though. I remember when I went from Hawaii to Virginia, I went from a lower school to one that had higher standards so that destroyed my confidence in my early years in school. And my vision is not the best since I also deal with dyslexia, so that didn't help either. Now, when I went from being homeschooled in Germany to here, I would say I was ahead in science and history than my peers, but I was way behind in math. And probably a little behind in English. It just had to work harder to be on the same level.

The transition socially was also difficult. I just wanted to be accepted by anybody, so I kind of acted completely different than I do now. It might have also been because my dad was deployed through my whole freshman year as well. I made some bad decision, but this year, I

would say I have chosen my friends more wisely. I am getting better grades, I play tennis, I still do Scouting, and I am also about to start working on a lawn crew again for the summer.

I have never really had to deal with bullying or being excluded in school. I think some of that is because I know I am definitely extroverted. I'll wear an Army shirt and my Army lanyard, and some kids will scoff, but there hasn't been anything crazy. I mean this is a military community, so there is military pride, but I would say the bond is definitely not as strong among military kids as it in Germany, but that kind of makes sense since there are more civilians here than military.

Another obstacle a lot of kids struggle with is their parents being gone for sustained periods of time. My dad was gone a lot, but I have seen other kids who had it much worse. Like they were pretty much an orphan sometimes, especially if they were Navy or Special Forces kids, because sometimes it was classified where they were, and I don't think I could take that. So, I can see that my military life has not been as bad or as stressful as it could have been.

My dad first deployed to Korea when I was six and then he went to Afghanistan for a year the first time in 2011 and did a campaign in Kosovo in 2014. He then went back to Afghanistan again in 2016, where he was gone for my entire first year of high school. I don't remember Korea much at all, but I do have some memories of the first time he went to Afghanistan. I remember everyone telling us they were praying for us and I felt uncomfortable with all that attention.

One thing I do remember is how young my mom looked with all these kids, because we had started to have foster kids by then, and I thought people automatically assumed my mom was a single mom. Sometimes, if I felt like it was going to happen, I would wear like an Army shirt or something, like subconsciously telling everybody, you know, my dad *is* in my life.

We were always able to talk to dad when he was deployed. I remember when he went to Kosovo, we were living in Germany then, and he called almost every day. On that one, I was never worried or stressed about my dad being away. School, Boy Scouts and all that stuff was taking up my time, so I really didn't think about him.

Personally, this last deployment was the worst. My dad was deployed my whole freshman year, so that was tough. I was fourteen, going on fifteen – a tough point of my life. I just started public school again and I was having all these problems, not problems but just trying to figure myself out socially in high school. It also didn't help that we didn't get to talk with him as much during this deployment.

The worst part was when we heard that he had earned a Bronze Star for doing something heroic – he doesn't really talk about it, so I don't know exactly what he did – and we didn't hear from my dad for a few weeks and we were worried that he did something crazy. It was the by far the scariest two weeks of my life because we didn't know what happened or if he was okay.

Having him come home each time was also tough because we learned how to work as a family without him. This last time was different though because he now definitely struggles with PTSD like a lot of other war veterans. Having to endure so many deployments has been the toughest part of life as a military kid for me, but I will say that it did actually strengthen me too. I would say that military families are stronger than ordinary family because you go through so much.

That is one thing I don't think people usually understand – the sacrifices that every military family makes. Seeing their spouse, their dad, their brother gone for long periods of time. Other jobs are tough, but most of them are not as dangerous where you could go to work and not come back. But with a parent in the military, it is a solid chance it could happen. And it doesn't

just have to be war, they could go to the range and there could be a misfire, or a simple mistake with their land navigation and they could walk into an impact zone and get blown up by an artillery shell. That's probably the biggest thing civilians don't understand. Going through a deployment and going to bed every night praying that your dad is still alive. Unless you have lived through it, you just can't understand.

Demeanor is one of the biggest differences I see between military and civilian kids. I can walk through the hallways or hang out somewhere and see another kid and I can usually tell if he's a military kid or not by the way he holds himself. It's the way we walk or talk or even stand in front of a teacher or address an adult. I wouldn't say that all civilian kids are disrespectful, but you can usually see the difference.

I have found my experience as a military kid has helped me to excel in the Boy Scouts. They use a lot of the same language, so when I have a leader say something like "get in a V formation" or use military time, I know exactly what he is talking about and I have to explain it to the other kids who are totally confused.

My ability to endure a lot has helped me in other ways too. One of my favorite memories was during this whole trek we did as Scouts in New Mexico where we were out in the wilderness for several days. On like the sixth or seventh day, the excitement of it was starting to wear off for a lot of my peers. They were tired, low on energy, and dealing with blisters and all. I just tried to stay positive and help others where I could because I saw this team was starting to fall apart, and I could pick up some slack. The lead crew ended up saying that because of my outgoing moral boosting, I helped everyone out because they probably would not have made it if I wasn't there. That day was actually one of my best days ever. I think that military life has definitely geared me more towards being able to do what I did in that situation.

Right now, I am seeing in I can try and graduate early. I have been taking my college exams and planning to make sure I get all my credits in somehow. The plan right now is to take a break from school and apply to be a part of the Kandersteg International Scout Centre staff in Switzerland. We went there to the Alps when we lived in Germany and it just captivated me. Like the saying goes, I want to live my life and have this experience if I can, so I am doing all the paperwork for my visa and plan to apply next year. If I don't get accepted, I still want to take that year and work at some other Scouting place like Philmont or Northern Tier and then come back to enlist in the Army.

When you grow up in a military family, you often really want to join yourself. If I did, I'd be fourth-generation military, which makes me proud. I know it will make my parents proud too, but they have told me that it is my decision – they would support me in becoming a dentist just as much as becoming a soldier. My end goal would be to serve as an Army Ranger, but I plan to go the enlisted route. I know that officers in the military make more money, but I have been around them all my life and I'm just not like them.

Looking back, I've experienced and seen much more than some of these kids and I think I'm doing so much more for my future than some of them. Where these kids are worried about next semester, I'm worried about five years from now, and that could be a good thing or a bad thing. I'm not saying I'm better than them, they might end up millionaires and some of them might end homeless, but our focus is just different. I just think that no matter what comes my way, I will be more prepared than others because of the life I have lived.

Leslie's Narrative

Thirteen was an important year for me. Thirteen was the last time my dad deployed, 13 was the age just before we moved back here. Thirteen is also the year I really lost my dad. I would say 13 was a pivotal year for me.

Before I or my brother were born, my dad was in the Army and stationed in Schweinfurt, Germany, which is where he met my mom, who is German. After they had my brother, she wasn't supposed to be able to have any more kids because of something that we all have, but, surprise, I came four years later while we were stationed in North Carolina. We moved back to Germany two months after I was born but only stayed for a year that time. We then came here until I was in 3rd grade before we moved to Fort Lewis, Washington, which I loved. We then moved back here during the spring of my 8th year and have lived here ever since.

I'm really close with my brother, even though he's older. I even got his name tattooed on me. I feel like as we've gotten older, the relationship got thicker. When I was younger, I would go to him for protection. My brother does get treated differently than I do. My parents deny that, but it is a true statement. He was the athlete and a good kid, I just feel like I've never lived up to him in their eyes.

Dad deployed to Afghanistan when I was 13 and came back … different. He used to be a very kind-hearted and giving man, but he was diagnosed with PTSD when he came home. He can get very irritable sometimes and he likes to be alone *a lot*. During my teen years, he was more like a roommate that you don't really talk to. I mean, yes, I could ask him for advice, but other than that, there's not really … anything.

He retired from the Army over a year ago but got a contracting job working overseas right away and has been overseas nearly my entire senior year. He basically helps build some

new technology with tanks and guns and whatever. And he's also a teacher too for people who come in to learn how to use all the stuff. So basically, it's like he's deployed all over again.

Since dad left for the contractor job, he has been very distant. He rarely calls my mom at all. When we call him, he doesn't have time to talk. I haven't spoken to him in over a month. He didn't even call me on my prom. I kept on reminding him, but he never called. It's to the point where I really don't care if he even shows up for my graduation, but mom said he was still coming.

He was a Staff Sergeant in the Army, so he was over lower level people and I feel like that got to his head where he started treating us like those people. There's a lot of tension in my home where you can tell your parents are not loving each other anymore. Mom and I also found out recently that he met another woman over there. I'm not sure what she is going to do or what this will mean for my family and it's sad, but I'm just over it and dad by now.

My mom is amazing though. I used to not like her because I went through that teen stage where you don't really like your parents, but as I've gotten older, I started appreciating her more. She has really bad psoriasis and it really affects her mental and physical appearance, so she deals with depression and social anxiety because she's afraid of people looking at her. That's why she doesn't really leave the house. She was not always there for me and she didn't go to any of my stuff for school – dad did that before he started to retreat from interacting with us a lot. In looking back, I didn't have my parents at many things because dad was gone, and my mom was always home.

Moving is just a part of the military life, but I think it was really hard on me because of the times *when* we moved. I just got out of elementary school when I moved the first time. So

first off, it's really hard to understand it, especially at a young age. But you can meet friends easy when you're younger – that's my perspective.

But moving before high school, it was not good. Since I came back here, it's like I don't know anyone. I am an outcast even though I lived here before. The high school I moved into wasn't on the same side of town from when I previously lived here, which made it harder, but I just think *I* was different. When I lived in Washington, it was such an accepting place to be and it is my favorite place. There are so many people, like black all the way to Filipino, and we also have like the LGBT community – each person just has their own thing no matter who they are. With me, I really like the urban look, so the way I talk, the way I dress is very urban. So, people here are like "What is she wearing? Why does she look like that and stuff?" It just set me apart from them.

Moving – I love the traveling part of it because I'm excited to go somewhere new, but I know it's going to be hard to adjust. It's hard for you to make a lot of friends as a military kid sometimes. You stick out really bad. Now the elementary school I went to here was on post, so when you live on post, you get to meet other military kids who get it. Then it's not so bad. But when I moved to Washington, I was like I had to start all over at school.

Being a military kid made things harder for sure, especially when it comes to saying goodbye to people. I hate that I get attached very quickly to people, so whenever a friendship dies – and I know that sounds terrible – but whenever a friendship dies, it's devastating to me. When we move, it's like military kids have to start over again. It can be depressing sometimes.

As a military kid, you can make great friends and whatnot – I still keep in touch with my old friends from other places – but knowing those friends are probably going to move on to

another other place is always there. You can't make any promises because people will not always keep in contact when you move.

There is also a worry about what kind of people you will meet when you move. As a new kid, you are so open to making friends, but people nowadays can take advantage of that openness. Like the kids at the high school here, they lived here all their life, so it was harder for me to make friends because everybody already had their groups. I started hanging out with the wrong people and I was getting caught up in things I shouldn't have. Then one day, I was like, this is not me. When you make mistakes … you can't run away from those issues as a military kid. You can't move to another place, you just have to learn to make do.

One way to try and meet new people is to get involved in school. I did cheerleading when I came to high school, but I had an injury my sophomore year, so I couldn't do that anymore. I had to look for other things that could help benefit my high school years. I've met a lot of people because of the clubs I'm in, like the African-American club, student council, leadership, and also partner's club with the special needs students in our school.

Another problem with moving is figuring out where you are academically. In different areas, we are at different levels of learning. So, in Washington, we did everything backward from what we do here. I don't remember having too much trouble when I moved there in elementary, but it was different when I moved back here.

I remember I couldn't just enroll in a regular history class because they have mandatory state history here that I had to take first. Then, in English, everything was online over there, so we worked online a lot. When we got here, more things were on paper, so I actually had to write. I think the first time I wrote an essay *on paper* was here. It is just something that we military kids have to adjust to each time we move.

However, the troubles that came with moving were not nearly as difficult as dad's last deployment. He had gone to extended training and deployed overseas when I was really young, but I don't really remember those. He came home and told us that he was going to deploy, but it didn't really sink in until the time came closer. I remember we had to wake up really early to drop him off. He got out of the car and I remember my mom had her favorite Keith Sweat CD playing. It was my brother, my brother's girlfriend, me and my mom and we were all emotional driving off without dad. My brother didn't really cry, but I cried because I knew this was going to be different because of how the news showed us the conflict was going on in Afghanistan at that time.

There were times when we wouldn't talk to him for a few days, maybe even a week or two and you don't know what's going on. It was nerve-racking. There were times he had to Skype us in the middle of the night or in the dark and all you could see is like teeth or whatever. I remember on Christmas, he watched us open presents, but then he said, "Hey, guys I have to leave right now because I have to get up and pack up all of our stuff and move because they found out where we are." Stuff like that happened a few times and it was worrisome. My mom fell into depression while my dad was deployed, so my brother's girlfriend lived with us at that time and help to take care of us.

Not having a parent is tough no matter what, but it is different when that person has been gone for a person's whole life. Like those kids who don't have a mom or dad at home, they know that person is not coming back, so they learn to deal with it. In the military, it is kind of the same thing, but you have hope that they'll eventually come home, but the waiting is harder because there is always a chance that they won't.

But my dad did come back after about a year and a half. Well, he did, and he didn't because he didn't come back the same. He never really liked to talk about it, but I know it was devastating. I did hear him tell me about one thing and he got teary-eyed, which he never does. He said he had some people with him on a mission and he told them to stay behind him, but they got bombed or blew up or something and the whole group died except for him. I remember him telling me this and I was like "oh my gosh like I'm sorry." I didn't really know what to do or say to comfort my dad.

After he came home from war, he started acting very hostile and aggressive. When he was here, he kept to himself. He always stayed in the garage, played his games, smoked cigarettes, and drank. He did those things before, but he picked up those habits more and more often then. He always wanted to be away from us. He never wanted to spend quality time with us and it was really odd. He also really liked to put down people to make him feel better.

At first, we were like, "It's okay. He's going through something," but it got worse and worse. It made me worry more about my family; whether or not we're going to stay together. It changed the way I looked at him and the relationship we had. I began to think, "if he's gone, then he's gone. If he's not, then he's not." When he was home, it felt like he was gone still because he was not himself.

I don't feel like the military has been a positive factor in my life. I think dad's deployment affected me a lot and made me dislike the military life. It made me develop the anxiety I deal with today. It really was the beginning of all of it. When he was gone, it gave me a lot of chest pain, but I didn't worry about it at that time because I was a middle schooler, so I thought maybe it was hormones. I was always told not to worry. Then he came home, and he was nervous all the time. When he was in the house, he was up all night and stuff and he walked

around, and he never slept. He was always worried about locking doors and I would tell him that the door was locked, but he always had to double check. He always made us double check. He never had guns in the house, but he did have hatchets and swords. He was always worried, and it rubbed off on me to where I feel like I have to be worried every minute of my life too.

I feel like if I had more care and love from him, I wouldn't have these issues with my dad. I know who my dad is. I know he is there. I know he cares about me, but he was never there physically, so, I never really had a dad like that. It always felt like nobody was really there for me, that I always supported myself and now I support my mom. My brother, he went away to college and with dad gone again, I am the adult in the house. I take mom to her doctor's appointment, I fix the cars, I take care of the dogs and do the shopping. I am at the right age now to be independent, but it was different when I was a teenager and I had to do that stuff because mom couldn't and dad just … wouldn't.

With me, I'm very independent. I like my own voice. I like making my own step. I don't want people to make it for me. I don't want people to make the first move on a checkerboard for me. I do it myself. And I think that comes from not having the ability to make my own choice a lot as a military kid.

I understand that people think that because you're in the military and you have a steady income that it must mean you have a stable life. But that is just not the way it is. You get the income, but it comes with all these other things attached. So being a military kid taught me to be kind to people because you'll never know what they're going through.

I think all of this impacted my time in high school too. I know some of it was moving back right before high school, so I was the new kid, but I was dealing with this anxiety before. I think that's why I feel vulnerable sometimes because it's like I want to be accepted and I want

friends. So, I felt like I would just do anything to make them let me be their friend. This is a place where everybody should be welcome, but when I got here, it wasn't that way. I tend to focus on the negatives when I see in myself more than anything. More than I should.

Like I said before, my giving nature has gotten me into trouble. It made me way too trusting and I have been taken advantage of in the past. I think that is what allowed me to be in a position where I was sexually assaulted a year ago. I just didn't see what was in front of me, because I've never been able to tell when I am being taken advantage of until it already happened.

I have been going to counseling for some time now and I think that has helped with all of this – the anxiety, the depression, the assault. It's been a year since that stuff happened and I still have flashbacks a lot more than I care to admit. It's been nine months and I had the surgery afterward to heal, but I'm still just trying to recover from that and look to the future. I think the hardest part in dealing with all of this was the fact that I didn't feel like I could really rely on my parents. My mom wants to be supportive, but she can only do so much, and dad has been gone this past year and it feels like he just doesn't want to deal with any of the problems I am having.

I think that's a lot of parents though. Whatever positive their child does, they want to take credit for it, but whatever negative comes with their child, they are like, "I don't know where they got that from?" I don't know why parents can't accept the negative and the positive about their children. I'm *your* child. You birthed me, you made me. These are your genetics. The only thing that's separate from me is my soul. So, it's like at the end of the day, I can't win. I just have to suffer with whatever is going on and talk with my friends, my brother, teachers, and my counselor.

With graduation just a few weeks away, I have decided to focus on my future. I have a lot of things I want to do. I have been accepted to the local university in town, so I will be able to live at home and take care of my mom, although I do have an opportunity to live with a friend from school too, so I am weighing my options.

Right now, I think I going to major in journalism, but I was also thinking about being a teacher because I do want to help our youth. It's not really a good environment lately for the youth because I know, as a minority growing up in this area, where some people don't even have people to look to for help, I want to be one of those people that turn to. I did want to also work to get trained as an EMT so that I can do that as my job during college. I think I just want to help others, whether it's in the education field or becoming an EMT. I'm really excited about that.

I do see myself moving at some point though. I want to probably live out on the West coast again. I have been asked if I plan to join the military or marry into it and I do admit that it has some benefits, but I'm not sure because of the emotional roller coaster I've been on with my dad if I want to go through that again.

When I think about myself, I know I'm not a rock, I'm more like a tumbleweed. A rock just sits there. They stay and settle in one place, but the tumbleweed blows into most places, so I think I'm a tumbleweed. I think I'm going to be a tumbleweed in the future too.

Lindsey's Narrative

One of my biggest fears is that I'll get really close to someone, let them in, and they'll just leave. A lot of people don't know about that me – maybe like a few close, a few people know, but I just don't tell people about it because I don't want to seem really needy. I *crave* that reassurance, but I don't want to *beg* for it.

I feel like being a military kid impacted these feelings because as the child, you don't have control of where your parents are stationed or how long you're going to be there. Our life revolves around my dad and the military – we don't have a say. So, you really just kind of have to go with the flow.

Most of my family is from the South. I have family in Alabama and Mississippi, which is where I was born. There are five of us in my family: my mom, my dad, and then I have two younger sisters, Briana, who is 13, and Tori is 5. My dad, a Captain in the Army, has been in for 16 years and will be heading to Major school this summer and then they all will move to Kansas while I head to college.

As the oldest, I was born while my parents were still working on their college degrees, so I would stay with my grandparents sometimes. Dad earned a degree in criminal justice and mom got a degree in childcare education or something like that. She works at one of the daycare places on post as an assistant director. She always finds a job like that each time we move. We stayed in Mississippi until I was three when we moved to Savannah, Georgia, and then to Fort Stewart in Georgia when I was seven or eight. I was 11 when we came here for the first time before dad got orders for Louisiana during my freshman and sophomore year. Then we moved back here again for my junior and senior year.

Me and my dad have a pretty good relationship. Well, he likes to *think* that I can just come in and talk to him and that he's understanding, but, he's not. If you try to say, "Oh, I feel this way," he'll challenge you for feeling that way. He'll say, "Well, I don't understand why you're feeling this way. You're being ungrateful." I know if I needed something, he'd get it for me, but as far as emotion-wise, we don't connect. As I got older, his military personality came out, especially when he was teaching me how to drive. *That* was an experience. It's just

sometimes he doesn’t know where to draw the line between like being a Captain and being my dad.

He likes to brag about me though. He kind of forces me to do all this stuff I wouldn't necessarily want to do for myself, so he can say, "Oh, you know, my daughter is this," or "My daughter, she got this award." On one hand, it feels good to have your parent proud of you and stuff. But at the same time, it kind of feels like he wants it more than *I* want it. When he was younger, my dad was a basketball star, so he wanted me to play basketball and I'm *not* sporty. I went to one practice and didn't go back because I didn't like it. Now he's trying to put that on my middle sister. She played soccer and then she played basketball, but now she doesn't do it anymore either. She's more into music anyways. Now it's all going to be on Tori to be the sports star, I guess.

Me and my mom, we have a weird relationship. I think we're so much alike we just always bump heads. She didn't have the easiest childhood and so she likes to throw that in our face sometimes and say, “Well, when I was younger, we had this, this, and this and we couldn't afford it.” I understand that, but I don't like having that thrown in my face because that is something I can’t control.

Some days we're really close, and then other days, we just kind of stay away from each other because I feel like she tries to hold me back sometimes when I have my mind made up on things. And then she likes to get other family members to try to guilt me toward her side. Like college – she doesn't like the choice I made to stay in this state for college. She wanted me to either move with them to Kansas or go back to where my grandparents live, so she got them to call me, but I held my ground. I think I get my directness from my nana because she's one of

those straight-to-the-point type of people and I'm *really* close with my nana and papa, my dad's parents. I'm not that close with my mom's parents though.

When I think about it, my mom might be the way she is because of her parents. When I was 14, I realized like my grandma, her mom, would say stuff and make little jabs at my weight. I really feel like that impacted my relationship with her, especially now that I'm 18 and I'm not about to make an effort to *be shamed*. I love my grandma, but I kind of keep my distance. And I think my mom is harder on me than my sisters. But my sister wouldn't agree, of course.

Sometimes Briana says I set the bar too high for academics. She's one of those I'm-just-gonna-get-by types and I was always getting straight A's so she says that's what our parents expect from all of us now. Oh well.

If you ask her, Briana will tell you she loves being a military kid. She will say, "I can't wait until we move again and all," or "I can't wait to get out here." And I'm like, "Girl, why?" Then I'm jealous of my youngest sister because she's only five and by the time she's maybe in middle school, my dad will be out in the Army. He'll be retired and probably go back to live in Georgia. She'll go to school with the same people and probably graduate with them, versus me and my sister having to move around and adapt to new schools all the time.

The constant moving is probably the worst thing about being from a military family because you get comfortable in a place, involved and stuff, and then you have to leave. Some places we lived were great though. I really liked living at Fort Stewart because it was only four hours from my nana and papa. We would take trips down there every other weekend and just stay there. I spent probably my 7th through my 10th birthday down there. My grandparents, they really raised me when I was young. Plus, I'm the first grandkid so everyone knows who I am.

But my favorite place has been living here because I moved here in middle school, so I grew up with these people and we all just became really close. When I was able to move back, I already had friends. I just like this state in general. I like the weather and the people – it's really diverse here. I got exposed to Native American kids and the schools are a great mix of black kids, white kids, Asian kids – just about everything.

The worst place to live: Louisiana, hands down. First of all, I went from a really diverse population to a mostly white, conservative town. Second, the transition from middle school to high school is tough, but even more so when you are the new kid. When I was there, I was at that stage where you really would rather have friends and I just kind of lost myself trying to please other people. I used to think, "Oh, they would like me if I did this." As a freshman, you're just dumb. But once I figured out what I didn't want to do, I made some really good friends there. I still talk to them to this day and they were just like a really good group of people. I think I am just as close to them as I am to the friends I have here.

But moving … uggg … it's just exhausting. Physically, you have picked up and just start over every few years and it's a lot easier now to keep in touch with people because I'm older and we have social media. But it still doesn't take away from the fact that you have to essentially start your whole life over in a new place.

We also had to deal with temporary housing almost every time we moved. The only time we didn't have to have temporary housing was Louisiana. We were set to move over the summer and my parents went down and bought a house. So, by the time we got there, we just slept in the house until for the two days before the furniture came. But this last move back here, we had our dog with us in the hotel and my little sister was only like two, so by the end of the week, all

cramped in a hotel until we got the keys to our new house, everyone was tired of each other and just so ready for our own space.

I think setting up my room up is my favorite thing about moving though. I get to decorate it how I want to and make it feel really inviting and cozy for myself. I feel like that's like the one place that doesn't change. When I move, it's always going to be *my* space.

School, for me, has always been the biggest obstacle about moving as a military kid because each state is kind of different on their curriculum. Plus, what you have to take to graduate and how many credits you have to have is different. In Louisiana, you had to take a math every year and a science every year, but then they didn't offer AP classes or anything, so you really didn't have a chance to kind of get ahead. But here, they have AP classes, they have concurrent classes at the university, but I had to take state history to graduate. I do think that military kids seem to work a lot harder than other kids because they have to overcome these issues.

Being able to move around meant I had a lot more credits than my peers in school here. In fact, I think I had enough credits to graduate halfway through my junior year here, so I was able to pick a lot of electives and other classes my senior year. In fact, I really would recommend military kids take all their core classes during their freshmen or sophomore year, so maybe by their junior year – because people would always say junior year is the hardest – or their senior year, they can fit in concurrent classes or an internship or something like that.

Academically, I go through a process. I kind of shut down for a minute and just have to regroup. I kind of like try my best – I'm that person. I'm a really good student. I care about my grades a lot. So, I might act like I don't care if I don't do all the work, but I at least do part of the assignment and turn it in because some credit was better than nothing. I'll ask a bunch of

questions if I don't understand because I feel like it's better to ask questions and sound dumb rather than just sit there and look dumb and not do anything at all.

Breaking into friend groups is another obstacle. Socially, at a new school, most of the time, I just kind of go in and wing it. I think when it comes to this part of school, military kids kind of need a minute to adjust. When I was in Louisiana, I met this girl who lived across the street from me and we became friends that summer. But it was a small town, so when we went to school, everyone knew each other because they grew up together. So, it was kind of hard relating when they would always say, "Oh, remember when we did this, or we had this party or something like that?" and I couldn't relate because I just got there.

Some military kids are more closed off to letting people in because they're just used to moving so much. I mean, *I'm* like that. If there's a confrontation or something, I'm a really straight-to-the-point type of person. But, I don't let a lot of people in. I don't want to get attached and then move and mess up the whole relationship or friendship. So, it takes a lot of me to want to build a deep friendship with someone new.

Dad first deployed when I was five to Iraq for a year and then went back to Iraq in 2009 for a little over a year that time. His most recent deployment, to Iraq *again*, was in 2011 for another year. He did have an extended training in South Korea for about six months after he came home from Iraq the second time, but that was different because we knew it wasn't war or anything.

I think it was harder the second time he deployed because the first time, I was maybe young, so I understood that he was leaving, but I did *not* understand that he was going to war. That it was dangerous with a possibility that he might not come back. But the second time, I was little older, so I understood the extent of it. I've always been really worrisome, so I started to

think, “what if my dad doesn't come back?” I would see the news and just freak out, sobbing. I knew this girl in school whose dad died over there, so that scared me so bad. I remember I worried so much I was getting Fs in school too. It wasn't a good thing for a little kid to be doing.

I did get over it some. Every time I would tell my mom I was worried about him, I guess she would tell him, and he will call whenever he could, so that made it a little bit better. But like those thoughts were always in my mind. I think we got a call maybe twice a week in good times. He would either Skype or just call, but we talked to him a good amount.

I feel like everyone deals with deployments differently. And my parents, they didn't paint a rosy picture and say, "Oh, he's just going away." Ultimately, I knew he was going to fight in the war and defend the country. So even though they tried to make it easy, I couldn’t help but worry still. You have to adjust to life without him and readjust back when he returns only to turn around and do it all again, so the cycle of multiple deployments made it even harder.

It put a lot of pressure on my mom when my dad was away, just to make sure me and my sisters were good. She never really like showed it, but, looking back, she had a lot to deal with. She never expressed it openly to us, me and my sister. I do remember she was a little more dependent on my grandparents when he was gone though.

Plus, he came back a little different after each deployment. I've never heard him talk about the times he was deployed, and I don’t ask either because I feel like it's a touchy subject. But he has this recliner chair and I remember when I was younger, I stood behind him and he would get so mad and say, "Do not stand behind me like that." He’s also *really* protective over me and my sisters. I feel like these things stem from stuff he might have seen over there, but I don't know.

Briana was born just a little before he left on that second deployment, so when dad came home on R&R, she didn't even recognize him because she was so young. I think that kind of hurt him that his own daughter really didn't know who he was. Tori didn't have to go through any long deployments though, just some training, which is good for her.

I think I am, like most military kids, more adaptable since I know how to handle change because of all we had to go through with moving and deployments and all. Most civilian kids haven't had to experience all that, so when they do experience a change, they don't really know how to handle it that well.

I also think it helped give me a lot of discipline. I mean my dad, he expects certain things out of us, especially me because I'm the oldest. So, you always have to make sure you do good in school, do your chores, don't go out in public and act all wild and stuff like that. I'm thankful now, but when I was younger it used to annoy me. Now I'm glad my parents never really let me get away with anything. It helped me to learn responsibility and made me become reliable.

There are times when I felt like I wasn't in control of my life. When I was in middle school, like seventh grade or eighth grade, I was going through some things emotionally. I used to struggle with self-esteem, so I think pride was another thing I learned from this life. I'm really like pro-woman now. Like doing what makes you happy and not letting guys shame you for doing something that you want to do because guys are trash 99 % of the time. There are some really good ones but overall, when a guy tries to shame me – especially if he shames me after I turned them down – they're even more disposable to me.

Even though I wouldn't trade my life, I feel like I moved through my entire childhood, so I don't want to move around as an adult. It's a good experience to have but, at the same time, I don't want my kids to have to pack up and start over every few years. We can travel – I think that

is something I still want to do – but not relocate my life every few years. I can't do that. I want them to be able to kind of grow that friendship and foundation with people and be able to say, "I've known you since this long." I don't think I even want to marry someone in the military – that is how much it has impacted my life. Like, he would really have to be a hell of a guy.

As a military kid, you kind of have to learn how to have almost thick skin, because like when you move places, everyone's not always going to be really welcoming. So, it's like you have to learn to really depend on yourself and almost love yourself enough to know that others might not like you, but they really don't matter. It took me a long time to realize that, so if I can help my own kids avoid having to learn this lesson, I will.

Sage's Narrative

When I think about my life, I think being a military kid really impacted me. I see myself as very creative and open-minded, but I guess you could say I am resilient too. I've been through a lot of stuff in my life. I've seen family members coming and going, I've seen households break apart, I witnessed my dad getting deployed multiple times, but I still managed to make it through and here I am now, about to graduate and do something with my life. The military caused a lot of this but also helped me to endure it as well.

My older twin brother and I were born at Fort Carson in Colorado Springs. We moved to Washington when I was two or three before moving back to Colorado. From there, I used to go back and forth between my mom and dad until 6th grade. So, I'd live in Arizona for a while and then back to Colorado, just back and forth. My brother and I were living with my dad for a month or two and the other month was with my mom, except for one time during 5th grade when we lived with dad in Colorado the whole year before he deployed.

We stayed with mom while he was deployed to Iraq that first time, but that was difficult because she was having some household issues with my stepdad and they decided to divorce. When dad came back, we moved to Florida the summer before we went into the 6th grade when he got orders for North Carolina. We didn't move with him right away because he found out he was getting ready to deploy to Afghanistan this time and was in the field all the time. Plus, he had just gotten divorced again himself, so it would have been hard to take care of us. We lived with one of my aunts during that deployment. Actually, she was my dad's ex-wife's sister, so I guess she would be my ex-step-aunt. We moved to Virginia with her during our 7th grade year. After that deployment, we moved to Georgia with dad and stayed there from 8th grade until the summer after our sophomore year when we moved here, and we have been able to stay here for our last two years of high school.

We never had to live overseas though, like some military kids. Dad was stationed in South Korea when we were young, but we lived with our mom. He did get orders for Germany after his deployment in Afghanistan and had to report *there* instead of coming straight home, but he was able to get out of it somehow and come home to us. He said we probably would have had to stay with our aunt if he had to stay in Germany since he would have been in the field so much with no one to watch us.

Of all the places we have lived – and it was *a lot* – my favorite would have to be Florida or Georgia. I mean, I know we only lived there for the summer, but Florida was just so beautiful. And Georgia was pretty too. Plus, we have family on my dad's side that lives there, so we used to travel and visit Georgia all the time during summers growing up. When people ask me now where I am from, where home is, I am more likely to say those two places even though I was born in Colorado. My least favorite place was when we lived in Arizona with mom or I would

say here too. Even though I like the people that I have met here for the past few years, it really is in the middle of nowhere. It's certainly not like Florida.

Dad got remarried not too long after he came back from Afghanistan. I'm happy for my daddy because he's been through a lot and when our stepmom came into his life, he was like relieved because he went through two other divorces. I like my stepmom. She is just about done with her master's degree and wants to be a nurse practitioner. My real mom, I think she lives in Washington. I get to talk with her on the phone, but that's our only contact.

Dad is a First Sergeant in the Army. He teaches basic training but on the artillery side. Really, he's in charge of the drill sergeants, that's what he says. He's trying to go to college too. He has an associate degree but is trying to finish his bachelor's degree because he's going to retire later this year.

My relationship with my dad – it's good. Sometimes I dislike him but other than that, it's still a good relationship. I still respect him and I'm still appreciative for the things he does do. Sometimes I can get a little frustrated or upset with him. I mean, we disagree with some things, since our viewpoint on certain topics are different and it frustrates me because he won't see my point of view because he's the parent. Sometimes parents, they think that we are wrong. I think because he works with trainees, it has a little tie into how he thinks.

He works really long hours. Lately, he's said that he's now going to finally work a nine-to-five, but he's been working until 8, 9, 10-o'clock at night. I mean, it doesn't bother me as much because I know he has a job to do. He's just … gone. He has to do what he has to do, so it doesn't bother me. I feel comfortable going to my stepmom with problems. There are sometimes I need to go to dad, but he's just not always there.

I do have two little sisters – step-sisters from my mom – but I haven't seen them in a while. They live in Arizona. I used to visit them with my mom when my dad was deployed sometimes, but the last time I got to see them was I think in 5th grade. The last time I got to *talk* to them was 7th grade. It really sucks because I know they're out there and they might need some guidance and I can't be there, I can't talk to them. I tried talking to my mom but she's no help. She doesn't know where they are either, which concerns me. I just try not to think about it.

So, it's just mostly me and my twin brother. I'm happy because you could truly say he's a good Day One. It would have been really tough without him because me and my brother, we're real close. We were there for each other through all the moves and deployments. We talk about a lot of things and he's the one I could talk to whenever I have an issue with someone. If it wasn't for him, it probably would have been difficult for me emotionally and mentally, I know I'm not going through this alone. It's like at least I have someone who's on my side.

Now, I'm the good brother – the only time I misbehaved was once in the 6th grade. He's always been the crazy one. He wouldn't admit to it but he's always the one that gets in trouble, and even though I'm the younger twin, he follows on what I do almost all the time. Whenever I find something interesting, he always wants to piggy back of it. Like for example, I'm interested in sneakers, because I feel there's art in them. I put some inspiration into making them and the style I have with them and because of that, he started wanting to collect them too. It doesn't bother me. I wish he could do his own thing, but I'm not going to tell him how to live his life.

Growing up as a military kid lets you see a lot more things that normal kids don't get to see. Some kids, they stay in one city for their whole life, but you get to see so different *ways* of life. As a military family, you get to see a variety of a bunch of different things like culture and how life is, how like some people don't have it this way or this is how a certain people or groups

live. That's the biggest impact. Moving around, you get to see so much difference in just the areas where you live.

While it benefited our family a lot –you get to travel to more places, and some kids don't even get to leave their own hometown and it helped pay for us live in a house and what we eat – but you're moving a lot and you don't really get a choice in a lot of things. You don't get to see your military parent at all sometimes. You got to put work first over other things – that is just the military way. Moving back and forth, either between mom and dad or with the military, was hard, but it's just how life was for me. It was like this became normal to me, I don't know how else to explain it. I just got so used to it, it's just normal now.

Dad *did* give us a choice in this last move though. He had other choices around the country, but he had a fear that he might get deployed again, so he said, "This is probably the safest option." I really badly didn't want to come here, but under the circumstances, it was here or some other horrible place where he might deploy again. I didn't like it, but that is the way it is, we have to follow the rules of the military lifestyle.

I do have some good memories of being the new kid in school. It's sad because you have to move to a different school, but it's sometimes a good feeling to be the new kid. I get to meet new people. Going to a new school and meeting new people can both good and bad. I guess that is the obstacle. Changing environments and stuff can be an obstacle, but it did strengthen me. Being in the military definitely opened my eyes to traveling, which is one thing I want to do in the future.

While being the new kid can be fun, having to learn how to fit in at the new school is always a struggle. Some schools are a lot different than others. At first, I might find it a little difficult because they do have their own ways of going about things, but, after a while, I don't

find it difficult at all. Even the hardest, toughest classes I feel like if you understand what they're asking for and as long as you follow up on what they tell you to do, it's not going to be difficult at all.

My last school, before I moved here, was really prepping you for college. You had to study to pass in that school, if not, they had probation and if you didn't go to summer school, they would just send you to another worse public school in the area. I just feel like they were further along on pretty much almost everything than here, because it was more funded, and they were a more financially stable school. They intend for everyone to go to college, so they would even go as far as saying if we didn't have a hundred hours for community service, we wouldn't be able to graduate.

It is a demand to get good grades in my house – if it's under a B, it's a bad grade. If it is a really, really intense class like trigonometry, OK, but if I'm making a B in an easy class like drama, dad is going to question me. So, grades were never really an issue for me or my brother.

The problem we found was when it came to sports. I feel like you always have to prove yourself in sports as a military kid. I played basketball and ran cross country and track, so when I would try out for the team, they wouldn't know about my skills unless I could prove it right away. It's different compared to when people transfer from different schools but still are from the same area or even in the state. Their reputation can follow them, but not with military kids. The one year I stayed in high school for both freshman and sophomore year, the coach knew what was wrong with me from the previous year and I never had that before. I got the same thing here with my last two years of high school, so it was great.

Moving to different schools does mean I got a chance to make friends around the country. I made really good friends and I do keep in contact with some. I feel like if I went back to where

they are, we could be right back in sync. If I have time and money and they do too, I'll probably meet up with them again. I've made a good reputation at each new place and been cool with people and they understand who I am, but each time dad got new orders, I would have to start all over again. This was a difficulty I had to learn to overcome.

At first, I used to put myself out there and like say, "I'm new," and stuff like that. Then I realized the best way to go about things is to find a group of friends that like the same things I do. Like here with Erik. He's also a military kid and when I very first got here, I remember orientation and I saw Erik with his friends and then, later on, I saw them at the mall a couple of times. Once we finally met, we ended up being close friends. It really helps that he is a military kid too because he understands. He didn't have to move as much as I did, but he still gets how it's like to be a military kid and it kind of helped us in becoming closer friends.

One thing Erik understood was what it was like to deal with deployment. Dad deployed a lot during my life – it felt like he was always gone either to war or training. I think it might have been different if he deployed when he was married to my step-mom because she would have given us a stable place to stay, but she didn't come until afterward.

All deployments are going to be difficult because you got to worry if your dad's going to come home or not or worry about how life's going to be without your parent while they are gone. But it was harder for us because our mom couldn't really take care of us the first time and then we had to live with our aunt the second time. My aunt did a good job taking care of us, but it was a little uncomfortable because we didn't want to be so needy because she's got her own kids. We felt kind of a little out of place during that year, which made dad being gone even tougher.

During the time he was at war, I would feel sad, I'd feel a little scared – there's no way to describe it. Sometimes I wouldn't think about it at all because I feel that he has already been

through it a couple times, so I just felt he would come back alive. I would pray that it would be okay. Then sometimes, I'll just open about it and let someone know how I felt. My aunt actually helped me to find a counselor to talk to during his last deployment. I got upset because the living situation I was in was tough. The counselor gave me some advice and it did help more than I thought, but I only went the one time.

While he was deployed, he would message us on Facebook or periodically he would call us. Like he'd always figure out some way to talk to us which I really appreciate. It helped us a lot.

I don't really remember him coming home the first time that well, just how it changed for us to go from mom, who was so lenient, to our dad's rules again. But when he was sent to Germany after his second deployment, I remember thinking it wasn't fair that we didn't get to see him after he had already been gone so long, even though we knew he was now safe.

Even though it was hard, I think being able to experience dad's deployments actually helped make me a better person. I'm not saying your father being deployed is a good thing, but it makes me know how to deal with a lot of different things, stresses or stuff like that. It impacted me a lot. It kind of teaches you how to be on your own and self-reliant, I guess. I think being a military kid has opened the door for me to see like a bunch of ways of life and how certain people adapt to living in the military lifestyle and what is it like signing up and devoting your neck, your life to your country.

I know some think that military kids are privileged sometimes, and we are in some ways. I got teased living in households with different families that are not military between my aunt and my mom, who were on the lower end in society with the lower end jobs. I can see the difference between that life and ours now. I just wish others would understand that we military

kids don’t always have a choice, that being a military kid is not all glitter and gold – you still got some limitations. We don’t have a normal life.

I think the way I grew up helped me. I’m still not sure if I would join the military myself. I did want to go back to Florida for school, but the out-of-state tuition was a major factor that made me decide to stay here for college. I was really considering joining the National Guard to pay for school, but I'm going to do one year of college here to just experience it as in like a normal student before I revisit joining the National Guard. I know living the military life is tough and I’m not sure I’d want to do it again.

I plan to major in architecture in college because I have always found I liked to be creative in that way. I used to be interested in Legos and then my mom got me interested in *Star Wars*. I used to make forces out of Legos and have them battle each other and, believe it or not, make actual YouTube videos over them. I think that is why designing, drawing, and style appeal to me now. I know it sounds kind of funny, but I want to be like a Leonardo da Vinci. I want to be spread out and have a lot of interest and a lot more talents than just being an architect alone. I guess you can say that the moving around as a military kid showed me different places and structures and lifestyles and that ties back into my creativity.

I didn’t choose to be a military kid. I went through a lot of struggles and, yes, I had some benefits, but at the end of the day, I'm really appreciative to be one because it was a privilege. I got to do a lot more things that a lot of other kids were not allowed to do and I actually kind of see it as a blessing. Even though it had some of its own disadvantages, being a military kid was still a great experience.

Zion's Narrative

I don't know about everybody's home, but I think military parents are a lot harder than regular parents. And I would know because I have not just one but four of them.

I was born here and only had to move one time when we lived in South Korea for three years. So, compared to what I know other military kids face, my life as a military kid was much easier. My mom and dad are both retired Army veterans, but they divorced when I was seven. Both remarried fellow veterans, so military service is a part of *all* the parents in my life.

We were stationed on the Osan Air Force base in South Korea when I was seven and moved back home when I was 10. I remember it was great when we found out my dad was getting stationed in South Korea too after I had already been living there with my mom. He didn't come back home at the same time we did – he had to stay another year – but it was good when he was there because I could see him. I think that made it easier to get through their divorce.

Dad retired from the Army as a Command Sergeant Major and now runs the ROTC program at one the state universities in Louisiana. He also works as an assistant pastor at his church. Dad remarried twice after my mom and his current wife, my stepmom, was prior service as well. She didn't retire from the military though and still works on post as a civil service employee.

I have lived mostly with my mom since my parents got divorced. She decided to retire after our time in South Korea, so we could come back here to live, and I would grow up close to my family here. My mom, who worked as a career counselor before retiring as a Master Sergeant from the Army, met my stepdad while we were living in South Korea and they got married in

2009. My stepdad retired from the Army here as a First Sergeant not long after we returned to the states.

My family tree branches off a lot with all my siblings. I have 10-year-old twin brothers from my stepmom. They love whenever I go down to Louisiana to visit because they don't have an older sibling around, so we play basketball and games when I'm there. As I've grown, I lowkey stopped seeing my dad as much as I used to because I get busier and I had a lot more stuff to do, especially once I started working.

My mom and stepdad have had one daughter, my seven-year-old sister that lives with us here. We're really close, as in like I would kill somebody over her. In the house, we will lay down and watch movies together and I will get her ice cream sometimes randomly and take her places with me. We get on to each other's nerve from time to time, but that's because she is a little sister.

I also have two older siblings – a 26-year-old stepsister from a marriage my dad had before he met my mom, who lives in Atlanta, and a 25-year-old brother that lives here in the state. When we were younger, they used to kind of bully me a little, I think that I why I am so nice to my little sister. But my relationship with them is just … different. Some if it is because of my dad. He used to be mean – I think that the military did it, but I don't know – before he became a Christian and got involved in church. My dad always had a temper, it was not as bad like he used to abuse us or anything, but my brother would always say he was softer on me than when he was little.

I have a really good relationship with my dad. My dad, me and him, we're just alike. We could literally just chill all day, be fine – whatever you want. We don't get annoyed with each

other. We like to crack jokes a lot, but he can get serious too. I know when to stop playing and all that.

While I am close with my dad, I'm definitely mama's boy. I'm not ashamed to say it. We can be ourselves around each other. When we're around my stepdad, he's more serious and sometimes he doesn't always like the stuff that we do. He has a different perspective and sometimes he thinks she babies me.

My stepdad grew up in a different environment than me. When he was six, his dad killed himself while he was in the same apartment. Then, he lived with his grandma in Detroit and he said it was a rough spot to grow up. He just grew up with tough love basically. They never totally loved him. We barely talk, only when it's something we need to talk about. I mean, he's still there for me, he supports me and all that, but we have a different relationship compared to me and my dad.

Living in South Korea as a military kid was an experience I will never forget. I know I was young, but it was something not every kid gets to do, so it was important. At first, we actually lived in an apartment off post until we could get on post housing. I remember there was a lot of litter though and that it would stink, but it was just a different way of living. It's not as clean as it is here in America, but I feel like it is a better way of life. They're not mean or anything. The Koreans will try to feed you if they have food. They got me fat over there. I was skinny before I moved to Korea and fat when we moved back home. Mom always said you didn’t have to worry about crime either.

When we lived in Korea, we were able to travel to Guam, Japan, and even hiked to the top of the Great Wall of China. I went snowboarding a lot there and that was fun. It snowed a lot there too. There were a lot of like military parties and dances as well.

The opportunity to travel was great but meeting all types of different kids from all different type of cultures was cool. I learned a lot about Korean culture, but there were a lot of people from Honduras or the Philippines, from all types of different places that I would have never met here. So, I learned to not see people differently because there would be students from different cultures and races in my classroom every day. I think a lot of people don't know the truth about Korea. They probably think it's bad because of North Korea, but it was really not like that when I was there. I don't know how it is now, how the situation is going on, but being able to live in South Korea was great and it made me want to go to more places instead of only in the United States.

I guess I got lucky that I only had to move one time. Honestly, I would have liked to travel and move more as a military family. I know I lived in Korea, but other than that, I have only lived here. It would have been cool to go to California, or Texas, New York, somewhere big like that. I don't think moving is hard unless you're starting from point blank and you don't know anybody at all.

Moving back to the states, the transition, academically or socially, wasn't too hard – or at least I don't remember anything really bad. I think it helped that my parents have never played around with grades. I've never had straight-up bad grades. I might have had a D before in math or something like that, but they always stay on me about my grades. If my grades are bad, I couldn't do anything, so I feel like that helped. I do remember that it seems like things over in South Korea were more controlled in school. I feel the education over there was more serious than here.

I know a lot of people have trouble finding friends, but I've always been an open person to everybody, so I really never had that problem or obstacles in that area. It was also easier

because I came back to a community I had already lived in, so I knew kids from before. So, when I came back, we all started hanging out again. It was kind of like we left off where we were at.

I did have some friends that I made over in Korea that I was able to see here in the states later on. One kid, we used to live in the same building in Korea and I used to go downstairs and play with him all the time. He was Korean-American since his mom was Korean, but his dad was military. He moved to Kansas after we moved back here, so my mom and I drove to visit him and his family. I also have another military kid friend from South Korea who also happened to get stationed here at one point, so that was pretty cool. They moved to a different town in this area later on, but I still hang out with him sometimes.

One thing that I do remember was being excited that I could finally start playing football once we moved back to the U.S. I always felt athletics helped make school and making friends easier. I feel like the military helped me to be better at sports because being active is a big thing. I grew around my mom playing softball all the time. My dad, he would play football or basketball when he was in the Army. But in Korea, you're not allowed to play contact sports until you are in high school, so, I couldn't play football until the fifth grade when we moved here.

In thinking about it, I haven't really had any bad experiences as a military kid. I know other military kids, they go through a lot more. Some move to different schools, different states a lot more than I had to, so it was harder for them. I've never experienced bullying or anything like that in school. I don't think I even got bullied when I had to wear this eye patch back in Korea. I had one bad eye, so I had to wear an eye patch over my right eye for hours each day to make this eye stronger. I used to hate doing that in front of everybody. I'm not going to lie, it was embarrassing. I felt weird wearing it as a kid, but I don't remember kids making fun of me for it.

As a high school student, I think I'm pretty normal. I mean, in a local black youth fraternity and I played sports, but I'm pretty typical as a high school student. Maybe if my parents were still in the military it would be different, but since they are only veterans now, I don't see myself as being different. But maybe that is because the kids I choose to hang out with are a lot like me.

As far as deployments, I think I also was able to dodge the hard stuff there too. My mom deployed to Afghanistan when I was like three – I only kind of remember it. Then dad deployed when I was like four to Iraq, but I remember they didn't cross over where they were both gone at the same time. My dad is the only one I really remember watching come back. I also remember that he was gone longer. My stepdad did deploy too, but it was before he married my mom and he doesn't talk about it with me at all.

So, they did deploy, but I was luckily enough to be young, so it didn't impact me much. I think about how much harder it would have probably been if I wasn't young when they deployed. It would have been harder if I was in middle or high school because that's like when you're in that transition and you kind of need your parents to guide you in your high school life. I think about how hard it would have been in I didn't have them there when I broke my leg during my sophomore year or something.

I do remember writing letters and seeing pictures of me writing letters to my dad while he was gone. I also remember him coming home. I remember seeing him get off the bus with all of all the soldiers. All of us were standing outside with the other families with signs and then they had a little ceremony. I couldn't wait to hug him. Every time I see a video of somebody coming home from deployment, it always can make me tear up. I don't know why. That's the one thing that can make me cry.

None of my parents like to talk about what it was like to be deployed, especially my stepdad. But my dad did talk one time. He said he got in a bad situation. He told me he had to shoot at a car with two teenagers in it. He said their brakes must have been out something because they were driving back and forth around where the military was. They thought they were trying to bomb them or something, so he had no choice. I'm pretty sure he remembers that day in his head. I know he deals with PTSD just like my stepdad, but they don't talk about stuff like that. It's all in the inside, but I know they have been through a lot of stuff. I might ask more in the future if I decide to join myself, but, for now, I pretty much just let it be theirs.

I feel I act more mature than most people my age and some of that comes from being in a military family. I can act goofy, but I know when it's time to chill out. A lot of people worry about how their Instagram looks, but I don't worry about that kind of stuff. It's not important to me. Little things like this I feel makes me different.

I have had a job for a few years now, but my current job is delivering food trays and carts at the local hospital and I'm proud of my work there. I approach it with my head up, my chest out. That's how I have seen my dads – both of them – look when they were in the military. They were in charge with authority, so I try to hold myself to that, like walk with my head up, not down, you know, with pride. Walk with pride.

I think it is easy to spot the difference between military and civilian kids. We are more proficient and concerned with making sure everything gets done in a certain way. I kinda grew on to it. I grew up knowing how to do everything, my own laundry, make my bed. I always say, "Yes sir, yes ma'am." Some people don't even do that. I feel my manners and what was taught to me in how to talk to different types of people, came from being in a military family. Like

working at the hospital, I talk to doctors, nurses, people that are about to die – all types– and the military helped to do that.

Having everything done on time is just normal for me. If I'm going to be somewhere, a lot of people are late, but the military kind of influenced me being on time and get stuff done on time. I even have military time on my watch. Also making sure your bed is made before you leave the house or even if you're just chilling in the other room, it has to be straight. I'll be hanging out with my friends and forget to take the trash, so I have to come back home and do it even though my family is clearly right there, and my friends don't get why. That's my job so I have to do it. So, I could plan to go out bowling and if I don't take the trash out, then I can't do anything. Or if you're sick at school, you don't go somewhere else later that day, stuff like that.

My stepdad is big on responsibility, sometimes to the point where I don't get it either, actually. Say there's stuff on the inside of our big trash bin outside and it starts stinking and he makes me clean it. I don't get it – it's a trash can, but I don't have an attitude about it, I just do it. You just got what you got to do. You're just going to start problems if you try to get out of it.

I feel like growing up in the military made me more socially open too. Some kids that have nothing to do with the military are socially awkward to me. They can't really just talk to anybody like they're scared or they're nervous. Probably because civilian kids aren't exposed to everything that military kids are exposed to. A lot of us travel, see different things, but some of the kids here haven't left the city before and that's crazy to me. Also, if I have a problem, I try to solve them myself, but I do feel comfortable going to other people if I wanted to. It's not weird to me, I won't feel awkward. I'm just used to it.

So, right now, my plan is to attend the university in town to get my basics out of the way and then transfer to another college in the state. I plan to major in criminology or forensics. Then

after that, I'm either going to join the military or try to go deeper into criminal justice to hopefully work with the FBI or something. Not like an everyday cop, but I feel like I have, like, senses and I notice details, so I just feel like I'd be good at profiling or something like that.

I do think I would be a good soldier though when I think about it. I think that would be something that I would enjoy. I know it would be hard, like with basic and all that, and other parts too, but I feel like that's something I would like to do. Of course, I wouldn't like getting deployed and all that crazy stuff. I mean if I do, I do – I will fight for the country, but nobody *wants* to go to war.

I don't feel pressured to join the military from my family, but I feel like I *could* be in the military simply because I grew up around it. I know that my parents being veterans has influenced me a lot. I try to follow what they say mostly. I don't feel I need to control my life right now. I'm not grown enough to be trying to do everything on my own yet. I need that guidance from my parents. I don't think they ever really *controlled* my life – I haven't felt like I've been controlled, but it is how I grew up, surrounded by a military environment where they made a lot of the decisions for me.

I thought about actually joining the military my junior year and going to basic training over the summer before my senior year, but I just waited. I just wasn't sure – that's a big step and I didn't know, so I just waited. Now I think it would be better to go in after I graduate from college, so I can go in as an officer.

If I could tell others what it is like growing up in a military family, I would tell them that it's not all bad. A lot of people that weren't raised around the military, they think you join and *immediately* you're going to go to war or you are going to die. It is just more than guns and

explosions and all that. There are all types of jobs in the military where you will never see combat. I feel like you can get a lot of character out of this life and people just don't see that.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

This chapter concerns the thematic findings from the study as they pertain to the self-perceptions of military-connected adolescents, their experiences, and how they make sense and respond to them. Findings for each of the three research questions and a comparison to previous research are presented separately. Implications to educators, possible avenues for continued research on this subject, and a final reflection will be presented in the following chapter.

Overview

The narratives of the nine military-connected adolescents present an informative and compelling portrait of the experiences, perceptions, and responses to growing up within this invisible minority. Through both similarities and divergences, their stories provide illuminating examples of life as a military-connected adolescent, which could better inform teaching and learning among this culture within secondary schools.

The themes which emerged through a thematic analysis of each participant interview provide an in-depth look at life through the eyes of military-connected adolescents as well as substantiate and add to various aspects of the existing research and literature pertaining to military-connected adolescents, the military culture, and elements of positive psychology development among adolescents.

As explained in Chapter 3, using a narrative inquiry approach allowed me to honor these participants by the sharing their life stories to better understand military-connected adolescent identity and experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Individual interviews built around Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) metaphor of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space guided me to seek answers to the research questions by focusing on the internal feelings, beliefs,

and thoughts alongside the outward sharing of experiences that included the past, present, and future.

While the co-constructed narratives painted a picture of the individual participant's lives, the thematic analysis further broke down those narrative to link their stories together, to look for similarities or differences among participants, and to present a broader picture of military life through the eyes of military-connected adolescents.

Shank (2002) claims thematic analysis is the search for patterns under the notion that where there are patterns, there is the possibility of something that is creating them. Or, as Morse (1994) put it, emergent themes come from perceptive questioning, observation, and a relentless search for answers to piece together data and make the invisible obvious for the masses. To achieve this, research texts were read and reread before being printed out on different colored sheets of paper and coded as they connect to the perceptions, beliefs, experiences, and actions of participants. Coded sentences or passages were cut out and sorted as they pertained to addressing each of the three research questions of this study. From there, coded interview strips were then sorted, arranged, and rearranged to categorize the codes before these categories were grouped into themes to help answer each of the three research questions asked in the study.

While categories relate to the context and description of participant accounts, themes are the result of interpretation of those categories at an abstract level (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016). However, it is still necessary to express the subtle differences within each theme through subthemes. Subthemes share the same central organizing concept as the theme but focus on a notable specific element (Vaismoradi et al., 2016). As such, subthemes were included as part of the thematic analysis that address all three research questions. Their development

relates back to the various categories created by the researcher during analysis, which were drawn from a combination of the language used by the participants and previous research.

Through this study, it emerged that military-connected adolescents view themselves as *confident*, *empathetic*, *mature*, and *adaptable*. They encounter numerous experiences including the *military parent as a soldier first, life on the move, traversing new school terrain, being the new kid on the block, saying goodbye for war,* and *the reunification of the family unit*. As a result, military-connected adolescents perceive *higher expectations, an impact on identity and relationships*, many *advantages and aggravations due to membership in this culture*, respond through various *coping strategies* as they work to make sense of the *lasting impact of military life*.

Research Question 1: Military-Connected Adolescent Self-perception

To address the first research question – *how military-connected adolescents perceive and define themselves as it relates to their membership within the military culture* – participants were asked about feelings and beliefs about themselves, their relationships, and their perceptions of how they compare to their civilian peers. Table 2 below presents the emergent themes and related subthemes that explain how military-connected adolescents perceive themselves.

Table 2: Themes and Subthemes of Military-Connected Adolescent Perceptions of Identity.

Theme	**Subthemes**
Confident	Determination Pride Self-assured Fearlessness Optimism
Empathetic	Cultural Awareness Humbleness Considerate Self-sacrificing
Mature	Respectful Self-Reliant Disciplined

Adaptable	Resilience Limited Locus of Control Masters of Unpredictability

Confident

Confidence arises when one feels secure in themselves. While the participants in the study revealed the same feelings of vulnerability most adolescents express, they also articulated confidence in themselves through their words and actions as a result of growing up within the military culture. Confidence was shown through expressions of determination, pride, self-assured fearlessness, and optimism.

Determination.

Although most adolescents have a desire to put forth the best version of themselves, the military-connected adolescents in this study expressed not just a yearning to look better but be better. For Elias, although he has high expectations for himself, he spoke about feeling as though he could always push himself further:

> …I just feel like I could always do better, and I always feel not inferior, but I always feel like other people are doing better than me [and] because I have the higher expectations of how I'm not there yet, I need to reach it. … I want to be a leader.

This desire to push himself to be better has guided many of his decisions, including plans he has to attend a premier military academy in the future.

While Elias claims his determination impacts his action and future goals, Daisy, Leslie, and Frank all express determination as a factor of their identity. For Leslie, hers was a dedication to the fight for the things she felt were important in such as friendships and the rights of others. Daisy points out her determination is something she adopted because she saw it modeled for her through her father. As for Frank, he feels his identification with determination served as a motivator:

> I've grown up with the aspect, you go out and you do your best and you accomplish your goals. Not really that failure is not an option because you learn more from failure than victory, but it's just that in my own soul, you do something and do it to your best and you finish it, no matter what.

Frank stated that his determination to consistently try and reach his desired goals is what separates him from a lot of his peers and indicates a high level of confidence.

Pride.

Several of the participants shared that pride in themselves and their membership within the military community was an important part of how they perceived themselves. For Zion, the way he walks and presents himself physically to the world is how he expresses his pride:

> I approach [life] with kind of like, with like my head up, my chest out, and that's how I seen my Dad's, both, they both, that's how they were in the military … in charge authority so I kind of, like, try to hold myself to that, like walk with my head up, chest out, not with my head down, you know. Just, I don't know how to describe it. Walk with pride.

Elias echoes those same sentiments in term of how he carries himself. He admits that at times this expression of pride can be "a little intimidating," and come across in a negative way at first but he stated that "we pride ourselves on being military brats" and he felt that distinction is obvious when looking at how military-connected adolescents carry themselves.

Pride can also be expressed in the demeanor military-connected adolescents have when they speak, especially to adults. While Frank claims the stature he uses when he speaks to those in authority, like parents or teachers, exhibits pride, it is his tone of voice, the use of "sir" and "ma'am," and the level of eye contact which reflects the pride he feels. Brandon sees his ability to exude pride through his behavior, which he feels helps to set an example for his younger brother on how to show pride and respect simultaneously.

For Lindsey, feminism as a part of her identity is how she exudes pride:

> I mean, I'm really like pro-woman. Like doing what makes you happy and not letting guys shame you for doing something that you want to do because guys are trash 99% of

> the time. I mean there are some really good ones but like overall … they're disposable to me.

The respect Lindsey feels she deserves reflects the pride she has for herself, which could be argued is harder for female military-connected adolescents to develop in a culture with a strong history of women being seen as less than men (Wertsch, 1991).

Self-assured fearlessness.

One thing many participants perceived as a difference between themselves and their civilian peers was a sense that they can trust in themselves and their abilities in the face of almost anything. The way in which most participants perceived this was by seeing themselves as extroverted. For Leslie, understanding of what it is like to be an outsider as a military-connected adolescent helps her to develop this in herself:

> [Being extroverted] kind of helped me when I felt like I didn't belong. … I am an extrovert as you say. I do like to greet [people] because I mean, everyone wants to feel welcomed. So, if a person says hello, then why not go and talk to them if you're alone?

Leslie talked about sitting back when she was younger and feeling judged by others, so when she decided she didn't want to experience this anymore, it boosted her confidence. Brandon spoke about not holding back and waiting for others to make the first move when meeting new people. Frank said his extroverted personality helps him to find new friends as he would "kick out the door and you know, come out with my big personality." Bailey, on the other hand, reveals that she sees herself as more introverted, although she admits that being openminded and fearless really can help military-connected adolescents.

There is a point where being so fearless and self-assured can rub people the wrong way, according to Lindsey. While her experiences as a military-connected adolescent helped her to gain confidence, she perceives that, in some situations, it can come across as confrontational:

> I mean, I'm definitely not afraid to kind of reach out and ask for clarification on stuff I don't understand. And then socially, if there's a confrontation or something I don't like,

> I'm a really straight-to-the-point type of person. Answers now rather than beating around the bush because I don't see the point in that. I'd rather get the answers then and squash whatever issue we have. Or if we have an issue, address it rather than, "Oh, you know, she just kind of made me mad and said this."

While confidence has helped her to navigate pitfalls in her life, Lindsey admits that her fearless nature makes her come across as "not the most friendly person."

Zion emphasizes that because he has been exposed to more situations as a military-connected adolescent, he perceives himself as less fearful in tackling new experiences:

> … some kids that have nothing to do with the military, they're socially awkward, and they don't really have that ability. They can't really just talk to anybody. They're scared to or they're nervous too. So, I think that … growing up in the military made me more socially open.

Zion notes that military-connected adolescents are more self-assured in the way they present themselves and thus less likely to let fear get in the way of welcoming new experiences or situations.

For some of them, this fearlessness manifests in a sense of adventure seeking as a part of their identity. Frank reveals that he perceives himself as an "adrenaline rush junkie" while Sage believes that being self-assured contributes to a sense of adventure in meeting new people:

> I have seen what it's like to be more adventurous and go out there and see different things and so I have more of a willingness to … try to accept me for who I am. For me to [put] myself out there and try to say like, 'This is me.'

Because he spent so much time moving around the country, Sage feels this experience developed the fearlessness he has when it comes to being confident enough to open up to new people and experiences.

For Brandon, he perceives his experiences as a military-connected adolescent as helping him cultivate the self-assured behavior that made his gender transition easier. He stated "military kids feel like they can't do stuff because they just moved there, or they don't have a lot of friends" until they get a strong enough backbone to realize they are capable of anything. For

example, Brandon talked at length about the bullying he endured while transitioning at his previous school, but the moment he decided to deny his fear and use the men's restroom for the first time was a "title of victory" for him. "That's why when people tell me now, like, trans are like 'I don't wanna go in,' I'm like, just walk in, it's not that big of a deal." Brandon's confidence allows him to overcome these hurdles and develop a more self-assured facet of his identity.

Optimism.

In several of the participants, their feelings of confidence brought about perceived optimism for their future. For Elias, the fact that a chosen path is "intimidating proves that it's a step-up in life that [he] needs to take." Bailey claims the fact that she chose to live with her sister after watching how the military helped her sister increased her confidence to perceive her future in an optimistic light:

> I watched [my sister] go to college and partying. She wasn't focused. But then I watched her change her life around and go to the Army and that matured her. And look at her now. I mean she's successful and so it shows me that anything is possible. I mean my own sister can do it, so can I.

The years spent living with her sister in relative stability helped Bailey to develop confidence and envision a future where anything is possible.

Sage, who had moved the most out of the participants, claims it is his ability to remain optimistic and "make the most of what they got in under the circumstances" which helps him to view the military life as "rewarding." While Frank, who remembers talking with fellow military-connected adolescents in Germany, is able to see that while his dad was often gone, he has been more fortunate than others:

> I could see that my military life was not as bad as it could have been or as stressful as it could have been. I'll put some respect in people [like] Navy kids because I knew a family's dad, he was on a submarine and I remember he was gone for two months and he

> was back for a day and he was gone for two months and was back for like a week. And I was like 'how can I … I don't think I can take that.'

This knowledge allows him to perceive his life in a realist and optimistic manner, which result in increased confidence because even though he went through some tough experiences, he is able to survive and even thrive as a result.

Empathetic

Empathy, as opposed to sympathy, goes beyond simply feeling bad for someone in a difficult situation, it involves trying to imagine how you would feel in that position. The participants in this study, who encountered different cultures and moved into different regions of the globe, express empathy as a key part of their identity. Empathy for them is articulated through being culturally aware, humble, considerate, and self-sacrificing as a result of their experiences within the military culture.

Cultural awareness.

Each participant perceives that a major difference between military-connected adolescents and civilian peers is the awareness and openness they have for people from other cultures. For Zion, the different people he met while living in South Korea makes him aware of the diversity around him. As Hall (2011) points out, the military is already made up of many cultures, religions, races, and ethnicities. As such, it should not be surprising that one of Daisy's best friends was a fellow military-connected child from Norway who lived down the street from her in North Carolina. While she never lived overseas, Lindsey said that different regions of the country offer a wide enough array of people that aids in her increased awareness of others.

However, Frank, who spent many years living in Germany, was given a glimpse at what other people think of the United States, which he perceives as helpful in increasing his understanding of other's perspectives:

> My worldview is completely different than most of my peers. You know I'm not trying to be cocky or different or say mine's better, but … I went to Europe and so I saw America as a completely different thing and how Europeans treat Americans and that changed my whole outlook on you know what we are and what like who we are and my worldview.

Frank also illustrates that is was not just the things he experienced, but the way in which he was raised that helps him to develop this mindset. Brandon and Zion, who both had considerable difficulties growing up, and feel their exposure to different lifestyles and cultures through the military helps them to better understand others:

> It was eye-opening. It lets me know that's why I can't – even today, even though I work for all the nice stuff I got, I can't pick on another kid because I already know how that feeling felt and it's not right.
>
> The reason why I'm open-minded is because the way I experienced a bunch of cultures and moved in every place. I'm open-minded to seeing how things could be in different ways and stuff like that.

Being able to see how others live – here and abroad – gives military-connected adolescent an opportunity to be exposed to the diversity of the world that many of their civilian peers do not have a chance to partake in.

Humble.

One could easily look at being a military-connected adolescent through rose-colored glasses with their ability to travel and see the world. However, it is this very thing that helps them to approach the world with a perceived sense of humbleness. While Frank, Daisy, Zion, and Brandon may have spent more time overseas than many of their peers, they don't brag about the places they've been or the things they have seen for fear of appearing, as Frank puts it "showing off." For Elias, his humbleness stems from the model his father set for him and his brother:

> He didn't have a lot growing up and he was raised in sort of a poor, ghetto area in California. He was able to join the military and that's where he was able to kind of rise up and he is really happy now because everything he gets, he's grateful for because he earned it himself because my dad's philosophy is you're never given anything in life. You

> have to earn it. … He always had to earn everything, and I feel like that's something that's different in today's society. So many people feel privileged that people owed them something or anything and that's as far as that's not the way things work. I'm sorry that's the way and my eyes have been opened for a while. My brother's eyes are too because that's just what you see every day in a military family.

Elias demonstrates how grateful he is for what has been given to him and believes he should not expect more than what he is willing to work for.

Zion also sees privilege among his peers, but he sees it manifest into the self-absorbed behavior that is common among teenagers growing up in a social media world:

> Just the way I act. I feel like I act more mature than most people. I mean I can act goofy but I know when it's time to chill out. Also, a lot of people they worry about how their Instagram looks and all that. I don't worry about that kind of stuff. It's not important to me. Just the little things I feel like make me different.

Sage, who also notices privileged behavior from his peers, states that he just tried to learn from each situation he found himself in and realized that he is humbled to just be alive and feels "kind of blessed" in his life.

Considerate.

Several of the participants shared their perceived considerate nature as beneficial to them and an important part of their identity. Brandon reveals how proud he is that his peers often comment on how good of a listener he is. For Leslie, her considerate nature was apparent by the way she spoke about how much time and effort she devotes to helping others and she regularly refers to herself as "open-hearted," sometimes to the point where she perceives others as taking advantage of her, but that will not stop her from being caring and considerate in the future. Daisy also asserts that the considerate part of her identity helps her to connect with others in similar situations:

> Yeah. I feel like I had always related to people that have been in the military or are in the military or have family members in the military because obviously I've had that experience and I'm sure my dad will still, you know, be so connected with them. … I would still want to like obviously to help out with like charities and stuff because it still

> is a big part of my life and this helps me, you know, through my childhood and stuff like that.

The caring part of her identity not only helps her to empathize with other military-connected adolescents but lights a fire in her to want to continue giving to others in the future.

Self-Sacrificing.

One thing nearly every participant points out was how unaware the rest of the world is about the level of sacrifice military families make because of the unwritten rule that a soldier's family signs up for military service the moment they swear in (Park, 2011). So, while the military does provide a stable paycheck and access to housing, food, and good healthcare, as Frank implies, this comes with the reminder that if "the military calls us tomorrow, we have to go."

This idea is something that Daisy really identifies with. As one of 10 kids in the family, she is no stranger to sacrifice, having to give a little more to meet the demands of the military made growing up difficult:

> I think we just take it whatever he wants to do and we're just gonna follow along [and it] has been like our motto. … it was kind of difficult but I do like appreciate what my dad is doing for the country and I obviously wanna go with him, and support him in what he's doing so, I just try to make myself fit in and do stuff like that to make sure that he can be here doing what he needs to get done and I'm not like. and I can do that as well.

Daisy spoke several times about the sacrifices she makes to support her parent in making sure the rest of the family is taken care of, even if it means setting her own plans and desires aside at the time.

For Leslie, her sacrificing nature tends to cut a little closer to the bone. The summer between her sophomore and junior year, she survived a sexual assault, something that she battles with today. However, not one to let an experience define her, Leslie expresses a desire to take

her experience and use it to help others, even if that means having to relive and share something so personal:

> I wanted to make an assembly before the school ends for our mental health. Inspirational talking and stuff like that and bringing up all this awareness. It's like depression and anxiety and feeling unwanted and feeling accepted and feeling depressed like yes. And if you got sexually assaulted it's okay and all that stuff. I really want to make this assembly really bad. I've been thinking about it since last year. I'm just scared to.

Even though sharing something so personal frightens her, the empathy she feels for those who are suffering in other ways supersedes these feelings because, as she says, "I don't do it to make myself feel good. It makes – I do it to make other people happy."

Bailey spoke about how her experience with sacrifice was difficult, including having to say goodbye to her sister during the final months of her senior year, yet her sister's work with the military developed a desire in her to want to help others as a future career path:

> I've just always liked the medical field and … I feel like helping people in medical ways. Well, I feel like being a military kid like my sister [as]she's fighting for our country. So, it can tie into it by like me saying, 'Well you know, I want to help people like she does.'

Bailey has watched her sister sacrifice for her country and that inspires her to follow in her footsteps and pick a career path that will allow her to give back to others.

Mature

Adulthood is just around the corner for the military-connected adolescents in this study. In the eyes of the law, nearly half of them are already adults because of their age. However, most could argue maturity is a vital element in becoming an adult because it relates to the notion of knowing how to act in any given situation. Military-connected adolescents face certain situations that their civilian peers often do not. As such, the participants in the study express a perception of maturity they feel is more present in them than others through the actions of being respectful, self-reliant, and disciplined.

Respectful.

Respect is a core value in the military, so it is only natural to think that this would filter down to military-connected adolescents. As mentioned before, many participants feel they express pride by showing respect for their elders, including parents and teachers. Sage and Bailey both state this is a natural thing for them when addressing or interacting with adults because giving someone "attitude," even if they didn't want to do what was being asked of them, is disrespectful and not something they wanted to be recognized as capable of. For Frank, he admits that this level of respect isn't an automatic thing and that he is still "training [him]self right now [to] just take it in one ear and out the other one." While he views respect as a byproduct of restraint, Brandon claims that when he acts in this manner, people comment his behavior "makes sense" when they find out he is a military-connected adolescent due to the fact that many people associate membership in this culture with being respectful.

Daisy declares that her peers often comment on her level of respect, especially in the classroom:

> … I guess like some people have told me like I'm different from like other teenagers because I don't like talk out in the class a lot or I don't like say things a lot and maybe that they're like kind of just like, 'oh well, you are kind of quiet like you don't really talk. Your kind of just like do your own thing and … don't talk back and I kind of just like do what I need to get down. I think especially with teachers they understand them like that's cool.

Daisy not only notices respect as missing from her peers but also from her brothers and sisters to a certain degree as they often state she is the "favorite child" which she attributes to not talking back or challenging her parents in the manner that her other siblings do.

Zion describes his ability to always be respectful as allowing him to "act more mature than most people." He says this behavior also helps him to feel comfortable interacting with adults in ways his peers would not:

> I feel like my manners and what [my parents] taught me in how to talk to people, different types of people, like working at the hospital I talk to doctors, nurses, people that are about to die, all types of crazy stuff every day. … the military helped me to build up to be like that.

Growing up with military parents, who are expected to show respect in all situations, is what aids Zion in learning to develop respect and internalize this behavior as part of his identity.

Self-Reliant.

The nature of having to say goodbye to a parent for an extended period increases the likelihood of having to learn to do things on your own. As such, all participants in the study commented on feeling self-sufficient or intrinsically motivated throughout their childhood and that they see self-reliance as a facet of their identity. In some instance, being self-reliant comes from wanting to avoid being a burden on parents (Daisy), learning to think for yourself and come to a conclusion on your own (Sage), as a way to express self-care and self-love in light of not perceiving in from others (Leslie and Lindsey), or as a way to express maturity as you accomplish something on your own (Bailey and Zion).

For Sage, this was something he feels he learned when his dad was deployed and he had to live with an extended family member:

> Even though you're not on your own, your kind of feels like you're on your own because I mean you going to someone's parents' house, that has their own kids, you got to learn how to deal with the other kids being the priorities and stuff like that.

While Sage recognizes and is grateful that he was given a stable place to live while his father was gone, he still viewed himself as alone in that situation, so he had to learn to trust and rely on himself more.

Academics is another area where many participants express self-reliance. Elias claims he perceives his parent's support, but that the push to excel comes more internally than externally:

> … my mom would always teach me [about making] good grades …. Now it's my own self, pushing myself so it's not like if I get a bad grade it's not just my mom yelling at me

> I'm yelling at myself too. So, my mom understands that too because she'll see me because I'll get beat up so bad. I remember the first time I got like a lower grade than A. I was like in tears and my mom saw me already, she didn't get too hard on me. She was just looked at, she's like, "At least you know. At least you know what's expected of you." She was like, "Just raise it. Do better," and that's just how I see it.

While high expectations are something both Elias and his parents agree on, he perceives relying on himself instead of just his parents as a major motivation.

While many feel self-reliance is a trait they learned as a result of their experiences as military-connected adolescents, Brandon also views it as a family trait he inherited:

> … this is in my family, my uncle like he has like he have five dollars but like he still like trying to get money ... So only for him, my mom 'cuz we didn't – or they didn't – really come from a good like structure like home 'cuz my grandma too wasn't really stable when they were growing up. So, they had to like has to find their selves food and all that stuff. So, my mom, my uncle, my auntie like we all just had that mindset and I guess I just got that from them.

Coming from a family that had to "hustle" to get what they wanted is what Brandon perceives as helping him learn to be self-reliant. Being a military-connected adolescent just added another layer to that for him.

Disciplined.

Showing restraint and control in certain situations to meet expectations is something most participants emphasize as part of their identity. Linked to the notion of self-sacrificing, perceptions of discipline were demonstrated in multiple ways by participants within the military culture. Daisy revealed how it helps her father find relief to know that she and her siblings are going to follow the expected rules as a child of high-ranking officer, so she is disciplined in that way. In that same vein, Elias and Zion both point out that many of their civilian friends don't understand that when they are asked to perform an action, say a chore, that "it needs to get done now." According to Elias, discipline and delayed gratification go hand in hand. Brandon comments that the desire to make his mother proud helps him to focus on achieving certain goals

through hard work and discipline, while for Leslie, her sense of discipline comes from having to care for her mother's health by taking her to appointments, getting groceries, and other adult responsibilities while her dad was gone.

Bailey claims her disciplined nature comes as a result of a desire to avoid falling into the same set of circumstances as her mother:

> … just growing up with my mom and stuff because like I feel like I'm hard on myself because I want to do better than what she did. So, I try to push myself and yeah, I stressed myself out trying to be better so that I'm not like she was.

Although she recognizes that making the choice to live with her sister and embrace the military life was a step in the right direction, she also knows it will require continued discipline and focus to make sure she stays on the right track in the future.

While Lindsey perceives that she has supportive parents, at times their high expectations for her discipline felt like it went overboard because she is the eldest sister:

> Because I mean my dad like he expects certain things out of us, especially me because I'm the oldest. So, it was always like school, like you make sure you do good in school like you do chores, just don't go out in public and act all wild and stuff. I mean I'm thankful [but] like when I was younger it used to annoy me but I mean I'm thankful for that because I see people my age now and they're just crazy just doing stuff and I mean I'm glad that my parents never really let me do that.

The lessons involving responsibility that she was taught as a child helped her develop maturity and discipline that she perceives as important now as she enters adulthood despite resenting them when she was younger.

Frank, on the other hand, has lofty ambitions for himself and his future including graduating from high school a year early, a feat that he admits will require discipline to achieve:

> So, it was probably about last year that I decided to right after high school [to] take not like a break, maybe not a break year but a period of time where I will [be on] staff at Kandersteg International Scout Center … where I went to as a scout when I lived in Germany.

> What I'm doing right now to actually do that is I'm applying for visas and stuff for Switzerland for that now and then I'll apply for a position as that and then if I get accepted into that I'll go to that probably around February if I graduate and if I don't get accepted that I have some lines and other scouting areas I can apply to like Philmont or Northern Tier but that's my plan for at least six months out of high school and then come back from where I am and enlist in the Army.

While these goals are big, Frank feels that his time spent as a military-connected adolescent has prepared him for the discipline it will take to reach them.

Adaptable

Most people are not big fans of change, yet military-connected adolescents learn quickly that being blindsided by change is just a natural rhythm of their lives. The participants in this study suggest they all have a general acceptance that nothing is promised and that changes are simply going to happen whether they are wanted or not. To make sense of the randomness of their lives, they refer to themselves as adaptable. This is seen through their acceptance of a limited locus of control, resiliency, and viewing themselves as masters of unpredictability.

Resilience.

As defined earlier, resiliency comes from being able to bounce back to where one was before a setback occurred. This ability is something all participants view themselves as possessing based upon the experiences they have had within the military life. Both Bailey and Daisy see resiliency in their ability to keep up with their grades and even watch them improve and learn to, as Daisy claims, “thrive more” despite having to move and start over at new schools. Sage admits a hardship after each move with “people accepting me for who I am,” but this experience reveals his ability to trust that building a good reputation each time he moved drew people to be his friend. Frank, Lindsey, and Elias all assert the perception that military-connected adolescents like themselves have “thicker skin” than others, allowing them to toughen up when facing inevitable changes that come with military life.

Leslie, who finds herself in the role of caretaker for her mother now and while dad was deployed and her older brother was at college, expresses how dealing with these extra responsibilities helps her develop her own sense of independence:

> I do everything. Like I fix the cars and I like take care of my dogs and I go to doctor's appointments by myself and I take [my mom] to her doctor's appointments … So, like, like yes, she's there for me but also she's not. … With me, I'm very independent. I like my own voice. I like making my own step. I don't want people to make it for me. I don't want people to make the first move on a checkerboard for me. I do it myself.

Even though she claims to sometimes dislike the role she is placed in, she perceives it as helping to liberate her and allowing her to realize that she has her own voice.

Brandon found he developed a sense of resiliency during his parent's deployments and extended training as well:

> I'm a lot more resilient than I felt I would've been if I wasn't like a military child. And I'm like, I got some more confidence now. … It made me stronger as a person I guess. Like I know how to do stuff for myself that like and my little brother that needs to do and some people you know my mom needs to go somewhere and it was just me and him. Like she knows that you know I wake him up in the morning, take him to school. Pick him up. Makes sure he eats all that stuff. I feel like if I was somebody who didn't have their parents around or I was like who didn't have to deal with that, I wouldn't be able to do that so. Take care of him the way I do so.

Because he has to learn to rely on himself to take care of himself and his brother, he not only perceives himself as resilient but also relishes that his mother is going to be able to rely on him as well, which makes him proud.

Being able to look at the experiences he has growing up through the lens of resiliency helps Sage to perceive himself as a better person in general:

> It's actually helped and made me more of a better person. I'm not saying as in like your father being or your parents being deployed is like a good thing, but it makes me know how to deal with a lot of different things, stresses or stuff like that. Because now, I already know how it feels like not have your home, your main parents are not inside of the household. How does it feel like live in different places and stuff like that.

Had he not experienced these difficulties growing up, Sage might not see himself as capable of bouncing back from any possible setbacks in the future.

However, the best example of perceived resiliency comes from Frank, who provided a metaphor for what he thought military life was like:

> So, like one thing I would always say was growing up with your family is kind of like growing a tree but with the military, it's growing a tree for 3 years then ripping it out and replanting it. Because you grow up as a family but then you grow, your roots start in the community and every three years it's just them getting ripped out and planted a new one. And so, it's kind of like I mean I would guess I could say, military families, I mean some of them are stronger than like ordinary families.

This metaphor is a clear example of how he feels that military-connected adolescents suffer abrupt and sometimes devastating changes, but that enduring them makes them more resilient to unexpected events in the future.

Limited locus of control.

Not only are military-connected adolescent required to follow the rules set by their parents, but also the expectations that come from being a military family, which can lead them to feel as though they don't have control over their lives. "You can never plan for anything because the next day there could be something new that you have to add," Elias states.

Sage, who perceives his father as giving him the freedom to make certain decision in his life, was quick to remind people he has no say in the matter when it comes to whether he wants to be in a military family:

> I didn't choose to be a military kid. I went through a lot of struggles and yes, I had some benefits but at the end of the day, I'm really appreciative to be one because it was a privilege and I got to do a lot more things that a lot of other kids was not allowed to do and I actually kind of see it as a blessing even though it had some of its own disadvantages.

Even though he perceives this life as a privilege, the fact that he didn't have much control over the course his life took weighs heavy on him and how he sees himself.

On the other hand, Bailey is able to perceive a little more control over her life because she did choose to be a military-connected adolescent:

> I guess because of like the choices my mom made, it controlled how my life was lived and I guess like before I moved here that's when I really like had choice in my life and said, "Look I know that I'll focus better and do better with my sister." So, that's when I took control and choose to stay here.

By making the choice to join her sister and live the military lifestyle, she took control of her life, even though she admits that she has limited control over where they are stationed.

Lindsey also agrees that not having a say in where they would be year to year causes her to feel as though she has limited control growing up:

> Our life has revolved around [my dad's job] in the military. Me and my sisters kind of don't have a say if we want to stay in place while he goes to school for a year, or if we all get up and move.

One could argue that her desire to be a writer and "write about stuff that matters to [her]" is a result of feeling like she has no voice in her own life and her choices as a military-connected adolescent.

One extremely negative byproduct of perceiving limited control is the development of feelings of abandonment or trust issues, which is evident in a few of the participants. Lindsey spoke about not wanting people to get close to her because she feels she has no control over whether they could hurt her. However, it is Leslie who expresses these feelings the loudest:

> It really made me very self-conscious about the people I surround myself with because I know that not everyone's temporary -- I mean everybody is temporary, so I don't really have much trust in people.
>
> I hate [getting] attached very quickly to people so whenever a friendship dies – now that sounds terrible – but whenever a friendship dies, it's devastating to me because like I tried so hard to get it to be accepted and to be wanted in a group and stuff like that and for people to not want you back, it's just like it's very heart-breaking.
>
> This feeling unwanted and stuff like that then it makes me wonder like is there something with me?

These feelings make Leslie perceive herself as alone despite being involved in school and with her peers because she has no control over when her father would get new orders to move or leave the family for deployment. It is important to point out that Leslie is also dealing with feelings of strain in the relationship she has with her father while she was being interviewed. She sees him pulling away from her and her mother due to the belief that he is having an affair while working as a government contractor on the other side of the world. The could have led to an amplification of her feelings of abandonment.

It is interesting to note that when asked about his perceived control over his life, Zion is the only one who didn't see his lack of complete control in a negative way:

> I mean, of course, I'm not out of the house yet, but... I mean I haven't really... I don't need to control my life right now, like, I'm not grown enough to be trying to do everything on my own. I need that guidance there from my parents. I don't think they ever really controlled my life. I haven't felt like I've been controlled, you know.

While he perceives that he doesn't have much control in his life as a military-connected adolescent, he recognizes that even at 18-years-old, he might not be mature enough to make all his decisions on his own and is happy to have the help from his parents.

Masters of unpredictability.

Whether they call themselves tough or flexible, being adaptable to the frequent change that comes with being a military-connected adolescent is something all participants perceive as part of their identity. This level of adaptability allows them to deal with unpredictability at a level far superior to their civilian peers. Some of this comes from the discipline instilled in them as part of the military life where, like Sage says, they must "adapt to life and being a military kid" because they "know [the military parent] has a job to do." Others attribute it to the exposure with other lifestyles and experiences that gives them an opportunity to see how other people handle adversity head-on or, like Frank, find ways to shrug or brush it off and continue with life.

For Bailey, dealing with the unpredictability of this life is like building up a callous, it is tough at first, but eventually, it gets easier:

> Yeah, I guess I've just, I'm kind of used to [change], but it's just like when it first happens, just like, you know, it hurts and then you get used to it. … It doesn't bother me anymore. So, it's easy for me I guess.

Elias echoes the same feelings of ease with change because it becomes something you accept so much that it leads to acceptance:

> I've been in this world, lived in this life for 16 years, and I got used to it but I mean there's never truly, there is you getting comfortable with it, I feel … you're going to hit walls and you're going to hit these moments in your life where you're going to – things were going to be going so bad, but that's just because you're going to have to learn how to get up from that. You have to learn how to kind of recuperate and you need to learn how to kind of just go off with it and learn to get better.

Being able to recognize change and adjust to make the transition easier is something both Bailey and Elias agree is key to dealing with the unpredictability of life as a military-connected adolescent.

For Brandon and Zion, going with the flow and not getting riled up when changes occur is how they master the consistent changes that come as a result of growing up amid this culture. However, Zion is quick to point out that this level of adaptability doesn't mean you change who you are at your core:

> I just don't make things awkward. I try to get in and go with the flow, get on page with everybody else and just fit in basically. I mean, I don't act different from myself to fit in. I act myself, but I don't act crazy either.

Adapting to survive consistent change may be important for military-connected adolescents but changing to the point where you alter who you are is too much, according to Brandon. Achieving a balance between adaptation and assimilation is what helps them to master the unpredictability of growing up as a military-connected adolescent.

While all the participants present findings of being confident, empathetic, mature, and adaptable, several of them point out that trying to classify military-connected adolescents under one definition is not possible. Lindsey claims that she wishes more people realize military-connected adolescents are as varied as people in any other culture or group:

> … all of [us] are not the same. Some people are a lot more social and outgoing and some of us would not even try. Just indifferent about the whole thing. And then there are those that are like just really shy, they don't like to talk. So, this is just not one prime example of what a military child is. It's multiple variations of us.

While the findings in this study show that military-connected adolescents perceive themselves in similar ways, military-connected adolescents are unique individuals and their identity goes deeper than any generalization one could make.

Moreover, Frank also expresses that trying to think about who he is beyond his military connection is impossible:

> I don't know, I think it definitely shaped me if I wasn't a military kid then I don't think I'd be who I am just because it is so much, it's not like "I'm a military kid on the side." It's everything and so every aspect … [is] something that envelops all of them. It's not like you can just take that part out and be who you are like, that's who you are.

Frank believes that his identification as a military-connected adolescent will not only influence other parts of his identity but is something that he will never be able to leave behind.

Comparisons to Previous Research

The findings in this study that military-connected adolescents perceive themselves as confident, empathetic, mature, and adaptable support several key pieces of previous research.

O'Leary and Ickovics' (1995) findings concerning the ability for adolescents to grow by developing personal autonomy coincides with the current findings as autonomy is related to individual confidence. Additionally, Blum (2005) claimed the ability to develop extroverted behaviors can be beneficial, which is something nearly all of the participants expressed as either a part of their identity or perceive as an added benefit for military-connected adolescents. The

addition of pride and optimism as a perceived facet of identity adds to the previous research within this group (Seligman, 2011) and addresses the gap of seeing military-connected adolescents less as simply victims of their circumstances and more as agents of change in their own lives.

The perceived levels of empathy among the participants in this study support Pollock and Van Reken's (2009) belief that third-culture kids tend to have fewer feelings of prejudice because they are more aware of people in the world and more likely to interact with people from other cultures in meaningful ways. It also supports Tyler's (2002) findings that mobility and the chance to grow up traveling and visiting different regions of the globe makes for more open-minded youth.

Easterbrooks et al. (2013) pointed out that the service and sacrificing identity that is prevalent among soldiers in the military is liable to be passed down to the children raised in this culture, which is supported by the empathic, considerate, and self-sacrificing nature participants in this study shared as part of how they see themselves.

While there was plenty of research which found military-connected youth victims of prolonged or delayed adolescent maturity (McDonald, 2010; Moore & Baker, 2011; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Wertsch, 1991), the participants in this study overwhelmingly viewed themselves as more mature than their peers, especially their civilian ones, which contradicts previous findings. While their perceptions might change when they reflect back on their childhood as adults, their current perception is that their military lifestyle had the opposite impact and has helped them to develop maturity through respect for others, self-reliance, and discipline.

Adaptation as a survival mechanism was something both Wertsch (1991) and Pollock and Van Reken (2009) identified among youth in this culture. Since this was also a perceived trait among the youth in my study, it helps to support the claim of adaptation as a defining trait among past and present military-connected children.

Since it was Leslie, whose mother was born and raised in Germany, who expressed the highest levels of trust issues, this aligns with Park's (2011) findings that families with foreign born spouses are more likely to see high risks for anxiety and depression. Additionally, Lindsey's desire to keep people at arm's length relates back to previous research concerning that same tendency among military-connected youth in other studies (Bradshaw et al., 2010; McDonald, 2010, Wertsch, 1991).

While Litwack and Foster (1981) viewed the need for military families and military-connected adolescents to present a façade of always being prepared in a more negative light, the participants in this study were able to see their ability to tackle unpredictability and survive as a source of resiliency, which is a more positive way to look at their endurance and aligns more with that of Wertsch's (1991) participants who viewed adaptability in the face of change in this same manner.

Among the 11 different factors that have been linked to building resiliency (Zolkoski & Bullock, 2012), the military-connected adolescents in the current study expressed nearly all of them except the development of a close caregiver bond within the first year of life, which may have been more difficult for those who endured parental deployment during that time. However, closely aligning with 10 of the 11 factors helps to support the findings that military-connected adolescents develop resiliency as they master unpredictability in their lives.

Research Question 2: Experiences of Military-Connected Adolescents

To address the second research question – *what types of experiences do military-connected adolescents have (or perceive themselves as having) because of their membership within the military culture* – participants were asked to talk about the experiences they had while growing up as a military-connected adolescent, especially those they perceive as different from other teenagers. Six major experiences emerged as common experiences among military-connected adolescents. Table 3 presents these experiences and related events as shared by the participants in the study.

Table 3: Experiences and Corresponding Events Among Military-Connected Adolescents.

Experience	**Corresponding Events**
Military Parent as a Soldier First	Family Obligations to the Military Regimented Chores and Duties in the Home Children as Soldiers
Life on the Move	Moving as the "New Normal" Overseas Experience Desire for Stability SNAFUs with Moving Moving at Different Ages
Traversing New School Terrain	Varied Levels of Academics Graduation Credits and Requirements Understanding the School Structure Public School from Other Options Hurdles for Military-Connected Adolescent Athletes
Being the New Kid on the Block	Stress of Feeling Like an Outsider Hanging with the Wrong Crowd Fellow Military-Connected Adolescents as Friends Maintaining Friendships Despite Distance
Saying Goodbye for War	Living Arrangements for Deployment Communication with Military Parent During War Increased Military-Connected Adolescent Responsibility Stress on Home Parent During Deployment Impact of Absence on Military-Connected Adolescent
Reunification of the Military Family	Happy Homecoming Reintegration into Family Life Changes in Military Parent Following Deployment

Military Parent is Always a Soldier First

Every job comes with certain expectations and responsibilities but being a soldier in the U.S. armed forces is not a traditional 9-to-5 job. Few jobs ask as much of their employees including specific levels of physical fitness, loyalty to the service above all others, extended time away from family, and a willingness to give your life for the sake of the job and the country. While every soldier recognizes these as a given, it is something military-connected adolescents in this study say they came to realize – that in an ordered list of priorities within the family, they were rarely first.

Family obligations to the military.

While military-connected adolescents understand that deployment to a war zone will mean time away from home, many of the participants already deal with the military imposing long workdays on their parents, giving them limited opportunity to see one another. Sage, whose dad works with basic trainees – brand new soldiers going through their first rounds of military training – sees long hours as normal:

> He works really long hours. I mean, lately, he's told me – this is the last week. He told me that he's now going to finally work a nine-to-five, but he's still been working since 5 a.m. to 8 to 9, 10 [at night]. He'd be lucky if he comes home like 7 p.m. sometimes.

These long hours mean that Sage and his twin brother often go entire days without seeing their father. Lindsey can also relate to how the long hours her father and her mother, who works as a civilian employee for the military, put in affect her:

> I mean, I'm the oldest so I kind of do a lot around the house, from my sisters, and just in general. I do step up because my parents work weird hours and stuff. I don't know. I think I was just really tired or something, and I just kind of like had a little meltdown. I was like ‘I can't handle this. It's just too much right now.’ He was like, ‘Well, I don't know why you feel that way. You don't do everything around here. We do stuff and all this.’ I mean, it wasn't the truth so I just kind of quit saying stuff like that to him.

While Sage claims to have learned to just accept the long hours his father would work and move on, there is a level of resentment that Lindsey expresses over how her parent's obligations impact her responsibility to the family.

Military expectations for the soldier in terms of attitude and decorum often trickle down to the military family according to several of the participants. Daisy, whose father is a high-ranking officer who, like Sage's father, also overseas military training of new officers, spoke about having to host graduating lieutenants each month in their home and the added pressure it places on her and the rest of the family:

> There's definitely a pressure to support obviously the military in general and to make sure we're like not doing what we're not supposed to be doing like making sure that we're in line I guess. … so obviously our house needs to look nice. We don't want to look like we're coming from obviously like trash or anything like that, we wanna look presentable. And so obviously how we act reflects on us too like obviously, he doesn't want us just acting awful towards the lieutenants and then that's reflecting on him. So obviously we needed to be like proper and make sure that we're presenting ourselves in a way that reflects well on him and the Marine Corps.

This pressure to appear perfect in all situations is something Elias can also relate to. His father, who grew up as a military-connected adolescent himself, addresses how the military soldier is also judged by the way his or her family behaves, so there is an expectation to be a "good family" and reflect that back to the military.

This same expectation of behavior is also expected when the soldier parent is deployed. Frank spoke about a time when his father was deployed and word was received that he had been awarded a Bronze Star, which is only given for heroic or meritorious service in a combat zone. Frank's family remained calm and patient while they waited weeks to hear from his dad and find out if "he did something crazy like, like his job asked him to," which was what he claims is expected of them as a military family. Military-connected adolescents in this study express that the entire family must realize that this level of obligation is expected from the military.

Regimented chores and duties in the home.

Procedures and protocol are standard fare for soldiers. Every duty, every action, every job comes with its own set of instructions. There is a running joke that the military would issue an SOP (Standard Operating Procedure) for how to properly go to the bathroom if it could. In an environment where individual thinking is forbidden, this mindset often applies to how a soldier runs his or her family.

Daisy claims her friends often point out how "strict" her family is because she cannot come and go as she pleases. She says this experience is to be expected not only as a military family but one with "so many moving parts" because of her father's work schedule and the balance of having so many children. For Elias, he spoke about how dinner in his home comes with its own set of instructions:

> We all go we sit at the table and we sit there for about 1 to 2 hours because my dad feels it's like because the dinner time is the only time we really got to talk. So that's really his favorite time to sit eat dinner and that's what he expects. He comes home from work from – comes back from base and he expects like he wants us all to be as a family or be whole. He wants us to talk to each other and I understand that. So, during dinner the rule is we sit there, we eat dinner as a family, we talk. We have to talk. Electronics away. There are no electronics at the table and we're only dismissed once he gives us permission to leave the table. From then on, we do our duties and what we have to do but that's just how that is.

Elias chuckled in recalling this because he remembers once telling a friend that he had to go to dinner and the friend, who expected him to come back quickly, was surprised when he didn't hear back from him until hours later.

While chores are common in any household, many of the participants in the study note they perceive the expectation on a higher level than their peers. Leslie believes the high expectations her dad has for housework impacts how she views cleanliness now:

> I'm a very -- I'm not OCD because my room is not currently clean, but I am a clean person. Growing up like we always had Sundays, we deep clean the house, like use a

> toothbrush and clean the – what is it – those baseboards or something like that, whatever they are called, like the bottom of it, stuff like that.

Zion also reveals that chores and duties he is responsible for in the home not only had to be done to a certain standard but done without question:

> Just getting laundry done. A lot of kids don't do that now, surprisingly. They don't get that. I don't really get it either, actually. This might just be my stepdad on this one, but I don't get why I have to clean up the outside dumpster when it's a trash can. Because there's stuff on the inside that gets dirty and starts stinking and he makes me clean it. I don't get that if it's a trash can. But … I just do it. You just got to do what you got to do. You're just going to start problems if you try to get your way out of it.

Although he could see the value in learning how to do certain tasks for himself, compliance without comment is what Zion perceives is expected of him as a military-connected adolescent.

Children as soldiers.

Several of the participants insist they feel as though the line between the soldier and parent blurs enough that the rigid hierarchy and chain of command in the military applies to the structure of their family, leaving the military-connected adolescent feeling like just another young soldier in the eyes of their parent.

Perhaps the least impactful way this is done is using military lingo within the family. Like other cultures, the military uses its own lexicon rife with phrases and acronyms outsiders wouldn't understand. Nearly all participants claim their parents use phrases like 'tracking' or 'roger' to signify understanding or are told to 'double time' when they need to do something faster. For the most part, they become phrases the whole family commonly use, although the soldier can take it too far and, as Sage said, "sometimes I just have no clue what he is saying." For Bailey, she laughs at how common it is for her sister to lapse into speaking that way at home:

> She's like, [her military friends and her] just, they say it all the time so now I say it. It was like the other day, she said something like tracking, tracking. She always does that … and I'm like stop.

Even though she expresses she didn't want to pick up those words and make them part of her vocabulary, she recognizes it is an unintended byproduct of living in this culture.

Other times, the respect and superiority that comes with rank in the military is perceived in negative ways among military-connected adolescents. For Lindsey, this was very obvious when her father tried to teach her something new because they "were never are like on the same page" and he "[didn't] know where to draw the line between Captain and dad." Leslie has even more difficulty with her father when he tries to assert control at home:

> Because my dad's superiority in this family and because in the military, he was the staff sergeant so of course he's going to be on top of some younger more like lower level people. So, I feel like that got to his head to where he started treating us like those people. He started treating us like we were beneath him and if we didn't listen to him, we are nothing to him.

Because she perceives her dad having to control everything and demand respect as he would over his soldiers, it reinforces the mindset for Leslie that he is a soldier first and a father second.

Life on the Move

Moving is not a possibility but an inevitability in the military family. Military-connected adolescents claim to detest the question "Where are you from?" each time they move. As Elias puts it, it all comes down to the semantics of the word:

> Whenever they asked me where my home is-- I tend to ask them what do they mean by home? Do they mean where I was born? Where I spend most of my life? Because home could be defined in so many ways. Home could be where your loved ones are. Home could be where you grew up and home could be where you had most of your memories. It could be where you're comfortable and it just all depends on what they mean.

When Frank is asked that question, he admits he is more likely to respond with "the world" because the notion of narrowing it down to one place is far too difficult. For Leslie, she likens herself to a "tumbleweed" because she has been blown all over the place as a military-connected adolescent. However, no matter how they chose to answer the question, high mobility is a

commonality for military-connected adolescents which comes with its own set of experiences as expressed by the participants in this study.

Moving as the "new normal."

If one does something enough times, it starts to become normal to them, which is how each participant expressed the experience of moving as a military-connected adolescent. Sage asserts that moving as often as he did start had minimal effect on him after a while:

> … it's gotten to the point where it just wasn't – it's just how life was going for me and I was like this became normal to me. I don't know how else to explain it. I just got so used to it, it's just normal.

While Sage is quick to dismiss the impact of moving, Lindsey recognizes it has an impact each time, especially because she knows the next move is just around the corner:

> I feel like it's a blessing and a curse because I get to move around and experience different places and different states and stuff. But at the same time, I never got to be one of those people that put down groups in one place and got to grow up with different people like some people do. So, I can't really say, 'Oh, you know, I've known this person since this time, or "we've been friends for this long," and just say like we grew up together. It's kind of like bounce[ing] around from place to place for a few years.

New experiences and new people are an asset in Lindsey's life, but it comes with the lack of experience of what it would be like to really put roots down and develop long-term memories with people.

Overseas experience.

More than half of the participants in the study lived abroad during their time as a military-connected adolescent in places like Germany, Italy, and South Korea. For Brandon, his time in Germany was divided between two different military posts: Grafenwoehr and Schweinfurt during his elementary years. Leslie was also stationed at Schweinfurt for a short time as an infant while Frank lived for several years in Wiesbaden, Germany, during his middle school years. Like Leslie, Daisy also lived abroad in Naples, Italy, in her toddler years, and Zion

lived for three years on the Osan Air Force Base in South Korea during elementary school. A deeper look at how they perceive their experiences will be addressed in research question three.

Desire for stability.

While the participants assert they accept moving as a common experience, there is still a desire for stability just below the surface for many of them. Lindsey claims that the best part of moving was setting up her new room because it is the one thing she could always rely on to remain the same:

> I get to kind of decorate it like how I want to and just make it like feel really inviting and stuff like cozy for myself. And I feel like that's like the one place like that doesn't change. Like when I moved like it's always going to be like my space.

However, in some instances, parents were able to provide some semblance of stability for their children. Both Elias and Zion's parents sacrificed in order to provide stability for their sons. Zion's mom was slated to move somewhere else after their time in South Korea, but instead of continuing with her career and going for the next rank, she applied to come back to the Midwest and opted to retire, so he could finish the reminder of his school years in one place. Elias' dad was set to be stationed in Texas for a year after a deployment but instead opted to live there by himself and simply drive back and forth to visit the family as often as he could so the children wouldn't have to be uprooted and moved for only a year. For Frank, his father has opted to try and take advantage of a regulation the military has in place for military-connected adolescents in high school:

> Right now, since he's [at] fifteen years and he started to wind down, we applied for stabilization for me because when [you are a] sophomore now, you can apply to stay there through your high school. And so, if he gets accepted, we won't move but if he gets denied, we don't know. So, it's still up in the air.

While he won't find out for several months, Frank recognizes the sacrifice that his father is making to provide some stability to his military family.

SNAFUs with moving.

A SNAFU is an acronym the military uses to express the phrase as 'situation normal: all fouled up.' It is applied when obstacles become the normal outcome rather than the exception. Moving is an area where SNAFUs are likely to happen according to the military-connected adolescents in this study.

Sage, who stayed in one location for no more than a few years at a time, claims there are difficulties in having to consistently start over in trying to "find his place." Frank echoes those same thoughts, claiming one of the hardest experiences is "trying to reconnect with a new community every three years." Daisy's experience was a little tougher as her mother found out that her unborn son had Down Syndrome and they had to cut their time in Italy short and quickly pack up and move back to the United States so she could give birth in a hospital with the medical resources to help them.

However, Lindsey's experience presents the most SNAFUs of all the participants when it comes to moving. When the family got orders to move to Louisiana, her parents tried to think ahead and purchased a house there so they would have a place to live, but there was a problem with delivering their household items and they were forced to sleep on the floor for several days. Then, when they left Louisiana to move here, they had some trouble finding housing right away:

> So, like we had [Tori] and she was four when we moved back here, and we had her and then had a dog and then we were in the hotel for like maybe like almost a week before we got the house, before we got the keys to the house. So, it's just, everyone was tired of each other and … we're just ready for our own space.

No one would argue that moving is an easy task, and even though military families become pros at it over the years, that doesn't diminish the expected obstacles that come from packing up the family and moving every couple of years.

Moving at different ages.

While every participant moved at different times and to different locations while growing up, most of them agree that age did impact the way in which military-connected adolescents react to moving. Some feel moving when they were younger was much easier than when they were headed into their preteen or teen years while others see how the maturity that comes from getting older made moving easier overall.

Frank claims that moving prior to his freshman year of high school was the "worst," of all his previous moves and Lindsey says the moves to Louisiana and back that split her high school years in half were harder to take because it is difficult "trying to find like where you kind of fit in" during your tumultuous teenage years while living in a new place. Sage feels it was much easier for him to settle in when he was younger, because "there are a lot more important things that come into mind when you're at this point in your age compared to a young age."

However, Daisy sees this experience through the eyes of her younger sister and sees the length of time at any given military post is going to impact how one perceives the move no matter the age. While Daisy moved around several times as a child, her younger sister was born in Virginia and had only lived there prior to moving here a few years ago:

> Yeah, that was her whole life and not that she doesn't have friends here, but she's like, 'Oh, I don't really like it here. I don't like the weather. I've like nothing to do.' And she misses it a lot because it is especially hard on her, but we tried to make the most out of it.

While Daisy understands the experience of moving is difficult, she does see how being younger didn't make their latest move any easier for her little sister.

Elias remembers not understanding moving and just how far away he would be from people when he was younger, but that growing up makes it easier to accept this change more graciously:

> So, I feel like at the time to me, all I heard was I'm gonna be leaving this area that I don't want to leave it and of course as a kid you're always like crying. You're like, 'I don't want to move. I don't want to go.' But then the older I got it was more of a kind of, 'Okay, I understand it's going to happen now.' It was kind of more of a mature. So, I feel like it just depends on the age you are because then you have a better understanding of what the distance is and what it really represents in your life.

While others feel it was easier to pick up and start over when they were younger, Elias sees how the maturity through age and experience helps him to better handle the ups and downs that come with living the highly mobile lifestyle of a military family.

Traversing New School Terrain

Moving to a new post also means adjusting to a different school environment. In some cases, military-connected adolescents moved into a better school system, but that wasn't always true for every move. While the military has support programs in place, this period of adjustment was just another thing military-connected adolescent experience as a part of this culture.

Varied levels of academics.

Each school a military-connected adolescent enrolls in is not guaranteed to be at the same level as the previous one. As such, many of the participants claim that a move also meant they were often ahead or behind their peers academically. This is where their powers of adaptation would kick in.

For Leslie, the move here to her current school came with transferring from a school with increased technology to a district where computer and instructional technology is shared or used sparingly, which feels like going "backward" to her. Bailey, on the other hand, finds that specific subjects in her current school felt harder or were much further ahead, meaning she must quickly adjust to that perceived learning curve. Brandon also has had some trouble adjusting and found his grades suffering as a result of moving:

> I'm behind [because] the system wasn't, it wasn't as structured as this one. And like some of the stuff we do here. When I got here my grades [were] slipping. I had like A's, all A's

> when I was there. And I don't know exactly what it is. I'll probably say it's the work. And how hard they make you work here as opposed to there. 'Cause they had, like, a lower standard for the students not like. If you compare the standards, here to there, yes it's different.

While Brandon has already been at his current school for nearly two years, he still feels like he is having to catch up to where his peers are in many instances. Frank illustrates this change in two different ways: one when he moved from Hawaii to Virginia, where he said he went from an extremely low performing school to a top tier state, which "destroyed my early years of school," and two, his experiences in dealing with issues as a result of his vision and dyslexia, which makes it even harder for him to adjust after each move.

Sage also reveals he is at a different level than his peers, although it is the opposite of where Brandon and Frank claim to be:

> Some schools are more, a lot different than others like my last school it was really- before I moved here it was really prepping you for college like you had to study to pass in that school like if not they had probation.
>
> I just feel like they were further along and pretty much almost everything I mean 'cause it was more funded and more like, it was really a privilege compared to like here … they were more a financially stable as a school and the school was made where like the kids you have to have- not only that it was – since it was privileged kids and stuff like that, they intend for everyone to go to college. So, they would even go as far as saying if we don't have a hundred hours for community service you can't graduate.

Sage's experiences going from a well-supported school to one where he perceives the rigor at a lower level is different than others in the study. While he says his grades didn't suffer, he did feel like he missed out on the opportunities he would have had at his previous school if he was able to complete his last two years of high school there.

Graduation credits and requirements.

While the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunities for Military Children (Masten, 2013) should help military-connected adolescents transition easier into a new school, the key word is *should*. For it to be effective, it must be well publicized and explained, but as a

compact and not a contract, it is not legally binding, meaning states can choose to enforce it at the levels they deem fit for their state. As such, the military-connected adolescents in the study note they sometimes have to face extra obstacles to graduate on time.

Every student who moved to a new school during high school (Bailey, Brandon, Daisy, Lindsey, and Sage) claims to have more credits than their peers because some of the ones from their previous school didn't necessarily count toward their graduation requirements. Several also had to take a required state history course to graduate, meaning they were often an upperclassman enrolled in a freshman course.

However, for some, the extra credits work to their advantage because it allows them to have some wiggle room to take courses they might have not been able to before. Daisy sees this situation as an advantage because she can enroll in more AP classes and concurrent courses at the local college, allowing her to start college with 12 credits already in her favor.

Understanding the school structure.

While the participants experience different academic rigor and requirements, another experience many revealed encountering is learning to navigate the new school's structure and procedures. As Sage puts it, "some schools they do have their different ways of going about things" that military-connected adolescents have to ascertain to be successful. Finding out what each teacher expects and how they run their classes was something Lindsey claims is a difficulty. Frank also agrees, but his perception is the difficulty in learning how much student interaction the teachers allows in the classroom:

> … sometimes the teacher will say something and you're, if you don't agree with it, it's not your place to speak out directly then and say, 'No you're wrong.' But I analyzed I feel like it's just that some teachers are blind to the fact that some kids have been through more than others.

Frank explains that he experiences this in his history classes the most because when wanted to share his experiences from living overseas, he often found that teachers were unreceptive.

Daisy illustrates this tangentially as she has watched her parents struggle to find a school that would be the best fit for her younger brother with Down Syndrome:

> … it was hard to find schools for … my disabled brother. It was hard to meet new people because some people just didn't understand, where he is coming from -- and things like that. …
>
> And then also finding schools for him to go to that accept him and obviously give him the education he needs has been kind of difficult and when he gets sick, it could be really dangerous depending on how sick he gets because he could be sick for like three weeks at a time. And you just have to deal with that.

These concerns add extra stress to her family each time they move, which means she has to try and figure out how to adapt to a new school on her own so she could allow her parents to make her brother's needs a priority.

A change in school structure is a benefit for some military-connected adolescents. Leslie felt that her most recent school has a more welcoming staff and the teachers work harder to develop "emotional connections with their students." Bailey also claims this is true among the administration at her school:

> I wasn't really like close to [previous teachers]. Like, you know, I [didn't] feel comfortable going. It was like a large school so like I feel like they would just be like, they wouldn't connect. … I feel if you go to school, you should feel you can go talk to any teacher or faculty member. Among other schools, there are two thousand kids. You couldn't just... the teacher will be like, 'What's your name?' Over here, they know you.

Bailey comments that her improved experience with the teachers and administration in her current school helps make the transition easier. It is her opinion that it helps her to improve academically.

Public school from other options.

Some participants also had the added layer of transitioning from a different type of educational institution back into public school when they moved. This included moving from a Department of Defense (DoD) school on an overseas military post or from a homeschool situation. Both Brandon and Zion remember the experience of being in the DoD school in different ways. For Brandon, he remembers that there was a big focus on German culture that he doesn't think of in a positive way:

> I think we just, I remember having to sing some German songs and then they make us repeat it. And try to learn it. And we try to learn some of the languages. But … they were always like forcing Germany down our throats so that was kind of annoying. … I don't have like a whole bunch of memories that like are positive.

Zion remembers also having to learn about the local culture of South Korea in his DoD school, but remembers the experience in a more positive manner, yet he perceived the structure of the DoD school as more controlled and serious than public school in the U.S.

Frank stopped attending public school when he was 10 and started homeschooling with his mother. This continued throughout his time in Germany, where he had a group of six or seven fellow military-connected adolescents who were all homeschooled together. The DoD schools on post were highly-funded, but, according to Frank's father, had some serious drug problems among the students and faculty when he investigated these claims as a CID officer. Frank claims he experienced some problems once he left Germany and tried to transition back into public school:

> I was super worried I would fail all my classes and that we could not pass any of the state testing. But I ended up doing pretty well in all of them except math. … I haven't been public schooled for 5 years and so I had, I guess I just wanted to be accepted by anybody. So, you know I kind of acted completely different that I do now.

Frank perceives his problems were further exacerbated because his dad was deployed during this time. Either way, he perceives the transition to a new school was harder since he was coming from a totally different school structure.

Hurdles for military-connected adolescent athletes.

While academics changes were the way most participants experienced difficulties, those military-connected adolescents who are also student-athletes experience additional problems when moving into a new school. Bailey, who played volleyball through high school, had some issues with the timeframe in which sports seasons are set in different states:

> Last year I did [have problems] because I didn't get to play. Last year I just had to sit out. At the beginning of the season in my other school, I had a concussion and then I ended up moving the next week, the week after I got cleared. So, then I came here, and their seasons was long over. It was like, oh...

Since schools and sports seasons begin at different times of the year, Bailey had to basically forfeit an entire season of volleyball due to moving as a military-connected adolescent. This equated to less time to practice her skills, and also less time to create a film for college coaches to see for recruiting purposes.

Sage also has had trouble in sports, but his trouble was in trying to make sure that he was able to be recognized for his ability:

> Yeah, I feel like you always had to prove yourself. … I do believe you have to prove yourself because [coaches are] not going to easily think, 'Oh because you're new you're going to be someone as good.' … it's much different compared to when I hear people that transfer from different schools but living still in the same area. I mean they understand a little bit more.

During his senior year, Sage claims he was finally able to experience working with a coach who knew his strengths and weakness:

> Yeah, I believe it's good to, to have that feeling that they already know how I am and they know what I need to work on already. Before I had to, they had to observe me and know what's my faults and stuff like that. So, I feel like that's a good feeling.

Since athletics is an avenue students often have to display beyond academics to attend college, these military-connected adolescents perceive that moving was not always advantageous for them athletically and yet another way they have to learn to adapt.

Being the New Kid on the Block

Teen years are often difficult as adolescents work to figure out who they are and where they fit in the world. Having good friends to go through this with makes this stage easier, but military-connected adolescents in the study experience having to both say goodbye to old friends and learn how to make new ones each time the family receives orders to move to a new military post.

Stress of feeling like an outsider.

When you are the new person in any situation, it can feel a little like a spotlight being shined upon you. Adolescents, who often already feel as though they and all their perceived imperfections are on display, might have a harder time overcoming these feelings. When you add in the fact that this experience is routinely encountered by military-connected adolescents throughout their lives, the stress that comes with feeling like an outsider is even more pronounced. Elias claims he often feels "out of place sometimes" among his peers, especially the civilian ones. For Leslie, her feelings of being an outsider were intensified when she moved prior to high school and tried to make friends:

> So, moving here was like kind of hard because everybody knew each other from middle school. You rarely see any military kids or something, so you couldn't really – you really stood out because you don't have any people that you grew up with. … when I moved here it's like I'm an outcast.

Even though Leslie lived here before she moved to Washington, she had trouble trying to reconnect with past friends, as well as making new ones.

Lindsey, Bailey, Daisy, and Elias all assert they have a harder time breaking into new friend groups each time they move. Lindsey perceived this through an experience when she made a neighborhood friend over the summer. However, she learned her connection wasn't as deep as the ones this friend had developed with other peers over the years. She indicated that she felt she was the outsider of the group once school started. Bailey and Daisy both used the word "stressful" when discussing their experiences with integrating into a new school and finding "good" people to be friends with. Elias insists the process of finding new friends is "nerve-wracking" even though he feels those feeling eventually subside:

> … you always never really wanted to go out and reach out to people, but eventually, you get used to it and eventually you just kind of learn to meet people … I just more kind of knew my environment rather than 'am I going to be loved' or 'am I going to be liked?' It was more comfortable and then as soon as you get over it.

Unlike some of the others, Elias feels his experience with making new friends has actually gotten easier as he got older and more mature.

Hanging with the wrong crowd.

Good friends don't come with signs, so sometimes the first people lining up to befriend the new kid might be a bad apple instead of a good one. Three of the participants in the study – Daisy, Leslie, and Lindsey – all claim to have experience in making bad friend choices after a move.

While Daisy claims that her experience with making friends was "mostly positive," she did make some bad choices during her middle school years:

> I got in with kind of I guess the wrong crowd, like these girls weren't very nice. But – and especially because a lot of my friends actually ended up moving in my middle school years. I had to find new friends and it was kind of difficult because obviously clashing personalities were very hard to navigate around …

This experience helped her learn to take the time and find good friends instead of just taking whoever was available.

Lindsey admits that moving during the transition between middle and high school left her with a desire to be accepted by her peers even more, so she claims to have lost herself by acting wilder than she normally would have. However, once she realized what she was doing, she adds that she told herself, “you're not going to just let yourself feel like that again or stoop that low, be something you're not,” to make friends. This was an experience she claims helped her to learn how to make better friend choices when she moved here before her junior year.

Leslie claims she also had a reawakening when she realized that some of her first friend choices might have not been the best for her:

> I just didn’t know where I belong. I started hanging out with like the wrong people and so I was getting caught up in things and then one day I was like ‘this is not me. That’s not who I am,’ and so it’s hard to recover yourself here because as much as you try to stay away from the negativity and stuff like that, it will still get to you.

Leslie said that these poor peer choices led to making poor decisions when she first arrived here. Even after she realized it and dumped them, she still had to live with the reputation that befriending them initially brought her.

Fellow military-connected adolescents as friends.

Although it is not a prerequisite for friendship, most of the military-connected adolescents in the study shared that some of their closest friends also happened to be fellow military-connected adolescents.

Daisy and Leslie both state it is great to have friends who understand the discipline and high expectations that come from living in a military family. Frank claims that while he never tries to seek out military-connected adolescents as friends, he believes he might subconsciously do this when he finds himself in a new group of people because then “we have at least one thing in common.” He also states the experience of creating a bond with fellow military-connected

adolescents overseas happens much faster and even goes deeper because it feels like “it was you against the world” in a different country.

However, being able to have close friends who don’t just empathize with the struggles military-connected adolescents face but understand them because they have endured them as well is invaluable, according to Sage:

> … other military kids that understand the situations you go through … they're more of understanding circumstances and stuff like that. I think it sounds broad, but I mean, I feel like that's their biggest difference. Like people that have never been around military people wouldn't understand …

Not having to explain why your family has specific expectations or why you might keep people at arm’s length is an advantage many perceive in looking to find relationships among those living within the military culture.

Another positive aspect of developing friendships with fellow military-connected adolescents is the fact that you might be able to see them if you cross paths again when new orders to move are given to the family. Although people do change – something that Leslie and Lindsey both found out when they moved back here after being gone for a few years – the likelihood of falling back into an old friendship can make the transition process easier, according to Zion:

> Just like growing up like, moving and then coming back to like we've been friends since we're two years old. So, when I left, we were really close, and I was away for three years, so I didn't see him at all. And then I came back and we started hanging out again. But it was kind of like I left off where I was at. We just started hanging out.

The friendship that Zion made with this fellow military-connected adolescent remains one of his strongest friendships throughout his childhood and he claims he hoped it will continue into adulthood.

Maintaining friendships despite distance.

Since high mobility is a given within the military, military-connected adolescents in the study admit that one of the hardest things about the move is saying farewell to the friends they have made.

One thing that has made it easier to maintain friendships after moving is remaining connected through technology according to Brandon:

> I felt like [it would be hard] if I was somebody who is older and it was like back like when there weren't any phones or anything because I still have friends from Kentucky and Georgia I still talk to. I would think it would have been difficult [in the past] because yeah, all my friends that like I really want to keep in contact with I still do.

While this is good when you are an adolescent, Elias points out staying in contact is more difficult when you are very young not only because access to technology is limited, but as you grow up, you grow apart as well.

However, Daisy explains she experienced some issues with anxiety concerning how difficult it was going to be to continue friendships in the future:

> It's kind of hard sometimes because jealousy could come out from, oh you know 'you moved like you have new friends, like you're just gonna forget about me,' but I feel that with certain friends they don't leave you because you have already made that connection and … I think maintaining connections and trying really hard not to lose them is what's key.

For Daisy, if the desire to continue to be friends is strong enough, the distance won't matter, something Bailey also agrees with. She says when she calls her friends or goes back to Louisiana to visit family, they fell right back in where they were "like nothing really changed." It is their experience that if you want the friendship to continue and are willing to put in the effort, it will survive.

Saying Goodbye for War

A soldier knows that they must be prepared to enter combat at any time – it is why they spend too much time training. Yet the military family and military-connected adolescents must always be prepared as well. They must be prepared to say goodbye, prepared to move, and prepared to give up their parent for the safety and security of the nation. Since the World Trade Center in 2001, which occurred just prior to or after the participants in the study were born, our nation has been engaged in continuous rounds of military actions and deployments to war zones on the opposite side of the globe. As a requirement to partake in this study, all nine of the participants endured watching their military parent head off to war, an experience they perceived as heavily impacting them all.

Living arrangements for deployment.

While most of the participants were able to remain with their home parent while their military parent was sent to a conflict zone, this was not possible for three of the participants. Brandon, Bailey, and Sage all had to experience living in a different environment while their loved ones were deployed.

Brandon remembers staying with his dad during one of his mom's military deployments, but he remembers having to stay with a grandmother during one of the early deployments. Bailey, whose older sister was recently deployed to the United Arab Emirates, had to live with her sister's new wife for the remaining two months of her senior year in high school. However, this wasn't the first time that she had to live with someone else while her sister was gone:

> The first time... okay, before we moved here, [my sister] was married. But they got a divorce. When she went to Kentucky because they had to train over there, I stayed with the ex. Yeah. It was really weird. They weren't fighting, but it was like 'I need help. Can you watch her?' He's like, 'yeah.' [Then] the last few times, she has to go out in the field and stay weeks and they can't come home. I'll be [ask a friend like 'can I come?' She'll be like, 'Yeah, my parents say you can come whenever.'

While dealing with her sister's deployment was tough enough, Bailey claims to have to adjust to a new home environment made it even harder.

For Sage, who stayed with his mom during one of his dad's deployments, saw that this would not be a possibility when his dad deployed during 7th grade and the best guardian for him and his twin brothers at the time was not even a family relative:

> Then my dad got deployed again so we had to go to, move to Virginia because my aunt, that aunt, she has already [had] a lot of kids to take care of and that was – she just could financially do it. So, my dad got divorced back in Colorado. And this [was his] ex-wife's sister. We consider her [our] aunt even though after the divorce, she's gone so technically my ex-stepmom's sister…

Sage states multiple times that he was grateful for what this woman did, but he perceives this as a tough experience because it was not only hard to be without his father, but to feel like you are an outsider in the home that you are living in at the time.

Communication with military parent during war.

Each of the participants claims they experienced various ways of keeping in contact with their military parent while they were deployed. Some remember writing letters or sending care packages while others received telephone and video calls. However, many spoke about experiencing those sparingly and that they were often unreliable means of communication.

For Zion, his parents deployed when he was very young, but he remembers writing letters and drawing pictures to mail. Lindsey also remembers sending and receiving care packages, especially during Christmas when her dad was deployed. Daisy also experienced this and even recalls CNN News coming out to cover her father's deployment for a Valentine's Day story one year:

> … because we had such a big family, I think we actually had 8 kids at the time, and so we were like put on the news and that was a little weird. Well my dad was actually in Afghanistan I think at the time, so they were shooting over like shots of him over there and then how we were dealing with it back in America.

Daisy, who was four or five at the time, remembers having to read a "fake" letter from her dad while they filmed it, which she insists was a strange experience.

One thing many of the participants shared was experiencing communication that was shoddy due to the areas of deployment. Frank, whose dad deployed to Afghanistan, a high-conflict zone, remembers that it was much easier to talk with him when he went to Korea, saying he remembers being able to Skype dad "like every day." Leslie remembers talking with her father and that sometimes the lighting would be so bad on the video call that "all you could see is like their teeth." Elias also remembers that the conversations he had with his dad when he deployed seemed to focus more on the terrible reception:

> I don't know why everywhere whenever he goes away it's always there was that bad Wi-Fi, always bad connection, always bad connection. You always tell that and it's always that constant, 'Can you hear me now? Is it better now? Here, let me call you back. Let me turn off the camera. Let's just talk. Turn back on the camera. Is it better now?" [laughing] It's always funny because that was always a reoccurrence with deploying…

Elias said that even though technology concerns made it difficult, he still thinks the experience of being able to talk with his dad made the deployments easier.

Increased military-connected adolescent responsibility.

When a parent heads off to war, the responsibilities in the home remain. And while the children cannot fill in for everything their military parent does in the home, they often stated they experienced an increase in the amount or type of chores that were expected of them while their parents were absent. This was even more prevalent in the participants who happened to be an older child in the home.

Elias stated that switching from a two-parent to a one-parent home meant he experienced the pressure to be a "father figure" for his younger brother in his father's absence. Although Frank explained he had a similar experience, his focus was on stepping up to help his mom:

> I sometimes feel that if when my dad's deployed and is gone and my mom and I are in public, people automatically assume [she is] a single mom raising a teenager and [that is] actually not the story. So sometimes if I know that's going to happen, I wear something like an Army shirt or something, it would kind of like subconsciously telling everybody, you know, my dad is in my life …

Frank felt it was his job to not only help pick up any slack in the home to make sure it runs smoothly, but also to ensure he was protecting his mom as the eldest child while his father was gone.

For Bailey, the hardest part about deployment is just that the routine of how the house operates is disturbed:

> Because like I woke up every day and saw her and now I don't, but the last deployment, she was already stationed there and so she left … I was used to it. I was used to being apart and now it's hard.

Bailey states that because this deployment was during the final months of high school, all the senior year things such as finals, scholarship applications, college applications, and graduation became her sole responsibility.

Stress on home parent during deployment.

One thing several participants claim is that they experienced watching their home parent struggle with the stress that comes from being the only adult in the home during deployment. Both Sage and Elias point out how grateful they were for the sacrifices that their home parent made to take on the needs of the family. Lindsey states that she didn't understand how much the deployment impacted her mom until she was older:

> I think it put a lot of pressure on my mom like when my dad was away, just to make sure me and my sisters were good … I mean she never really like openly showed it but I mean like during that time they like started to have issues with each other so that was like a difficult thing … So, I think like she had, looking back, like she had a lot to deal with …

In retrospect, that made Lindsey even more grateful that they could get help from her grandparents during this time to take the load off her mom.

Lindsey wasn't the only participant to share that the family needed some outside help for the home parent during deployment. Daisy shares they had a family friend stay with them during that time:

> Well, my mom was pregnant with my sister and so obviously it was harder for her to get around and get all of us everywhere. So, we actually had a friend of my dad's whose name is Ms. Amy. She came to stay with us just to help …

Daisy also remembers that her mom kept the children involved in several different extracurricular activities while their dad was gone, including sports and church. While she knows now this added more stress to her mom to have to manage that schedule – especially because she gave birth to her little sister while their father was deployed – Daisy says she is grateful for her mother's sacrifice because it made the deployment go by faster.

The stress that Leslie claims her mom experienced as a result of deployment was described as the most debilitating of all the participants. In a similar way that Lindsey's parents suffered from some marital strife due to deployment, Leslie's parents seemed to never quite recover from theirs:

> My mom changed a lot, she is affected by how he's acting, you know, it's not – because of like I see the way you act is going to affect others around you … So, my mom fell into depression while my dad was deployed.

Because of how severe her depression was during her father's deployment, Leslie states that her brother's girlfriend at the time actually moved in with the family in order to help out more around the house with duties where her mother simply could not.

Impact of absence on military-connected adolescent.

While many participants shared they felt a perceived heightened stress within the home parent, all of the participants claimed that having to grow up without one or both of their parents for an extended period of time impacted them in many ways.

Deployment is an emotional event, according to Zion, who claims that the experience of his parent's deployment was even harder than dealing with their divorce at the time. Sage also says he was always a bundle of different emotions when his father was gone:

> I would feel sad. I'd feel a little scared. I've said sad and scared. Nervous is the same thing as scared. I just – there's no way to describe it. Sometimes I wouldn't think about it at all because I feel that he has already been through a couple times. I feel that he's going to come back alive, but I mean that's just the main emotions I felt.

He says the constant worry about whether his dad was going to come home was sometimes so much that he would have to try and do other things to keep himself occupied so he wouldn't think about it.

Just like with her mom, Leslie claims she deals with severe anxiety and attributes her current problems with it, and the feelings of being abandoned back to her father's deployment:

> It was like kind-of nerve-racking … It really – it's like it was the beginning of it. It gave me a lot of chest pain and stuff like that, but I didn't worry about it at that time because I'm like 'I'm a middle schooler, maybe it's hormones.' … So, I feel like if I had more of that about with the care and love, I wouldn't have the issues with my dad. Like I never really had – I don't want to call it – I know who my dad is. I know he is there. I know he cares about me, but he was never there physically. So, I never really had a dad like that. So, I think that's why I always wanted attention. I think that's why it grew on me now like I want to be the center of attention because I lack that care at home because my mom had her own issues …

Leslie remembers experiencing this during a time when they were on a video call and her dad had to cut the call off because they had been discovered by the enemy and were having to pack up and move quickly, something that heightened her ever-present anxiety even more. She shares that these feelings didn't really go away when her father returned because he was dealing with his own issues, including PTSD, so because "he was always worried, it kind of rubbed off on me to where I have to be worried every minute of my life."

While Frank states that all military-connected adolescents go through "a season where it'll be bad or stressful or you know sad because your dad's gone," Lindsey claims that each

person deals with deployment differently in her experience. For her, she said she was happy that her parents didn't try to "paint a rosy picture" and opted instead to be honest with her and her sisters. She adds it made it easier for her to deal with the deployment because ultimately, she knew where he was and why he was there. However, because she was aware of where her father was, the constant barrage of media coverage made it worse for her and did impact her academically:

> I would just like watch the news and sobbing and just. It wasn't a good thing for a seven-year-old to be doing. So, like I just would, I would freak myself out a lot. …I was a terrible student. Like I got F's on progress report and stuff …

Lindsey also remembers that the parent of a child in her school died overseas during this deployment and when she learned about that, her worried nature intensified until her dad finally returned home safely.

On the other hand, both Brandon and Elias express different sentiments regarding the impact of deployment and parental absences. For Brandon, he doesn't remember his mom being gone really affecting him in a negative way:

> I haven't, I've never been, like, I've never had a problem with [my mom] being gone or anything. So, it didn't really faze me. I don't think as much. I don't know. Yeah so … I've always been, like, pretty adaptable or something.

While Brandon said he doesn't remember the absence in a bad light, Elias claims that because his dad was gone so often, he began to feel desensitized to the experience to the point that "it doesn't affect [him] anymore."

Many of the participants believe that the age when the deployment occurred made a difference on the level of impact of the deployment. Zion, who watched his parents deploy when he was very young, says that he believed it would have been much harder had he been older:

> Yeah, that would've have been probably harder. … middle school is like, when you're in that transition and like, you kind of need your parents like, to guide you, you know, to

> your high school life. I don't know I just – as a kid you don't really notice it as much like, it's not a big as emotion.

Frank agrees with Zion's reasoning completely and claims that even though his dad deployed multiple times throughout his life, the deployment during his freshman year of school was his "toughest year so far." Elias explains that the reason why deployment is harder when you are older ties back to the concept of ignorance being bliss:

> I was really young at the time, so I never really understood what it meant and then because I was older I had to kind of understand what was going to happen and everything. … it was just a sense of innocence and ignorance because I never really had an idea of what was going on …

Because he was a child who had a limited grasp on what was happening, Elias added that it was easier to be distracted from what was really happening or could happen to his father during deployment.

Lindsey, who experienced deployment both as a child and an adolescent insists it was harder for her when she was older, but also sees how it could be more difficult when you are younger by the way it impacted her little sister. She explains that her sister would become very upset when they couldn't just call their dad or talk with him for longer and she would have to explain it to her. While deployment is unpleasant at any age, these participants feel that experiencing it when one is younger results in less of an impact on military-connected adolescents.

Reunification of the Military Family

Welcoming home a loved one from war was an important and happy experience for the military-connected adolescents in this study. However, they shared that dealing with how both the parent and they had changed during the separation. Also, helping the parent transition back to normal life comes with its own set of experiences – both good and bad.

Happy homecoming.

Each of the participants remembered the experience of welcoming home their mom or dad from deployment as a joyous occasion. For Zion:

> I remember seeing him like, get off the bus of all the soldiers and we'll all be standing outside with the families with signs and then, I always remember him coming back, they would have like, a little ceremony. Yeah, I remember that and he'll be standing there and I'll be like, I can't wait to hug him.

The experience was so impactful for him that he adds that whenever he views military homecoming videos he "tear[s] up a little."

Sometimes the experience is made even better when the homecoming is a surprise for members of the family. Leslie says that when her dad came back, they were able to surprise her brother when they picked him up from school that day because they didn't tell him that dad had come home early. The return of Lindsey's father in elementary school was supposed to be a surprise, but she said that her teacher misread the email and accidentally told the secret to Lindsey in school one day. However, for Daisy, her father was able to surprise her at school when he returned:

> I remember crying a lot when – I mean, I was super surprised because he had come from behind me. I was in like the computer lab, playing some game and he had come up and it was so surprising. It was really nice to have him back. I mean, it was very -- he was like, "Surprise!" and then I was crying because I was so happy that he was back.

She knew that her father was going to be coming home soon since they had made a big sign to put up on the house but making it a surprise for her made it even better for Daisy to reunite with her dad.

Frank also remembers making signs to welcome back his dad from deployment, but he says he never experienced the big homecoming ceremony "like, you know, you see on TV" because his dad never deployed in a group of larger than 15-20 people, so the welcome home ceremonies were much smaller. Although it was smaller in size, Frank claims that it didn't

diminish the level of emotion that came from being able to hug his dad. The level of emotion that comes with a military homecoming was something that Elias states he didn't quite understand until it happened:

> … you think that it's just going to be a good simple hug and let's get out of here but that what ends up happening is you start going through the emotions. It's all of a sudden just I don't know where you start breaking into tears, hugging him. I remember the first time I saw my dad. I didn't even remember. I didn't recognize him, [he] changed so much and I hugged him. At the time when I hugged him as soon as I just broke down and it was funny because my dad was like telling me, 'It's okay son. It's okay.'

Elias, who comments that he doesn't often show many emotions, was surprised by how quickly and overwhelming the emotions were when they came to the surface when he was finally able to welcome his dad back after his deployment.

Reintegration into family life.

While feelings of euphoria are common at the beginning, those can fade some when the military parent begins to reintegrate into the family. Elias asserts that some of these problems were because "the fears in the soldier's eyes is when they get deployed they're going to be out of the loop." While the military parent was gone, life continues for the rest of the family, and the military-connected adolescents, such as Elias, continue to grow up, which can make the parent feel like they were "frozen in time" when they return home.

Several participants stated that this is often a difficult experience for them for several reasons. Sometime, the military parent was affected by what happened during war and the way in which they respond could have changed as it did for Daisy:

> But I do remember it was weird having him back. I mean because he had been gone for so long. I remember it is kind of tense. He's always had like kind of a temper, I mean, because he gets stressed out and worried a lot. And so, he was a little rougher I guess, obviously, for coming back from war that's going to be how it's going to be.

Daisy says that she didn't perceive the change quite as much as her older sibling, who remembered their dad being much more relaxed in the way he acted and responded to his family before the deployment than the way he was when he returned.

Frank claims that transition is always difficult for his dad when he returns home.

> It's always like there's a vacuum of power even that you don't notice until that he gets back. It's always the first few times were always tough you know like, like there was one time I wanted, I needed help like buttoning up a shirt and didn't want my dad to do it because I knew my mom knew how to, but I forgot that my dad knew how to do it [too].

Frank thinks this experience happens because military-connected adolescents are so adaptable that they just get used to a single-parent home only to have to learn to adjust back to having both parents in the home.

While Daisy's little sister, who was born while her dad was deployed, was too young to remember welcoming home their military parent, that wasn't the experience both Brandon and Lindsey's siblings had. For Lindsey, she remembers that her dad came home for a two-week R&R (rest and relaxation) toward the end of a year-long deployment, but that her little sister "didn't even recognize him because he wasn't there, and she was so young." Brandon notes that his little brother had the same experience when their mom came home after a deployment:

> … she had come home and my brother, she's like, 'oh come here' whatever and he was kinda hesitant to go to her 'cuz she, like not, she has been gone for a while and yeah. She was kinda hurt about that, but you know, she understood that dad was the only parent that he'd seen when he was young. So yeah, that's sad.

Brandon looks at the relationship that both he and his brother have with their parents and thinks this is why he is so close with mom, while his little brother is close with their father.

Elias thinks the feelings that families have about the transition for the military parent is because we "fear it more than it needs to be." He states his dad was able to transition back smoothly each time. He says that "it's a rocky start from leaving, but as soon as he comes about everything just settles back into place nice and easy." In the same way that parental deployment

impacts each military-connected adolescent differently, you could say the same for how they respond to the parent's homecoming.

Changes in military parent following deployment.

It wasn't until Daisy saw her dad start to enact changes in their home concerning curfew and chores, basically being "stricter on certain things" that she began to see what her older siblings already understood: war changed their dad. While she tries her best to understand why these changes occurred, it is something that Daisy continues to learn how to adjust to with the return of her father.

Frank, Lindsey, Zion, and Leslie also saw similar types of changes in their military parent as Daisy did following the return from deployment. Frank claims physical injuries his dad sustained while deployed started to make it harder for his dad to sleep, making him "really grouchy" and each time he leaves and returns it becomes even worse. Lindsey says her dad also has some issues with sleeping at night, so if he fell asleep on the couch and she woke him up, he would become agitated if anyone disturbed him and yell at them. For Zion, he knows both his father and stepfather deal with symptoms of PTSD. While his stepdad chooses to revert more into himself and remain quiet, Zion's dad's quick anger led him to have to make some changes in his life:

> … my dad, he's not being nice. Like, he used to be mean. I think like that the military did it, I don't know. But he used to be mean when he was younger before. Like, he became a big Christian, and that involved big churches and all that so much.

While he says he father still has a temper, Zion's dad turned to religion to help him deal with the changes he saw in himself following deployment and war.

In the same way that deployment affected her mom, Leslie's father was greatly impacted as a result of his time deployed in a warzone. Leslie states that her dad used to be very kind-

hearted and giving, but he started to develop some severe changes in his personality upon his return home:

> Well, when he was living here, he was very by him, he was very to himself. He always stayed in the garage, played his games, smoked cigarettes and drink and so about that he picked up those habits more and more often. And like, he always wanted to be away from us. He never wanted to spend quality time with us and it was really odd. He never really wanted, he wanted to go hang out with me, but we can't go to certain places because he gets nervous. … there were times where we had to stay with the like lights out and whatever. He always had to be on watch and I think that's why he walks around the house all night long. And like he's like – he's like oh, locked the doors and I was like but that door was locked he was like double check. He always made us double check. He never had guns in the house because he doesn't approve of that. He said gun, you know, people with a gun can take control any minute. So, he only kept like hatchets or you know, swords.

Leslie says it helped some once he was diagnosed with PTSD, but she thinks he sometimes uses it as a crutch or an excuse for his behavior, especially now that he is working as a government contractor overseas and has basically cut off contact with their family.

Comparisons to Previous Research

Previous research concerning the experiences of military-connected adolescents, including connections to the military culture, high mobility, moving schools, peer relationships, and parental deployment are reinforced by several of the findings from the participants in the current study.

Although they varied slightly, most of the participants in the current study shared similar experiences, especially concerning high mobility and parental deployment, which helps to establish a link between military-connected adolescents as they create a distinct group within the military culture (Hall, 2011; Montalvo, 1976; Wertsch, 1991). The findings of increased social, emotional, and academic issues among military-connected adolescents who experience high mobility and parental deployment are supported by several of the current study participants, most notably among Leslie and Lindsey (Hall, 2011; Park, 2011). Bolton (2006) and Mmari et al.

(2009) research concerning the need for educators to be better equipped to help support military-connected adolescents as they endure several of these same experiences appears to ring true among the participants in this study as well.

Clever and Segal (2013) found most military-connected adolescents relocate an average of every three years and Elias, Bailey, and Zion were the only participants in this study to not follow that same pattern. However, it is worth noting that Bailey only lived in the military culture during the last six years of her life, Zion's parents were retired from the military at the start of his time in secondary school, and Elias' father often went to duty stations alone to prevent his family from having to move, so these factors should be considered when comparing the findings of this study to previous research. Tyler's (2002) findings that the first year of an overseas tour was the hardest was not supported by my findings as Frank found his time in Germany among his most favorable experiences, however, he was the only one that spent a considerable time overseas at an age where he was old enough to remember it, so that should also be considered.

When it comes to selecting peers, most of the current participants stated selecting fellow military-connected adolescents was favorable, which reinforces previous similar findings concerning the comfortable understanding members of this invisible minority have among one another, making their friendship ideal (Hall, 2011; Moore & Baker, 2011). Additionally, participants shared ways they work to blend in upon entering a new school, while sometimes keeping peers at arm's length, which ties into previous research (Bradshaw et al., 2010; McDonald, 2010). Concerning the findings that third culture kids are forced to adapt quickly (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009), the fact that several participants claimed they had issues with falling into a wrong crowd of peers in a new school would appear to support those findings as

they found their desire to quickly find friends did not always turn out to be the best decision. Pollock and Van Reken also claimed that social media made it easier for third culture kids to maintain friendships after moving, which was also expressed by many of the participants in the current study.

Wertsch's (1991) findings that the home parent serves as a source of support for military-connected adolescents was reinforced by the participants in this study, with only Lindsey sharing that she has a strained relationship with her mother. Moreover, the notion of feeling like an outsider, which support previous research, was also prevalent among many of the participants in the study with several using those very words to describe how they felt moving into a new community. While Wertsch's (1991) findings indicated alcoholism was prevalent among the families of the military-connected adolescents she interviewed, in my study only one participant shared that drinking was an issue in her family.

Since the number of the times soldiers deployed from 2001 to 2007 have more than quadrupled, (Engel, Gallagher & Lyle, 2008), it makes sense each participant experienced parental deployed more than once during their childhood, expect for Zion, whose parents deployed several times before he was born, and Leslie, whose dad was deployed only once, but did opt to become a government contract and head back overseas upon his retirement, which sets up virtually the same circumstances as a deployment.

Previous findings that military-connected adolescents are more likely to develop attachment issues if their parent deploys during their teenage years, which is the time when identity development is most likely to occur, appear to be both supported and contradicted with the findings from the current study (Huebner et al., 2007; Williams & Mariglia, 2002). Both Lindsey and Leslie, who watched their fathers deploy during their middle school years,

specifically talked about experiencing trust issues. However, Elias, Frank, and Sage also experienced a parental deployment during a similar timeframe and didn't share or express trust or attachment problems. It is worth noting that those claiming to have attachment issues are female while their male counterparts did not express similar feelings, so this might indicate that these feelings are more common among females, which could relate back to Olsen's (2012) findings that males tend to handle parent deployment better than their female counterparts.

Previous research found that military-connected adolescents often find themselves with gaps in their learning and academic skills because of high mobility (Harrison & Vannest, 2009; Military Child Education Coalition, 2011). This aligns with virtually all the participants who found that they were either ahead or behind their peers academically each time they moved.

Research Question 3: Perceptions, Responses To, and Making Sense of Experiences

To address the third research question – *how military-connected adolescents perceive, respond to, or make sense of their experiences* – participants were asked to talk about their thoughts, beliefs, and feelings about the experiences they had while growing up as a military-connected adolescent, how they reacted to them, and the impact they perceived these experiences had on them. From those responses, five themes emerged. Table 4 presents the emergent themes and related subthemes to explain how participants perceived, sought to make sense of, or responded to the many experiences they had growing up within the military culture.

Table 4: Themes and Subthemes of How Military-Connected Adolescent Perceive and Make Sense of Their Experiences.

Theme	Subthemes
High Expectations for Military-Connected Adolescents	High Expectations from Parents High Expectations from Self
Impact on Identity and Relationships	Sources of Military-Connected Adolescent Thriving Perceived Struggles Within Military Families Lack of Outsider Awareness of Military Life

Advantages and Aggravations of Military-Connected Adolescence	New World Perspectives Traveling the Globe Excitement of New Beginnings Unable to Move from a Bad Situation Difficulty Adjusting Bullying and Trust Issues
Coping Strategies for Military-Connected Adolescents	Religion Counseling Sibling Relationships Extracurricular Participation Educators for Support Detaching from Emotions Advice for Other Military-Connected Adolescents
The Lasting Impact of Growing Up Military	Military Culture as a Facet of Identity Imitating Military Values in Daily Life Military Family as a Great Place to Grow Up Choice of Military as Part of Future

High Expectations for Military-Connected Adolescents

Military-connected adolescents stated the overall expectations that are internalized in the military culture often meant they would experience being held to high expectations throughout their formative years. The participants in the study claimed these high expectations came in two forms: those from their parents and those they had developed for themselves.

High expectations from parents.

While most adolescents would agree their parents want the best for them and push them toward positive outcomes for the future, the military-connected adolescents in the current study spoke of how they perceived the expectations of their parents were at higher levels than the parents of many of their civilian peers.

Bailey was given the opportunity to clearly see that difference as she could compare the expectations that her mother had for her with that of her military sister:

> Well, when I was back home, I went to school, but I just *went* to school. When I moved here... when I decided that I'm going to go there because [my sister] pushes me to do

> better. I know that I can always go to her and I focus better. My grades are better than they ever were.

Bailey claims that her sister never seemed satisfied with Bailey's progress and achievements, that she was always "fussing at her" and telling her she could do better. This was something Sage also feels he got from his father unless it was a "really, really intense class," but if he was making a B in an easy class like drama they would question him about it until the grade improved.

Elias also perceives that his parents wanted more from him academically, however, the parent he says is the toughest on him is his mother and not his military father:

> With military parents, you got two kinds. You got the – I don't want to say the relaxed one, but I want to say the one that kind of relates to you more and then you got the strict one. My dad's somewhat in between because my dad, he's the guy I could talk to, he's relaxed at times. … With my mom, all the time wants us to do the right thing and of course with parents, you know, especially mom's, they want the house clean all the time and everything so my dad always just wants to make my mom happy. That's always his goal so, it's always make sure this is clean, make sure that's right and make sure that's right and if it's to the point where that side's not working then he immediately switches to the other side and he's immediately like kind of a drill sergeant. … It's just weird because like when growing up he used to – I'm scared of my dad, not my mom, but my mom is way – because she's pickier, I feel, with grades and house and cleaning and to my dad it's just 'did you do your best or anything' and then it's like, 'Yes I did,' and then if we behave, do our best it's all he could ask from us. With my mom, we could always do better. [laughs]

Elias also claims that he has higher expectations placed on him as the oldest sibling in the house and his parents are more lenient on his younger brother. This perception is echoed by other participants as well, including Lindsey, Frank, Brandon, and Daisy.

For Zion, expectations are placed on him academically but also in terms of his responsibility in the home:

> I'll be hanging out with my friends and I forget to take the trash. They don't get why I have to come back home and take the trash out even though my family is clearly right there, and they can do it their self. It's just the meaning of it like that's my job so I *have* to do it. So, I could be out bowling and if I don't take the trash out then I can't do anything. I got to come back home.

Zion also states that he would be punished if his grades slipped, so that helps him to work harder to keep them up and actually learn the material, something he doesn't always see in his friend's homes as those parents "don't really care how their kids do in school as long as they're passing."

High expectations from self.

When someone grows up in an environment where expectations from those in positions of authority are high, it is only natural to assume they will begin to internalize those same guiding principles, which is something most of the participants claim in the current study. Since they already express perceptions of determination, discipline, self-reliance, and adaptability as part of their identity, realizing that these military-connected adolescents have adopted high expectations for themselves is easy to imagine.

Daisy claims that she developed such high expectations for herself that her overachieving desires often meant she would find herself overextended:

> … fitting everything in my schedule like I had a lot of babysitting I had to do but then I also had swim, but then I also wanted to do key club stuff. And so, having to do that was pretty difficult, I actually ended up doing a lot less key club stuff than I wish I did because of swim and babysitting.

It was Daisy's experience that she had to take a realistic look at what she was capable of doing to make sure that she was successful at a few things instead of simply being mediocre at many.

From a very young age, Sage says he feels he is "advanced over the kids his age" because of the high expectations he has always had for himself. He attributes this trait to what helps him remain focused on the future throughout high school:

> [The] important thing is that you got to realize the importance of high school and the value of education … you need to start really planning out on how your future should be because in the next few years you're going to be on your own it's down to planning and this is like one of the four most critical years of your life when it goes by really fast.

Seeing the value in school and the importance of being future-oriented is the advice Sage wishes he could share with others who might not have the same high expectations that he feels he has developed as a military-connected adolescent.

This advice also serves Elias and Frank as sophomores as both young men are already making plans for their future. Elias spoke about plans to take additional core classes to help him prepare to major in engineering in anticipation of applying for a military academy. Frank feels that his high expectations are due to his difficulty transitioning from homeschool to public school. He perceives his academic skills as being ahead in science, but behind in math and English:

> Because math has never been a strong suit for me, … I took pre-algebra as a freshman and that helped me solidify. … And so, with English, I'm going to need to get good grades in this Pre-AP class you know so I can at least put one AP class on my schedule [next year].

Frank claims that to achieve these high expectations, he must strive to study more at home and ask his parents and teachers for help when he isn't able to understand something or find the answer on his own. Since these expectations are goals he set for himself, he has had to develop the internal motivation to achieve them.

Impact on Identity and Relationships

The participants in the current study perceived the experiences they had as a part of the military culture, including high mobility, having to start over at new schools, and enduring deployment, in different ways. Some of them were positive, some were negative, but each participant perceived that their connection to the military has had an impact on how they view themselves, their family, and their relationships.

Sources of military-connected adolescent thriving.

As stated before, thriving occurs when a person encounters an obstacle and not only survives but turns out better, as a result, their experience with adversity (Carver, 1998; O'Leary & Ickovics, 1995; Parry & Chester, 2005). Many of the participants in the study share that even though they experience hardship, they still view themselves and their family positively and feel they are better prepared for the future. Or, as Frank puts it, military-connected adolescents and military families are simply "stronger than ordinary families" because of all they have to endure.

One way that military-connected adolescents perceive they are able to thrive can be attributed to the support they receive from their parents. Bailey states that when it comes to her and her sister they "just understand each other," which helps her develop the confidence she needs to thrive. Elias shares that the consistent verbal support from his father about how proud he is of him makes it easier for him to develop resiliency in his life. The support that Daisy perceives from her mother as she is "really good at making sure we have everything and that we feel like we're a part of [our dad's] life." This makes going through all of the tough experiences that come with being a military-connected adolescent much easier.

However, the one thing that virtually all the participants perceive is unwavering parental support for whichever path they choose to follow into adulthood. Frank states many people often assume that military-connected adolescents are going to follow in their military parent's footsteps and join the military. While this is an option that more than half are either planning to do or have seriously considered, Frank, like several others, states he feels he would be supported by his parents no matter the choices he makes:

> Well, of course, you grow up in a military family, I really want to join the military, you know I'll be fourth generation Army, [but] it's not something like if I choose next year I wanted to be a dentist, you know my parents would totally support that. But it's

> something like, that I know that there's a career path I can take that it's, that I've been around my whole life.

Knowing that he will be supported helps Frank to see himself able to thrive despite the possibility of obstacles in the future.

Participants also perceive that the sacrifices their parents make on their behalf help them learn to thrive as military-connected adolescents. Zion's mother's decision to retire from the military so they could stay close to family though his teenage years, and Sage's father's decision to ask him and his brother to choose which duty station they wanted to live for their final years of high school makes both participants feel as though they have some control over their lives. Elias and Leslie share that the perceived sacrifices made by their home parents specifically to support them made it easier to thrive because of their experiences as part of the military culture. Elias is grateful that his mother is "tough" enough to handle the ups and downs of their lives, which include himself and his brother who "were a handful." Leslie says that although she may not have recognized it when she was younger, she is grateful for the sacrifices her mom made for and her brother during their childhood:

> My mom is amazing. I used to not like her because I went through that stage of being a teenager where you don't really like your parents but as I'd gotten older I started appreciating her more because of the things that I realized she was doing.

Even though she often complains about the things her mother is unable to do for her, Leslie still feels that she is successful in life because of her mother's support and sacrifices, which have helped her to develop a sense of independence.

The fact that their families feel closer than others is another way that military-connected adolescents in the study perceived themselves as thriving. Elias and Daisy spoke about how much they communicate with their family members because they perceive good communication in the family as a source of support to develop maturity and respect for others. Zion also feels

that the closeness he has with his parents is different than his peers who often don't feel as comfortable with their parents. He thinks of himself as close with his mom as a self-proclaimed "mama's boy," while he says he and his dad are "just alike," so he perceives they could "literally just chill all day." Brandon expresses several of these same feelings of closeness with his mom, which he attributes to the fact that it was just the two of them when he was younger:

> … so, me and my mom, we all are pretty close 'cause, like, beginning when I was young it was just me and her. And then, yeah, it was kind of weird, when [my brother] got there 'cause I had, like, always been with my mom. And before that, like, everything we did, we did everything together basically.

Being able to rely on the closeness of the family as a unit is one way many of the participants feel helps them learn to thrive while growing up within the military culture.

Perceived struggles within military families.

While several participants were able to perceive the military lifestyle as a positive influence on them, not everyone sees their experiences as military-connected adolescents in that manner. For some of them, the experience colored the way in which they view their relationships with their military parent, their home parent, and their siblings.

Several of the participants identify a perceived disconnect with the military parent in their family because of the experiences within the military culture. Sage claims that he still has respect and appreciation for his dad, but he still gets "frustrated or upset with him" when the authoritarian side of his dad comes out. Zion also agrees with this perception and states that many people don't understand that "military parents are much harder than regular parents" because of the heavy authoritarian culture runs throughout the military. This feeling is the same for Lindsey when it comes to making sense of the relationship she has with her father:

> Me and my dad have a pretty good relationship. I mean, he likes to think that I can just come in and talk to him, and like he's understanding and stuff. I mean, he's not. If you try to say, 'Oh, I feel this way,' he charges you for feeling that way. He'll kind of be like, 'Well, I don't understand why you're feeling this way. You're being ungrateful.' So, it's

> just kind of like – well, I mean, I knew if I needed something, he'd get it for me. But as far as emotion-wise, he's not … we don't connect.

Lindsey also discusses that it feels like her dad is trying to live through her experiences when he forces her to do things she might not want, like learning to play basketball. While that experience could have been one that brought them together, because she perceives it as a way for him to brag to others about her accomplishments, it became a negative experience for Lindsey.

For other participants, the relationship that developed with their military parent left them feeling like strangers to each other. In regard to this relationship with his military father, Frank commented that he and his dad would "just function" together because he has been gone so much during his childhood. Elias claims that he and his dad "kind of [were] used to all being alone in our own separate places," although he is quick not to fault his father for this feeling of being disconnected, rather the family just learned how to be more self-reliant without him. For Leslie, the disconnect was not because her dad was not home, it's just that when he was there, they still didn't connect which helped her to develop self-care issues:

> [It's] like not having a father figure. The weird thing is, my dad asked me. He said, 'How many of your friends have actual fathers in their life? I can name a few.' He said, 'Well, you should be lucky that I'm here.' But what he doesn't realize like, yes, maybe physically but emotionally you're not here so technically you don't. I don't feel like I have a father.

Leslie, who sees herself as a caring and selfless person with everyone in her life, struggles with caring for herself because "you feel like it's your responsibility to take care of others, so you forget to take care of yourself and they forget to take care of you too."

Even though it is the home parent that military-connected adolescents ultimately spend more time around, that didn't always result in the development of a strong relationship between some of the participants and their home parent. Brandon claims that he and his father are not "super close, we just kind of talk and that's it." While Frank says he respects his mom, he talks

about them having more of "a teammate relationship more than like a son-mother one" as they work to juggle the responsibilities of the home, especially during his father's deployment. Daisy feels the problems that she has with her mom stems from the fact that they "have the same kind of personality" so they "kind of like clash sometimes," which means the parent she finds herself in trouble with more is her mother. Lindsey claims, as with Daisy, the similarities she has with her mom are the source of some of the strain she has with her. She further claims that the behavior comes from the control that her mom tries to exert over her life, which she claims is getting worse as she ages:

> Some days we're really close, and then other days, we just kind of stay away from each other because I feel like she tries to hold me back sometimes when I have my mind made up on things. She likes to get other family members to try to guilt me on her side. Like about college, when she doesn't like the choice I made, she got my grandparents to call me. I would, though, kind of block it out.

Lindsey says that it took many months for her mom to finally accept that she would stay in the current state to attend college and not follow them to their next duty station. This disconnect often makes Lindsey seek out her dad, even though she doesn't perceive their relationship as that great either, at least he isn't "as dramatic" as her mom.

Another struggle that plagues Leslie has resulted in a strain between her and her older brother. She perceives her parents as supporting her brother more than they support her:

> I never had that same connection that my brother has with my parents than I do. … He used to like, he always talks about how it was really hard when he was growing up because of the fact that like he needed a role model near him and stuff like that, but my dad was always there for him. He was his football coach and stuff like that, he was always there and supporting him. … My brother gets treated differently than I do [but] my parents deny that …

Lindsey states these feelings do not change how close she feels to her older brother, she pointed out that their relationship became "thicker" as they have grown up. Lindsey also states that the

feelings of bias she perceives coming from her parents did impact how she feels about herself within the family unit and affects her level of self-confidence.

Lack of outsider awareness of military life.

While the participants claim both negative and positive impacts through their experiences as military-connected adolescents, many of them still comment that one of the hardest things about this life is the fact that civilians simply don't understand what it is like to live within the fortress of the military culture.

Obviously, civilians can recognize the hardships that come from frequent moves and sending a parent off to war, yet Sage feels people tend to place too high of an importance on the fun and excitement that they think comes with the military lifestyle:

> I wish they would understand. Sometimes, some civilian kids, I wish they would understand being a military kid is not as- I'm not going to say it's not as privileged 'cause we are privileged but like being a military kid is not all glitter and gold and you still got like – you still got some limitations and some things that normal kids, that live in a normal. I don't want to say normal but like live in like an ordinary life don't get that.

Sage wishes that more people would remember that they pay for a lot of the perks that people perceive come from this lifestyle. Many civilians do not understand the stressors that come with this way of life, such as the worry over where they might live in the following year or how different their parent will be when they return from a deployment, inf they return at all.

Elias claims that even though he loves his life, he still finds himself wishing he could be more like his civilian peers:

> You just want to seem like every other kid. That's always your goal. Just to kind of seem like everyone else and that's just kind of why you try to hide everything because you just want to be normal and seem like everyone I look at you and be like, "Oh, he's always happy. He's having a normal life."

While the participants view themselves as adaptable, it still wasn't enough for Elias to wash away the feelings of once again being the outsider every time his dad came home with a new set

of orders. In fact, sometimes the particular military-connected adolescents were hesitant to open up and reveal this outsider identity. For instance, Brandon, who claims he sometimes just says he is from Florida when people would ask him at a new school and not tell people he is a military child at all. This wasn't because he was ashamed of his identity, but that this facet of it was "too much to explain" all the time.

Advantages and Aggravations of Military-Connected Adolescence

Reflection upon the various experiences the participants had growing up as military-connected adolescents leads them to perceive various advantages and aggravations associated with living within the military culture. The perceived benefits included new world perspectives, traveling the globe, and the excitement of new beginnings while disadvantages included the inability to move from a bad situation, difficulty adjusting, and bullying or trust issues.

New world perspectives.

Living and growing up amid different cultures in different regions of the world helped several participants see the world in new ways that might not have been possible without the mobility of being a military-connected adolescent. Zion believes that his time in South Korea gave him a chance to interact with people from around the world. This enabled him to develop a mindset where "you don't see people differently," a trait that he did not always identify among his peers. Sage echoes that same idea, claiming that his increased exposure to diversity was one the most important things he gained from this lifestyle:

> Open minded, as far as a military child and I feel like that's probably the biggest impact being a military child, that being open minded because I moved to a lot of places and I've seen different parts of the country … it makes me realize like it's way different and that it's kind of I can see and it's like to try to learn from it and to actually experience what it's like to be in different cultures.

Lindsey also claims that being able to live in multiple locations while growing up allowed her to adjust her point of view on many things:

> Well, it's like I got to move around and like see different people, so I feel like I have a lot of different perspectives like it won't just be 'this is how it is' because like this is all I have known. I forgot to see like different things and so I feel like that benefits me in a way.

Lindsey feels that this opportunity helped to offset the obstacles that came as a result of moving so many times during her childhood.

Traveling the globe.

Being able to live abroad is not a feasible option for many families, yet it is something routinely offered to military families. Several of the participants in this study were able to perceive this as a benefit.

While she was too young to remember much of Italy, Daisy shares that those memories from her older siblings and parents are often some of their favorite to share. The family was able to visit historical destinations throughout Europe while stationed there that were not afforded to the younger children in the family.

Brandon was also younger during his time stationed in Germany and although he did not have fond memories of the education system there, his time abroad did awaken in him a desire to "explore and travel" that he feels he will continue to pursue in the future. For Frank, because he has traveled so much, in the U.S. and overseas, it baffles him that families sometimes rarely leave the state they live in:

> My neighbor, she goes here and she told my Mom she only lived in three states and I that … blew my mind. I was like, oh my goodness. I've been in like 30 states let alone outside the US. And the last tally I think it was 14 countries I've visited.

Being able to be a world traveler is something that Zion enjoys as well. He recalls being able to visit different countries, even see the Great Wall of China during his time in South Korea. He believes these opportunities far outweigh possible hardships in this life:

> I liked it. I like that opportunity, the travel and see different places. Uh, I felt like it's a great way to grow up. And not like the Army's not always great. People have to deploy

> and all that. And some people don't come back, it's a sad truth. But I feel like the army's something [that] needs to go around. Because it helps you build like who you are. To me, that teaches you a lot.

In reflection, Zion thinks he may have missed out by not moving as much as other military-connected adolescents. Sage says he feels when his dad turned down orders for Germany because, in retrospect, he would have liked to have had the chance to visit Europe because he felt he might not get the opportunity as an adult unless he joins the military like his father.

Excitement of new beginnings.

While several participants spoke about the difficult experiences they had moving as a part of a military family, others perceived moving as a benefit. For Brandon, moving to a new place was a routine part of his childhood. It meant he had the chance to start a new chapter in his life each time he moved:

> Like I know how like some military kids are like, 'oh man and my friends I have to leave them now' but I don't feel that way. I don't know. I've been always just kind of like living for the next adventure sort of.

He claims that this is why he and his brother "don't really trip" when their mom comes home with new orders to move to a new military post.

Leslie states that there was a process that she would go through each time the family found out they were going to move:

> First, I'm excited to go somewhere but [then] I'm like I know it's going to be hard to adjust. … it makes you wish, you're like, 'Man, can my dad just get like, can we get PCS again?' Because it's like we can start over again. It's like everywhere we move, it's a new start.

This process was one of the things she says she misses the most when her dad retired from the military. The family realized that they would never move again and be given an opportunity to experience that fresh start in a new place.

Daisy also moved several times during her childhood and claims that the long stretch of time living in Virginia was the hardest experience growing up:

> I guess I had kind of gone sick of living there because I knew everyone from third grade to sophomore year. So, I wanted to experience something new because I knew everyone there and I mean it was cool to visit New York because it was six hours away and we could drive there, and then come back, but I was ready for something new.

As stated earlier, moving is difficult for Lindsey. Yet, she said that being able to move back to a previous duty station feels less like starting from scratch and more like starting again:

> It kind of gave me a sense of hope. Because when we left, my nana was like we might come back here one day. And then he got the orders and we came back here. It wasn't as bad as other moves when we're moving somewhere, and I don't know anyone. I had a foundation here.

Leslie, Zion, and Lindsey all got to experience coming back to a previous duty station and reflected that it did make the transition easier due to the familiarity with the study station.

Unable to move from a bad situation.

When Sage's dad was deployed during his 7th grade year, he and his brother found themselves in a tough spot when the only person capable of caring for them was a family friend. The time Sage spent away from his family helped him to develop empathy, which he identifies is a benefit, yet he still looks at the experience in a negative light:

> [My aunt] had her own kid so besides my dad giving her money every month, she didn't have a lot to give to us so we didn't have the nicest clothes like I have now and something like that. Kids would pick on me because of that. When kids [would] pick on me and stuff like that, I only know that they just don't know that sometimes, I just couldn't afford it and I have the opportunity to have nice things. I just humbled myself and I just learned like... I still feel kind of blessed.

While he felt helpless at the time, he can now see that this experience did strengthen him, in the long run, to see that what people say to him "doesn't really mean anything."

Leslie, who shares that she has been having a tough time in high school the past few years, dealing with issues of anxiety, bullying, and overcoming a sexual assault, states that one

of the hardest parts was that “you can’t run away from these issues. You can’t stop them. You can’t move to another place” because her dad had orders to stay in this city no matter the issues his daughter faced.

This was also an issue that Brandon faced, he spoke of making his transition from female to male and the unwelcoming environment where this experience initially took place. He claims that his freshman year of high school was the worst due to the bullying he endured. Yet, he admits that he didn’t think about the fact that his mother’s role in the military prevented him from being able to move from an unwelcoming school to a more inclusive one. In fact, he claims he would “probably just stay” anyways and deal with the issues versus running from them.

Difficulty adjusting.

While nearly all participants saw themselves as adaptable because of their military-connected adolescent identity, this didn’t diminish the fact that moving, according to Lindsey, is simply “exhausting:”

> Just the constant moving is probably the worst thing because you get comfortable in a place and you get involved and stuff, and then you have to leave. It's just like you meet people and then you kind of think they're your friend and when you're there, everything's great, and then you leave…

Daisy shares that while she wanted the excitement of moving after being in one place for too long, having to move after a long tour is probably the hardest:

> We had never moved to [the Midwest] before so it was like a big change. And getting used to like living out here in like the country because we were coming from the east coast, which is very different and so it was kind of weird moving over here.

According to her, their parents tried their best to help them integrate into the new community, but it was still a hardship to have to leave behind something that you learned to count on.

Elias states that he feels one of the hardest things about adjusting is that you never know when a change is going to be asked of you as a military-connected adolescent:

> Like every year I would always have that fear at the end of the school year thinking we might move because I already had the idea with military that you would always move, move, move, move because I had a bunch of friends that were leaving around me … and eventually, I just had that idea in my mind that every year there's a chance of you moving …

For Elias, the lack of control over when a move was going to be was far scarier than the actual move itself. While being able to adapt to any changes that come was something he perceives as part of his identity, the lack of control over when these changes will come does make it harder to adjust.

Bullying and trust issues.

Being the new kid in school often brought an increase in attention for military-connected adolescents. While some participants claim they liked the excitement, others felt that it just made for more opportunities to endure bullying.

Although he didn't perceive it as such at the time, Elias states that he often felt isolated when he lived in El Paso as an elementary kid, because his new kid status left him without a good batch of friends. Brandon also shared multiple examples of bullying, although he perceives this bullying had more to do with his transgender status than the fact that he was a military-connected adolescent.

For Frank, he claims that his pride in being linked to the military often brings him some unwanted attention, like some peers "scoffing" at him because he proudly wears his U.S. Army lanyard to school each day, but the biggest experience he had with bullying was during his time in Germany:

> I mean it's kind of like bullying I guess we'll leave that one word. When you know its stuff like, oh you know, Germans they, "Stupid Americans." … And so that also made me feel even more appreciative of our right to freedom of speech and I can go on Facebook and see people blasting the President and not disappearing you know.

While he didn't experience bullying on an individual level, his experience with bullying as part of the culture from his home country, as well as his link to the U.S. military stationed overseas did have an impact.

When it comes to responding to parental deployment, Lindsey and Leslie appear to have internalized this experience in very negative terms. Both young ladies express having some severe issues with trust and abandonment as a result of parental deployment and consistently having to cut ties with friends and communities because of the military's high mobility.

For Lindsey, this fear makes her more protective and apprehensive about opening up to new people:

> It makes me more cautious to like get really close, to be more open up with them because I'm used to moving after like a year or two. So, like after a while like I just won't let myself get too attached to people because then I just leave and have to go start all over again. … Like one of my biggest fears is I'll get really close to people like letting them in and they'll just leave. So almost like an abandonment thing and like a lot of people don't know that about me.

Lindsey shares that these feelings have impacted her ability to date. She claims she had difficulty getting close to a boyfriend one summer and that the relationship ultimately ended.

Leslie's trust issues come from not only moving so often but also because of her dad's emotional and physical distance from the family, which was especially difficult due to his absence taking place during her senior year:

> I came home [early one night] because I got my foot stepped on at prom and I thought it was broke. My mom was on the phone with him and he never talks about me. He always talks about my brother. He hasn't contacted me in 4 weeks now. He didn't even call me on my prom. I kept on reminding him; he never called. This feeling [of being] unwanted and stuff like that then it makes me wonder like is there something with me?

Leslie wasn't sure if her father was going to be home to attend her high school graduation, which caused her anxiety to flare up in an already stressful situation. He did end up showing up for graduation but caught a flight back to his government job overseas the very next day.

Coping Strategies for Military-Connected Adolescents

Fight or flight is a natural response to adversity. For military-connected adolescents who perceive their wings as clipped, forcing them to stay in one place until the military orders the family to fly to a new place, the act of fighting back begins to be the only option. Participants in the study found that developing different coping strategies and seeking out support helped them learn to understand their role in the military, to survive their experiences, and even learn to thrive.

Religion.

Finding sources of support is something participants shared as a vital resource in learning to cope with their experiences as a military-connected adolescent. Most of the participants stated one place they found relief was through religion. Daisy states that her family's religion – Catholicism – is an important part of their identity as they devoutly attend church every Sunday. A major part of this stems from the fact that her father had plans of becoming a priest before he traded in his robes for a set of military fatigues, and his faith was something he worked to instill in his children. Daisy says this helped her to cope during struggles in her life.

Frank, who also spoke at length about his family's connection to their church, states people often don't understand the danger and hardships that comes with this life, so his faith is the only thing he can always rely on when he encounters a problem as a military-connected adolescent:

> … the biggest thing that people don't understand is I mean every job is dangerous you know, a teacher, janitor work like a janitor like you know you could go to work and not come back. But with your parents in the military, it is a solid 50% of the time, even when they're just going to work and who knows there could be a misfire, especially in the range, there could be a misfire, they walk the wrong way two miles and then they got blown up by an artillery shell. And so, that's probably the biggest thing they don't understand. And or like deployments of a year. Going to bed every night praying that your dad is still alive. I think that's the last thing they'll understand.

Sage also mentions turning to prayer when he found himself feeling lost when his dad was deployed or he was having to prepare to move again. Leslie, who like Brandon, states that they were raised in a religious home, yet found themselves not practicing it as much as other participants. However, Leslie found that the power of positive thinking is just as helpful in these same situations:

> We didn't really pray much but we always hoped. You know, when you – you know, when you say you can speak things into existence. That's how we thought about like, oh, he's going to be okay. Speaking into existence so that's all we did.

Optimism, which was shown to be a facet of the perceived military-connected adolescent identity, became a source of support for Leslie in these situations which allows her to make sense of them.

Counseling.

While religion helped Sage work through difficult times, he stated that it wasn't enough when his father deployed during his middle school years. He found himself upset and lost to the point that he talked with his ex-step aunt, his caregiver at the time, about seeking help:

> How I cope with it was like.. I'll just talk, I'll just let it out and I'll talk to you about it. … I got upset because you know the situation I was in so I just talked to a counselor. She told me, she gave me some advice or something like that because it was really difficult. … it did help.

While he only spoke with the counselor once, he did find that talking about his issues was a useful coping tool. He says he now has begun talking with his dad, his teachers, and even his brother when he finds himself dealing with something difficult.

Sibling relationships.

Deployment can bring a family closer together as they deal with the absence of a loved one, many of the participants spoke about the strength of their relationships with their siblings. Daisy, who never found herself lacking for the presence of her nine siblings, states that the

relationship she has with her sisters is strong, even with those who have moved out of the house. As a family, they talk almost every day which helps her to know she can rely on them. For Leslie, the bond she has with her brother is the only one she perceives as reliable in her family:

> I got his name tattooed on my back in Japanese. I really love my brother. My brother is literally my other half, I guess. … And he always let me sleep in his bed, I never slept in my own bed, at all. I always slept with my brother because I was scared …

Leslie says that although they had a typical sibling relationship and fought sometimes growing up, she knows she can always rely on him and views him as her past, present, and future protector.

Sage claims that his relationship with his brother was extremely close, common for twins, but he insists that having a brother to go through all these experiences as military-connected adolescents made it easier to cope:

> It would have been really tough 'cause me and my brother we're real close and we talk about a lot of things and he's like, Oh, he's been around and he's the one I could talk to whenever I have an issue with someone and if it wasn't for him, it probably would have been a difficult for me emotionally and like mentally 'cause I'm like, I'm going through this alone. It's like well for sure like I'm going in, I at least have someone who's on my side. So, it's a good thing.

This isn't to say that being a part of a military family magically makes the sibling relationship better. While Lindsey stated that she had a tougher time dealing with expectations as the older sister in the family, she also finds herself dealing with feelings of jealousy between her and her sister as they relate to being part of the military:

> One of my sisters, my middle sister, she loves being a military kid. She's like, "I can't wait till we move again and all of this." She's like, "I can't wait to get out of here." And I'm like, "Girl, why?" And then I'm jealous of my youngest sister because she's five. And by the time she's maybe middle school or my age, my dad will be out in the Army. He'll be retired and that'll probably be in Georgia. She'll go to middle school with the same people and then go to high school and graduate with them, versus me and my sister having to go to middle school and high school with different people and everything.

Although she thinks that growing up in the military gave her certain opportunities, the notion that her younger sister won't have to deal with the same situations and obstacles as she does upset her and she thinks it may have impacted their relationship.

Extracurricular participation.

Coping with moving into a new school was made easier when the participants joined in with clubs, sports, or other extracurricular activities. Participants used these groups to help them find friends and to have a place to escape the stress of being a military-connected adolescent, an opportunity to feel accepted in their new setting. Finding a connection with people in school helped Daisy to meet new people each time she moved. Lindsey uses her time working on the school newspaper to meet new people who have similar interests and passions and could escape into that club when she was feeling stressed. Leslie also found that to be true and joined several leadership and social clubs in school to help her feel more connected and to give her purpose as she felt she "needed something else in [her] life." Elias also looks to clubs like JROTC to help him find a place to belong and feel like he is a part of something he views worthwhile:

> JROTC is a big part of my life right now like literally. This morning I had practice but after school I always have activities. … It does push stress like any other after-school activity. It kind of gives me a better feel.

As a junior next year, Elias plans to serve in a leadership role in JROTC, which gives him pride, but he realizes that his experiences as a military-connected adolescent set him up to handle the stress of such a big responsibility.

Sports is the avenue of choice for Sage, Zion, and Bailey to find connections and support growing up. With cross country, basketball, and track, Sage played sports year-round to keep him active and maintain peer relationships. Zion, who claimed to not "do a lot of extra activities," said that football was a big part of his time in school and the best way he found to meet people:

> I never played football until I got back to the states in fifth grade. That was my first year. I used to only play basketball and baseball. Sports always has helped me get friends. I always meet my friends through sports somehow. That's basically how I met all my friends.

Zion feels that athletics is a great way to help military-connected adolescents find a quick way to connect and become part of a school when they move. This is something that Bailey agrees with and participated in when she finds herself in a new school setting:

> Well, sports. That's always the first thing. I started... I went to practice and everybody was like, 'This is the new girl.' And then over here, I didn't really... I think it was the first or second day, and then I say, 'Can I eat lunch with you all?' I didn't know anybody. And then I guess, as time went on, more people started talking to me.

While playing sports helped her to meet people, she also called it her "getaway" it gave her an outlet to get away from the stress of being a military-connected adolescent as she could funnel her focus on the sport.

Frank, who also used sports as a way to integrate into a new school, found that clubs outside of school setting also helps him to find acceptance. As a Boy Scout, Frank knew that friends could be found the moment he located the closest troop. Being a member of this organization helps him to find support each time he moves and also gives him a place to keep his mind off of the worry that came each time his dad was gone. Brandon also used outside clubs like the Kudos, a local chapter of a black youth fraternity as a means of developing relationships.

Educators for support.

Participants who perceive the school they were in as welcoming found their teachers and counselors solid sources of support to help them deal with the struggles of growing up as a military-connected adolescent. Bailey expresses she had some apprehension before she moved to her current school, but that the teachers made the transition smoother:

> But the faculty in... I love the faculty, the counselors, and the principals. I feel if you go to school, you should feel you can go talk to any teacher or faculty member. Among other

> schools, there are two thousand kids. You couldn't just... the teacher will be like, "What's your name?" Over here, they know you. It makes you feel like you're more welcome.

Knowing that if she had a problem she could rely on her teachers for help makes her feel supported, which she believes helps her to "work harder than [she] used to," which improved her grades, ending her time in high school on a strong academic note. Daisy also feels that her previous school was a great source of support while her father was deployed, which made the experience easier. She remembered that because the community has a strong military base, they had assemblies in school to talk about what was happening and make sure the students knew the school supported them. Daisy acknowledges that the support and understanding of the communities she has lived in has been helpful for her and her family.

When Sage lived in Virginia, he had a chance to experience what it is like to be in a school that didn't have a strong military presence. He could feel the difference in support when he was at schools that were not near a military community because he felt less supported by the school in terms of being part of the military culture. He feels that more schools need to recognize that they have military-connected adolescents who often feel left out in school. Brandon, on the other hand, states that even though he always lived in communities near military posts, there was a clear distinction between those who supported military-connected adolescent and those who did not:

> … it's hard to move around for some people. … That is hard to change from one set into another like so quickly. … Kind of like, when I got here I didn't really know where anything was. When I was a freshman, I was confused or whatever. Like, I feel like nobody really kinda helped me. I needed it, but I mean, I figured it out finding classes and stuff the first day.

Brandon did say that some of the responsibility does fall on the military-connected adolescent to speak up and inform their teacher that they are "not just coming from another school" but are new because of their connection to the military culture. He thinks that if more teachers knew that

their new students were a part of the military culture, it could be more advantageous for military-connected adolescents.

Detaching from emotions.

One way several participants claim to cope with the stress of the military culture is to simply tune them out and isolate themselves from those feelings. Many of the participants would say things like "I'm used to it now," or "It doesn't faze me" because they have learned to accept the unpredictable nature of this life as a part of who they are.

The hardest experience for most military-connected adolescents is parental absence due to training or military deployment. While many families grow up in single-parent homes, there is a difference for those who are doing so as part of the military culture as opposed to the single parent home due to other circumstance. Children who grow up without a parent get used to only have one, but if you do have a second parent who lives with you, but "you don't know if they're ever going to come back," this causes extra anxiety for them, according to Leslie. However, focusing on these feelings constantly, according to Lindsey, "wasn't a good thing," so they must find ways to detach from those feelings in order to get by.

Brandon claims that not only is it unhealthy to worry all the time, but there is also this unspoken need to have to stay strong for their military parent in an attempt to make it easier for them to deal with being gone as well:

> We kinda have this thing where, before, but not now, that we kinda have to stay strong with, like, in each other's eyes. And like, I remember the first time I've seen my mom cry, was like, when we use to live in Kentucky. And like, that was in my entire life that she had. And so, I feel like I had to do the same thing.

Brandon insists holding back the emotions he felt because of the experiences growing up as a military-connected adolescent is part of the duty of being a supportive child for his parent. Daisy also felt that the emotion she expressed needed to match what she thought she experienced when

compared to other military-connected adolescents. While she experienced the hardships of deployment, her father came home relatively the same. Daisy acknowledges there is a greater "emotional toll obviously for people whose parents come back and their parent has lost a limb or god forbid their parent has died and now they have to deal with it." As such, she feels that she always has to check her emotions because she knows there are others who suffer far worse than she did.

Elias claims that he has difficulty showing emotion on multiple occasions and attributes his disconnect with his emotions to growing up in this culture:

> It's just kind of like the flu or something. … you build an immunity and eventually, you just get used to it and I feel like that's the same thing I guess because my brother was introduced to it at a younger age. He got used to it a lot quicker than I did.

While most would think the suppressing or detaching from their emotions is a negative thing, Elias views developing this skill in a positive manner because it allows him to remain calm in stressful situations and develop better self-control, which he perceives as being a benefit for him as a future adult.

Advice for other military-connected adolescents.

As the military-connected adolescents in this study are winding down and wrapping up their time as youth members of this culture, they did have some advice for future military-connected adolescents that they believe will help others to better respond to and make sense of the experiences they will likely face.

While most of the participants perceive themselves as extroverts, they also feel being bold, brave, and forward makes it easier to start over in a new place – even if that means they have to force themselves to do it. Zion says military-connected adolescents should "try to be outgoing" because it can reduce the stress that comes from being the "new kid" and having to find new friends, because if you are shy, "then your high school life is probably going to be

boring, honestly." Bailey, who was admittedly the shiest of all the participants, knew that she was going to have to push herself out there if she was going to survive in each new setting:

> I just - like I'm always like 'okay, don't be as shy,' because I am shy when I first meet people. So, I'm like 'don't be as shy. Talk.' Well, I'm just like, they're not going to talk to me if I don't talk to them. So, I try to open up more I guess.

While she knew it would require her to come out of her comfort zone, Bailey feels this forced extroversion allowed her to meet more people and enjoy school.

While Lindsey claims that her general plan when she moves into a new town and school is to "wing it," the one piece of advice she would give military-connected adolescents is to start small when trying to find your place in a new setting, so as to not feel so overwhelmed:

> In my friend group and stuff, I'm really social. I'll talk a lot, but I don't go out of my way all the time to talk to people…. [So,] I kind of look for one person I become friends with and talk to, and then branch off from there. Like become friends with their friends and then go from there.

Daisy also feels that trying to just make one friend on that first day of a new school is a good goal and a great way to cope with the stress of being the new person.

Trying new things is also a great way to help make the experience of being a military-connected adolescent easier, according to Frank. While his extroverted personality makes it easier to meet new people, he says that simply exploring a new place and looking for new experiences helps to make his life more exciting. Brandon would agree with Frank and he encourages students to realize that military-connected adolescents have much to offer if they are willing to try new things:

> Keep involved in your school 'cuz it's fun. Get some confidence. Don't be scared to be in groups and clubs and all that. Don't feel like you're not up to where everybody else is at 'cuz you just moved here. You can be how everybody else is. You can be popular. You can have friends. You can sit at the table with whoever you wanna sit with. You can be on a sports team, just try it out and you already got that resiliency in you. … you keep working for it, it doesn't matter how far you think it's away from you.

As Brandon explains, the ability to overcome any situation is already a part of who military-connected adolescents are at their core, they just need to remember that fact when they find themselves in difficult situations.

It is the reality that they have experienced so much and been exposed to the diversity of the world at a higher level that should help military-connected adolescents to model empathy and open their hearts more to others, Leslie claims. They can be good role models for peers on how to care for others. Sage wants to advise military-connected adolescents to remember that while they have the power to adapt to changing situations, one thing that shouldn't change is who they are on the inside:

> … the best thing to do is to be yourself, most importantly because, at the end of the day, there's going to be people that you encounter [that] don't care about the person you are ... so, the most important things to be yourself …

This was something many of the participants realized only after they had fallen into the wrong crowd, so they caution future military-connected adolescents that it is better to be alone and true to yourself until real friends show up than be a follower and change who you are just to fit in.

The Lasting Impact of Growing Up Military

Membership in a culture is something that impacts a person and that is how the participants viewed their time growing up as military-connected adolescents. While the participants in the current study claim to have internalized several of the characteristics of the culture as part of their own identity, they also were able to contemplate about the lasting impact this will have on them as they approach adulthood.

Military culture as a facet of identity.

According to Elias, "everything that happens in your life, the good and the bad, it all defines who you are as a person." For military-connected adolescents such as him, being a

member of the military culture makes a deep impression on who they eventually grow up to become:

> I understand I'm not in the real military but there are aspects that are equivalent that are like – like my equivalency to the military and with all that, that's just how I feel -- I just feel really connected with that because I can't feel connected to anything else close to that.

While he sees that there are other cultures he belongs to along the lines of his race and religion, he doesn't perceive them as being as impactful on his development as the military. In fact, he stated that growing up in the military culture is "transformative" and that it can help military-connected adolescents "go from being one person to a better person." This perspective helps him to better understand who he is and the choices he has made in his life, and to continue to reflect the image he has in his mind of what members of the military culture should be.

Sage agrees that growing up within this culture is not something outsiders would view as "normal," but that is some of what makes it so impactful on the identity of military-connected adolescents. The unique nature of military service and the military structure makes it harder for people to separate it from who they are. This idea was something that Daisy expressed when explaining the difference between her and her civilian peers:

> … having a parent that's in the military and going to functions, and stuff like that. People don't really understand like why you have to go to that. Civilians don't really - I mean, they can go on base and they can go to functions, but I think it's part of like who [we] are. They don't really know how to like, oh, 'why do you have to do this?' It's part of like being part of the Marine Corps because [my dad] is also part of the Marine Corps and being invested in that, and civilians are just like, "oh, yeah, my dad's in this, but it's not like I'm a part of his work" like we do what [my dad] does.

Most adolescents know their parents have a career but understanding that the family often takes on the military culture as a part of who they are is too foreign of a concept for outsiders to understand. Where a civilian parent who is a nurse, a plumber, or a lawyer can separate their

work and home, a military parent's career takes priority over every person and many of the decisions in a military family. There is no escaping it and the impact that it has on who you are.

Imitating military values in daily life.

Because it makes such an impression on the military family and military-connected adolescents, in it only natural that family members would start to imitate several of the traits they see used or exemplified in the regimented lifestyle of the military culture.

As already shown, military-connected adolescents perceive themselves as more mature than other peers because of the increased self-reliance, discipline and respect they see in themselves. Daisy takes it a step further by saying it has to do with an understanding of what is expected of them in any given situation because "there's a time to be professional and then there's a time to be like crazy and there has to be like a difference between them. Like you can't always do one or you can't always do the other." As such, her perception is that military-connected adolescents are not mature all the time, they just have a better grasp on how they are supposed to behave in certain situations and have the self-discipline to follow through. Frank feels this idea of imitating discipline is something that many military-connected adolescents express nonverbally as well:

> … even sometimes kids will stand there at ease, they'll stand at ease even though they haven't, they've never been in a basic's training or anything. They'll stand there, feet shoulder-width apart with their hands on their back, … just like their dad has told them to when he's yelling at them or when he's disciplining them. And that's the biggest thing that I found.

This mimicking of their military parent – whether it is taught to them or not – is a clear sign that someone is connected to the military culture in his opinion.

Another clear sign of being raised around the military is the concept of time management and punctuality. Following a set schedule and learning to manage your time wisely was one of the first things that Elias states he learned from his military father, this was also expressed by

Frank, Leslie, and Zion. Zion also states that he even started to use the 24-hour clock that is used by the military in his everyday life because it was used so often at home.

As explained before, the use of military language and lingo in the home is a common occurrence for participants in the study, but only a few of them actually adopted it as a part of their own speech or used it in different situations. Elias found he uses it often, not only at home but also as a member of JROTC. He and his friends would use it so much that he laughed at how much it "sounds like I'm actually in the military." Frank found that the use of military lingo and phrases at home helped him in the Boy Scouts. He felt it allowed him to fit in easier than his troop mates that did not have the military background:

> I had one time especially, I was the biggest youth leader, so I was in charge of all the youth and we are setting up camp and one of the adults pulled me over and he was an officer and he said 'hey, I need you to set up your platoons and this …' and he keeps on. I know what he was talking about, but he was saying everything, I mean the platoon, V-formation, etc. All the stuff. I know what he was talking about, but the other kid, my second in command, he had no idea what was going on, and then the officer tries expounding some military time and phonetic alphabet which I had known, so I totally got it and then the other kid was so confused, and I was like 'alright look, we just have to line up right there. He wants us in bed by eight o'clock, we wake up at six.' And the other kids were like 'he could've just said that.'

Both Elias and Frank claim that their inclusion of the military culture helps them to mimic it in other areas of their daily lives. It also helps them to feel more connected to the military culture in general.

Military family as a great place to grow up.

Several of the participants voiced their opinion that growing up in a military family is a great thing due to the better opportunities that come with being a part of the military culture. Sage, Leslie, and Bailey all spoke about how they perceive their military home life as more stable in terms of consistent and reliable income, housing, and healthcare. Although Leslie has no real knowledge in the difference between a civilian and military household, both Sage and

Bailey have experienced both, their opinion comes from first-hand experience to support it. As Sage puts it:

> I got teased living in households with different families that are not military, but [I got] to see what their lifestyles are because they're not military and how they have to live in a normal life. Then I've lived with my mom, which was in the lower end of society and she had to live with the lower end jobs and stuff like that. … It opened the door for me to see a bunch of ways of life ...

Bailey mirrored Sage's response; living with her sister affords her stability she knew she would not likely receive if she remained living with her mother. On the other hand, Leslie states she does enjoy the stability, but the tradeoff of having to deal with absent parents and anxiety from the unpredictable lifestyle almost makes it not worth it some days.

Bailey also points out that beyond the permanency her sister gives her, the gains that she has seen was in terms of her academic potential has made life more beneficial growing up as a military-connected adolescent:

> Well, I feel my mom wasn't... she was hard on me but not like my sister is. I feel my sister is hard on me because she knows I can do better and can be something. And my mom just... she laid back … she didn't [do anything].

The fact that she watched her grades improve over the years spent living with her sister was enough to help her see that the military life was the better option.

The participants did not try to mollify the military life through hyperbole and some admitted that while this life is good, it doesn't alleviate the hardships they experience and that the "hard life isn't for everyone," as Elias stated. Daisy points out that growing up as part of a military family is difficult, especially considering the size of her family, but despite these hardships, the opportunities that came as a result of being part of this culture makes it worth it:

> You might not want always to move, you might not want to like leave everything behind or have your parents or parent deploy. It's – I mean, it's going to be hard like dealing with precautions of all that and like the stresses of like certain times of the year … it's not always going to be great, but at times it's going to be really fun and you're going to have a really good community to be with.

Zion couldn't agree more with Daisy about how being a military-connected adolescent was a positive experience for him and one he thinks he might like his own children to grow up in:

> I just think the military life is a really good life. I don't know. I just feel like it would be a good way to raise my kids. If I was in the military, I feel like they would enjoy it, being around the military and it would help them where they're growing up.

While he does admit that bad situations are unavoidable, people have rough lives all over, so at least the military "can set you up for life," making it the better option in the long run.

Choice of military as part of future.

While the participants overwhelmingly agree that the military will always be a facet of their identity and part of their childhood history, when it comes to whether or not their relationship with the military will continue into the future comes in three options: a confident yes, an adamant no, or a maybe for various reasons. For each of them, their perception of, and reaction to their military-connected adolescent experiences weigh heavily in their decision.

Zion, Frank, and Elias see military service as the path they want to follow into the future. All three feel that following their parents' footsteps makes sense and want to take it up a notch by setting their aim for some of the more elite jobs in the armed forces.

The least steadfast of the three, Zion believes his powers of perception and attention to detail will serve him well by focusing on criminology and hopes that a degree in that field coupled with the training he would receive as an officer in the military, will help him to land a career in the FBI. While he trusts in this plan for criminology, he is still not 100% sure he will include the military option, but claims he never once felt as though his parents were forcing the military on him:

> I don't feel pressured, but I feel like I'll be really in the military just because I grew up around it. I feel like I would enjoy it. I don't know why. I don't know if it's because I grew up around it but I just always felt like the military was something that I could do and enjoy.

Right now, Zion plans to attend college on academic scholarships, keeping his option for the military on hold until he feels he is ready to make that move.

Frank wants to follow his father's footsteps and focus on criminal investigation. He has interest in cybersecurity and thinks the military will be his best shot at getting there. The tradition of military service is substantial in his family – he would make the 4th generation to serve if he joins – but he is aiming to first become an Army Ranger, one of the more rigorous positions in the military's ground fighting force. While this has been a dream of his for some time, he understands the sacrifices he will have to make to achieve it:

> My end goal in the military is as a Ranger … it's something that I've done through my research and talking to recruiters. What I'll end up doing is go basic for infantry and then go to Airborne School and then go to Ranger school. It's a long road, they said on average takes about seven years to get to Ranger and so I'll just be a grunt for a while, [but] it's kind of my dream.

The unique skills and training he will receive in these schools should serve him well in cybersecurity, but he firmly believes that the discipline he learned growing up as a military-connected adolescent is what will help him to find success in the future.

For Elias, his plan is to merge both college and the military together from the start by applying for a military academy, like West Point or the Naval Academy, directly out of high school. While these college options are difficult to get in to, he is already working on building up his resume in high school by taking advanced placement courses and excelling in JROTC. While the military as a final career might not be his first choice after earning his engineering degree, he does feel an obligation to serve his country no matter what:

> I mean like my plan was to just get in, serve my four years maybe serve a little extra but probably after that, I would have gotten out and so, I would get out and start my career as an engineer or see where that goes. But of course, there's a lot more aspects. So, it depends if I have a family or not. It depends if the military works out for me and all that. I felt personally as a belief – it's also my dad's belief and I agree with him 100% – I feel that every single person [should] give back at least like you should at least serve four

> years. You don't serve your whole life in the military, you just give a little bit of your time to at least contribute to something of our country.

It is Elias' belief that the structure and discipline he feels growing up in a military family follows the same principles he would like to embrace in his life as an adult. "Besides," he said, "you already have a job when you get out [of the academy]. So, you don't even got to look for a job afterward," which is a plus for him.

It only makes sense that the two participants who had the most difficult time emotionally while growing up as military-connected adolescents would be the most adamant about avoiding it in the future. While Zion, Frank, and Elias all saw their time spent growing up in the military culture as a positive aspect of their childhood, Leslie and Lindsey cannot wait to watch the military life recede in their rearview mirror as they drive as far and as fast in the other direction.

Leslie states that she will miss the monetary and healthcare benefits that come with being a military family, but not nearly enough to continue to stay with them:

> I don't know if I want to go through it again. Having a person leave you that you love so much and then you leave me as one person [only to come] back as a different one. I don't know if I want to go through that kind of up and down kind of situation.

While she did admit she can't control who she will fall in love with and marries, and by staying here in this military community for college means the likelihood of meeting a soldier does increase, she likes that the experiences she already had as a military-connected adolescent means she 'knows how [she's] going to deal with it," if her heart leads her back to this life.

For Lindsey, she sees her future being the exact opposite of what she experienced growing up as a part of a military family:

> I moved around my whole childhood. I don't want to move around as an adult. It's a good experience to have but at the same time, I don't want my kids to have to pick up and start over every few years. I want them to be able to kind of grow that friendship and foundation with people and be able to, you know, 'I've known you since this long.'

In contrast to Leslie, Lindsey knows that even if the man of her dreams shows up if he is a soldier she is going to walk away because the emotional toll this life had on her growing up is too much for her to even contemplate living through it again.

The final four participants – Bailey, Sage, Daisy, and Brandon – have all contemplated how the military might be a part of their lives as they head out into the adult world but have all opted to take a wait-and-see approach for various reasons.

Bailey and Sage both could see themselves joining the service and living the life of a soldier but are going to try college first before making that big of a decision. Bailey says that she does feel some pressure from her sister to join, but is still hesitant:

> She wants me to join the Army and her commander does too. He was like, 'I would write a letter for you.' I was just like, 'I don't know.' She wanted me to go to [Officer Candidate School]. It's like. It's like I want to. I'm just not ready to leave yet ...

While her sister's service makes her want to give back, experiencing her sister's deployment gives her pause, she is not sure that a life built upon absence from your loved ones is the right path for her. However, the selfless service that comes with the military inspired her to go into nursing as a career path.

While Sage can see the benefits he has been afforded through being part of the military culture, he too is hesitant to follow this path:

> I don't want to be in the military. Well, the only way I'd be in the military is to have it pay for my college, but it makes me understand like, living life is tough. And if you don't get the education or if you don't get a good job then [it] makes you realize it's not enough.

Sage claims he and his twin brother have talked about the military as an option in the future and they both agree that it would only be as a last resort to help pay for school and even then, they would join the National Guard first because "if I only have to show up for like one weekend out in a month, that sounds like a good deal."

While serving the military as a soldier is not something Daisy would ever want to do, the idea of following in her mother's footsteps and becoming a military spouse is something she believes she would enjoy:

> … my parents always talk about [me being a military spouse] just because we have such a great like community. Like the young people they meet are very respectful and that's, obviously, like the parent's number one dream for like people [is] to be respectful to obviously the parents and then also who you're dating. It's not like a priority but they would love it if I married into [the military].

Daisy commented that she would be nervous to raise a military family of her own after thinking about all her mom went through, but she is curious if she would approach it the same as her mother did because she sees herself having more of her dad's qualities, she wonders how the stress of this life would affect her in the parent role as opposed to the child role.

Brandon's decision about his future in the military has been an evolving one. While he stated he grew up thinking the military would be the best path for him by joining JROTC and that fact that he "always thought it was kinda cool like [he] used to watch the basic training videos on [his] phone and stuff," the reality of being transgender has forced him to reevaluate if the military is the best option or even an option at all. As Brandon points out, under the current administration, transgendered soldiers who are now serving are being targeted with policies ranging from forcing them to serve under the gender they were born with to even removing them all together while those who want to sign up are being turned away from military service completely. While he is not certain which path he wants, Brandon says he is going to instead focus on his final year in high school and figure out what he wants to do later. Either way, he believes that the military has had a positive impact on his life and that he will miss the respect and pride he has experienced watching his mother serve.

Comparisons to Previous Research

The findings of the current study were that military-connected adolescents perceive, respond to, and make sense of their experiences growing up in the military culture by developing high expectations which impact their lives. These findings reinforce or align with many of the previous findings concerning military culture, military-connected adolescents, and positive psychology.

Both Park (2011) and Dagher et al. (2010) state that spouses and children effectively serve the military alongside their soldier, which was how the participants in this study felt as they grew up watching their parent's chosen profession take precedence over their own needs. This becomes problematic as both Wertsch (1991) and the current study participants agree that being recognized as a military-connected adolescent is difficult because they don't display any outward differences, which can lead to feelings of isolation and being misunderstood as they adopt an outsider identity among their civilian peers in public education.

Pollock and Van Reken's (2009) PolVan Cultural Identity Model claimed that adolescent identity is impacted in two ways: the individual's relationship to their surroundings and how identity is consistently redefined as the individual sees how they are similar or different from those around them. As each of the participants moved to a new duty station, they claimed that there was always a period of adjustment and for some of them, poor decision making as they tried out new identities and surrounded themselves with the "bad crowd." However, in each instance, participants felt like outsiders in their new community as they took on the model's *hidden immigrant* identity because they were not easily identifiable as anything other than 'the new kid,' but they perceive themselves as having a different outlook as a result of their experiences growing up.

While adolescents develop their individual identity, finding cultural connections simultaneously is a great way to bring forth a healthy sense of self (Hylmö, 2002; Schwartz et al., 2012). As the military-connected adolescents in the study grew up and made sense of their experiences, they perceive that their membership within the military culture not only defines them, but they believe their relationship with the military will have a lasting impact on whether they choose to be a part of the culture or not as adults.

The participants in the study appeared to have a strong grasp on their identity, especially as it relates to being a part of the military culture, which would appear to contradict Williams and Mariglia (2002) findings that high mobility often results in problems with identity development when it is impacted by strained peer friendships. However, it is worth mentioning that even though many of the participants are either at the legal age of adulthood or within a few years of being there, they still have many more years of growing up to do, so their identity is still being molded and has the possibility of changing.

Among the differences Wertsch (1991) pointed out between male and female military-connected adolescents, the tense relationship between female youth and their authoritarian military parent is supported by the participants' perceptions in this study. Lindsey, Leslie, and Daisy all mentioned having difficult relationships with their military fathers, although Daisy did so to a lesser degree. Bailey was the only one who didn't express similar feelings, but she had a female guardian who also happens to be a sister and not a parent, which should be considered when making comparisons. Wertsch's findings of a lack of support for LGBTQ youth also appears to align as Brandon faced many hurdles as he completed his gender transition within the military culture. However, he did find support from his military mother and other adults at his mother's present duty station among teachers, JROTC leaders, etc.

President Obama's 2008 Memorandum of Understanding was a directive to help support military-connected children by focusing on well-being, psychological health, and striving for excellence in educational settings. Youth who perceive supportive relationships with educators often find success in education (Bolton, 2006). Since these were things several of the participants mentioned struggling with growing up amid the military culture, it appears that this understanding may be pointed in the right direction. While several participants claim they perceived support in many of their school settings, these are still problems youth in this invisible minority in public education still face a decade after the memorandum was established.

Previous findings often highlighted resiliency and thriving as defining characteristics or resulting facets of identity among military-connected adolescents (Clever & Segal, 2013; Dowling et al., 2003; Easterbrooks et al., 2013; King et al., 2005; Milburn & Lightfoot, 2013; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Scales et al., 2009; Seligman et al., 2005; Theokas et al., 2005; Torres, 2006; Wertsch, 1991). The findings of this study support this same assertion that resiliency and thriving are a common perception of self, and a byproduct of living within this invisible minority.

Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) three major areas of positive psychology focus on contentment with the past, happiness in the present, and hope for the future. As each of the participants shared their beliefs, memories, and perceptions about their own personal past, present, future, they often fell along these same optimistic lines. While the participants shared some serious hardships they still endured, they often stated they had accepted these experiences without anger or resentment and viewed them as just a part of growing up in the military culture. While they are near the end of their youth, the participants perceived the positive advantages that they were afforded as often, if not more, than the sorrow they felt over the pitfalls. They all

spoke strongly about hope and optimism for their futures. These current findings help to establish a focus on military-connected adolescents in a positive light instead of defining them by their losses and hardships.

Among the seven crucial factors that Ginsberg and Jablow (2006) feel relate to resiliency, including competence, confidence, connection, character, contribution, coping, and control, each of the participants in the current study referred to each of them to varying degrees as either a part of how they define themselves (confident, character, competence, and control) or how they respond to the experiences they faced growing up in the military culture (connection, contribution, and coping). Among Zolkoski and Bullock's (2012) protective factors linked to resiliency, the only ones that weren't completely present among the participants in this study were: a strong social orientation, which participants like Bailey and Daisy expressed some difficulty with during their adolescence, and positive self-esteem, which was and has been a difficult thing for Leslie. Yet the other aspects such as: autonomy, independence, optimism, selfless service toward others, easy-going attitude, good self-regulation, viewing adversities as opportunities, and having a demanding yet supportive adult in their life were perceived by the participants as part of their identity.

Carver's (1998) model of response to adversity showed four different ways in which people react to problems in their lives: succumb to the problem, survive with impairment, resilient recovery, and thriving. For each of the participants, the ability to bounce back from a setback and even see how the experience helped to strengthen them was more than evident in their shared their stories and feelings about their lives. The case could be made that Leslie's relationship with her parents and peers, which she claimed were negatively impacted by her experiences as a military-connected adolescent, could be classified as "survival with

impairment" as she clearly suffers from anxiety and trust issues. However, her optimism and plans for her future, including a desire to put together a workshop to help people dealing with mental health issues shows she is using her experiences as a catalyst to help others and herself, which could be considered as resiliency to a degree.

Since one of the gaps identified among previous research was a focus on participants while they are in their youth as opposed to reflecting during adulthood, the current study provides findings to help address this area. Additionally, the current study highlights both stressful experiences along with those that strengthen youth in this culture, so the focus is not just on deficits, but positive aspects of growing up within the military culture. Previous research has often used quantitative data to look at adolescent resiliency and thriving; the qualitative focus of this study adds a different dimension to previous research on military-connected adolescents.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

This narrative inquiry explored the invisible lived experiences of military-connected adolescents. The purpose was to better understand how military-connected adolescents define themselves, their experiences, and make sense of those experiences as a part of the military culture. Chapter 1 provided a brief history and overview of the problem, the purpose, and the three research questions. Chapter 2 included a synthesis of two bodies of relevant literature: military culture and positive psychology. A discussion of narrative inquiry, presentation of participant selection, data collection, and analysis was presented in Chapter 3. The co-constructed narratives of the participants were presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 presented thematic findings. This concluding chapter discusses the limitations of the study, implications, and future research.

Limitations

Data for the study was gleaned from a series of interviews with nine military-connected adolescents. While each of the stories provided a unique glimpse into the lives of military-connected adolescents, a few limitations are inherent.

Since participants were interviewed at a fixed point in their lives, their developmental journey has not yet ended. As they continue to grow, their perspective of their experiences as military-connected adolescents will likely continue to evolve.

Although the researcher's position as a teacher at the high school where these participants attended was beneficial in gaining access, developing trust, and understanding the context of the experiences of military-connected adolescents, the dual role of teacher and researcher could be seen as a limitation. The information that students were willing to divulge to a teacher they see every day might have been different from what they might have shared with someone with

whom they had no prior relationship. Although an effort was spent in developing an interview protocol to avoid this, students may have been motivated to respond in ways that they believed would please an adult who played a role in their past or might do so in the future.

The inclusion of Bailey as a participant could also be considered a limitation. While she did meet the requirements needed for participation including having lived as a military-connected adolescent through her formative years, she didn't become part of the military culture until she was in 7th grade when she left her mother and decided to have her older sister serve as her guardian.

Despite these limitations, it is my hope that this research might make the heretofore invisible lives of military-connected adolescents more visible.

Implications to Educators

The purpose of this study was to not only better understand military-connected adolescents, but also to see how a better understanding of military-connected adolescents could help inform their schooling.

Better Identification Within Public Schools

Schools need to have ways to better identify military-connected adolescents. While it has become routine to collect basic demographic information on students including race, ethnicity, and gender, parental military status is often not collected.

Military status can be divided up into an easy check of the box to indicate active duty, National Guard, Reservist, or military veteran. This could help educators quickly see which students have a military connection.

Professional Development Focused on Serving Military-Connected Adolescents

Schools help to shape behavior, attitude, and value among students and teachers. Multicultural education is already a staple of preservice teacher education as it aids in the understanding of cultural conditioning and learning preferences among different groups. Adding relevant information about military-connected adolescents within a frame of multicultural education could help aid teachers learn more about the identity, stressors, and particular challenges of military-connected adolescents.

Currently, very little professional development addresses the needs of military-connected adolescents, even in school districts with a strong military presence. In the eleven years I have taught in a school district with a large percentage of military-connected adolescents, there has never been a specific professional development related to military-connected children. Not once.

Developing Support Systems in Secondary Schools

Military-connected adolescents need to feel connected to a school to help aid the transition after each move. Schools, especially those near military bases, need a strong support system for military-connected adolescents. Participants in the study claimed extracurricular activities and positive student-teacher relationships helped them acclimate to a new school.

The Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) offers information on military-connected children and provides free workshops for teachers. Information and services are readily available but infrequently utilized. MCEC can also help schools establish Student to Student (S2S) clubs, a student-led organization that eases the transition for military-connected adolescents.

Reinforce and Grow Resiliency

While the nine military-connected adolescents perceived of themselves as "outsiders," they shared several common experiences, beliefs, and perceptions. While many of them appear resilient and confident on the outside, they often felt insecure and isolated on the inside.

While these feelings often led them to seek out fellow military-connected adolescents as friends, it would be advantageous if military-connected adolescents had allies outside of the military too. Teachers can help support military-connected adolescent students by listening to their needs, being patient as they adapt to the new school structure, and reinforcing structure and security within the classroom. Open communication with both the student and the parents could help anticipate changes in behavior that might come from an impending move or parental deployment.

Of course, there is no one right way to approach a military-connected adolescent. Just like children that belong to other groups or cultures, there are norms and common occurrences, but each person may react to the stress of military life and experiences differently. A student's behavior might fluctuate and changes in attitude might occur as families go for long stretches without hearing from loved ones. Finding a way to reach out to military-connected adolescents with empathy and understand can help military-connected adolescents flourish. Or not.

Figure 4 is a one-page handout that could be provided to educators to help them better understand the characteristics of military-connected adolescents.

Reaching & Teaching Military-Connected Adolescents

Military-connected children, which includes school-age children of active duty, National Guard, Reservists or military veterans, have the benefit of being exposed to rich, diverse experiences as a part of the military lifestyle. This exposure helps them to develop ***confidence***, ***empathy***, ***maturity***, and ***adaptability***, yet these strengths do not always guarantee academic or social success.

> "All of [us] are not the same. Some people are a lot more social and outgoing and some of us would not even try. We are just indifferent about the whole thing. And then there are those that are like just really shy, we don't like to talk. This is not just one prime example of what a military child is – there are multiple variations of us."
>
> - Lindsey, 18

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back despite facing adversity. As military-connected adolescents endure high mobility, saying goodbye to friends and loved ones, and parental deployment as inevitable events throughout their childhood, schools can provide an environment that can nurture children, so they can develop the resiliency needed to survive.

Another way to think about this is that "resilience does not mean invulnerability[1]." For military-connected adolescents to be successful, educators need to better understand how members of this invisible minority perceive themselves and the experiences they face throughout their childhood.

Quick Facts About Military-Connected Adolescents

- There are **4 million** military-connected children in the United States
- **80%** of military-connected children attend public schools across the U.S.
- Active Duty military-connected children move an average of **6-9 times** during childhood; **3X more** than civilian children.
- Military-connected children of **National Guard and Reservists** may not move as often as active duty children yet are often the only military-connected child in their school, which can increase feelings of **heightened isolation** when they experience parental deployment.

Common Experiences Among Military-Connected Adolescents

- Military service as a priority over family
- High expectations for home and school
- Moving to new duty stations
- Quick adaptation to new school structures
- Graduation requirement variance by state
- Exposure to diversity
- Developing and maintaining friendships
- Parental deployment to conflict zones
- Feelings on abandonment
- Reintegration of military parent after absence

[1] Kenneth R. Ginsburg, M.D. "Building Resilience in Children and Teens," 2014. American Academy of Pediatrics.

Figure 4: Educator Handout on Military-Connected Adolescents

Avenues for Future Research

Findings in this study presented in-depth research on the perceptions and experiences of military-connected adolescents, there are areas where further research could be done.

Most participants in this study were members of a family who had connections to the U.S. Army. Conducting research with adolescents from families who had connections to other branches of the military could be of value to see if experiences are similar. One wonders how associations with a particular branch of the military might influence an adolescent's perception.

Participants in the current study were between the ages of 14-18 but branching out to collect data from participants in the preteen age range of 12-14 years old might be interesting. While 12-year-olds may not be as confident in their own identity, the early teen years are pivotal in adolescent and adult development (Hylmö, 2002; Muuss, 1988).

Further research could also seek more participants who had overseas experiences as military-connected adolescents. In this study, Frank was the only participant old enough to recall experiences he had overseas in detail. Other participants' families were stationed overseas when they were in elementary school or younger. Finding more participants who also experienced the benefits and struggles of life overseas could supplement current findings.

Final Reflection

In this narrative study, nine military-connected adolescents allowed the veil that hides their culture from the world to be pulled back. They shared who they think they are, achievements and successes, losses and sorrows, hopes and dreams. Military-connected adolescents see themselves as confident, caring, and capable of handling nearly anything life has in store for them. The perceptions and responses to military culture shared by participants

indicate a childhood colored by high expectations, relationships both strained and strengthened, and the development of myriad coping strategies.

Although there were only nine participants, their voices provide a richness to the research concerning military-connected adolescents. In a nation that has been at continuous war around the globe, where our country's fighting force needs to be in prime position to defend this nation, ignoring the children left behind seems indefensible.

Military-connected adolescents face hurdles in their lives on a scale often unmatched among their civilian counterparts. Their resiliency in the face of these experiences and their ability to thrive continues to be an inspiration to the youth, parents, and educators who encounter them. Perhaps we will reach a day where military-connected adolescents are no longer invisible in schools. Perhaps our gratitude for the role they and their parents play in supporting our national defense won't be invisible either.

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Appendix A: Invitation to Participate

January 22, 2018

Good day,

You are receiving this letter to let you know about an opportunity to be a part of a study concerning military-connected adolescents.

There are currently more than 4 million military-connected children in the nation, with more than 80% of them attending public schools. Since they look the same as civilian students, these military children become an invisible minority with secondary schools. The purpose of this study is to understand how military-connected adolescents define themselves and their experiences to see how this understanding could better inform learning and teaching.

Possible participants, such as yourself, have identified because they meet the following criteria:

- Have one or more parents who serve in any branch of the U.S. military AND have served throughout the majority of your childhood,
- Have moved to different duty stations (both within the U.S. and overseas) during their childhood because of their parent's military career, and
- Have endured a parental deployment of their military parent to a conflict region during their childhood.

Those selected for this study will need to commit to a series of interviews Mrs. Jennie Hanna during the spring semester in order to talk about themselves and their experiences as a military-connected adolescent.

If this sounds like something you are interested in possibly participating in, please plan on attending an informational meeting to learn more about the study on **Tuesday February 6, 2018 at 2:40 p.m. in Mrs. Hanna's classroom – Room 152**. If you are unable to attend the informational meeting but are still interested in possibly participating, please come by Mrs. Jennie Hanna's room and speak with me directly.

Thank you for your time,

Jennie L. Hanna

Appendix B: Parental Permission to Participate in Research

Will you allow your child to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Jennie L. Hanna from the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum Department and I invite your child to participate in my research project entitled Invisible Minority: Military-Connected Adolescents in Secondary Schools. This research is being conducted at MacArthur High School. Your child was selected as a possible participant because he or she has one or more parents/guardians who are current members of the U.S. armed forces and meets the following criteria: have been military-connected children throughout their formative years, endured high mobility, and had their military parent deploy to a conflict area.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE allowing your child to participate in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to conduct a narrative inquiry to see how military-connected adolescents define themselves and their experiences as part of the military culture and how do they make sense of and respond to these experiences in terms of resiliency and thriving.

How many participants will be in this research? About 6-10 people will take part in this research.

What will my child be asked to do? If you allow your child to be in this research, s/he will be asked to participate in a series of one-on-one interviews with the investigator listed above in order to share and discuss how participants views themselves as a military-connected adolescent and share their experiences as military-connected adolescents.

How long will this take? Your child's participation will take 30-60 minutes per one-on-one interview. Follow up interviews will be scheduled as needed in order to help with clarification and/or to obtain more information from the participant. If, at any time, the participant misses more than two (2) schedules interviews, the participant's participant may be terminated by the principal investigator without regard to the participant's consent.

What are the risks and/or benefits if my child participates? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will my child be compensated for participating? Your child will not be reimbursed for her/his time and participation in this research.

Who will see my child's information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify your child. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institution Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about your child as a part of this research. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Does my child have to participate? No. If your child does not participate, s/he will not

be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If your child does participate, s/he doesn't have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Will my child's identity be anonymous or confidential? Your child's name will not be retained or linked with her/his responses. The data will be retained in anonymous form at the end of the research.

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your child's responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher would like to contact you again to recruit your child into this research or to gather additional information.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

_____ I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at Jennie.L.Hanna-1@ou.edu or a (580)917-1844. You may also contact Dr. Lawrence Baines, (405)325-3752 or a lbaines@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your child's rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am allowing my child to participate in this research.

Parent's Signature	Print Name	Date
Child's Name		
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)	Print Name	Date

Appendix C: Assent (Over 12) to Participate in Research

Would you like to be involved in research at the University of Oklahoma?

I am Jennie L. Hanna from the Instructional Leadership and Academic Curriculum Department and I invite you to participate in my research project entitled Invisible Minority: Military-Connected Adolescents in Secondary Schools. This research is being conducted at MacArthur High School. You were selected as a possible participant because you have one or more parents/guardians who are current members of the U.S. armed forces and meets the following criteria: have been military-connected children throughout their formative years, endured high mobility, and had their military parent deploy to a conflict area. In order to participate in this research, you must give your assent and your parent/s must give their permission.

Please read this document and contact me to ask any questions that you may have BEFORE agreeing to take part in my research.

What is the purpose of this research? The purpose of this research is to conduct a narrative inquiry to see how military-connected adolescents define themselves and their experiences as part of the military culture and how do they make sense of and respond to these experiences in terms of resiliency and thriving.

How many participants will be in this research? About 6-10 people will take part in this research. If you agree to be in this research, you will be asked to participate in a series of one-on-one interviews with the investigator listed above in order to share and discuss how you view yourself as a military-connected adolescent and share the experiences you have had as a military-connected adolescent.

How long will this take? Your participation will take between 30-60 minutes for each interview. Follow up interviews will be scheduled as needed in order to help with clarification and/or obtain more information from the participant. If, at any time, the participant misses more than two (2) schedules interviews, the participant's participant may be terminated by the principal investigator without regard to the participant's consent.

What are the risks and/or benefits if I participate? There are no risks and no benefits from being in this research.

Will I be compensated for participating? You will not be reimbursed for your time and participation in this research.

Who will see my information? In research reports, there will be no information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be stored securely and only approved researchers and the OU Institutional Review Board will have access to the records.

You have the right to access the research data that has been collected about you as a part of this research. Your participation in the creation of your narrative in an important part of study, so you will be asked to review portions of the study as they pertain to your own narrative. However, you may not have access to this information until the entire research has completely finished and you consent to this temporary restriction.

Do I have to participate? No. If you do not participate, you will not be penalized or lose benefits or services unrelated to the research. If you decide to participate, you don't

have to answer any question and can stop participating at any time.

Will my identity be anonymous or confidential? Your name will not be retained or linked with your responses. The data will be retained in anonymous form at the end of this research.

Audio Recording of Research Activities To assist with accurate recording of your responses, interviews may be recorded on an audio recording device. You have the right to refuse to allow such recording without penalty.

I consent to audio recording. ___ Yes ___ No

Will I be contacted again? The researcher would like to contact you again to recruit you into this research or to gather additional information.

_____ I give my permission for the researcher to contact me in the future.

_____ I do not wish to be contacted by the researcher again.

Who do I contact with questions, concerns or complaints? If you have questions, concerns or complaints about the research or have experienced a research-related injury, contact me at Jennie.L.Hanna-1@ou.edu or a (580)917-1844. You may also contact Dr. Lawrence Baines, (405)325-3752 or a lbaines@ou.edu.

You can also contact the University of Oklahoma – Norman Campus Institutional Review Board (OU-NC IRB) at 405-325-8110 or irb@ou.edu if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, concerns, or complaints about the research and wish to talk to someone other than the researcher(s) or if you cannot reach the researcher(s).

You will be given a copy of this document for your records. By providing information to the researcher(s), I am agreeing to participate in this research*.*

Participant Signature	Print Name	Date
Your Parent's Name		
Signature of Researcher Obtaining Consent	Print Name	Date
Signature of Witness (if applicable)	Print Name	Date

Appendix D: Semi structed Interview Questions

Good afternoon. I want to thank you for giving up some of your free time to help me by participating in this study. I am interested in military-connected adolescents. More specifically, I want to understand and illuminate how military-connected adolescents define themselves as part of the military culture and explore how this understanding could better inform learning and teaching in secondary schools. I will ask some questions, but please feel free to offer any extra details or elaborate to better explain your answer or share anything you think is important for me to understand about being a military-connected adolescent. You also have the option of declining to answer or passing on any of the questions that I ask. Are there any questions before we start?

Interview 1:

Tell me about your family.

Probe with any of the following:

- Tell me about your military parent (job, branch, rank, education, etc.)
- Tell me about your home parent. (job, education, etc.)
- Tell me about the culture, religion or other group affiliation you and/or your family have.
- Tell me about the relationship you have with your military parent.
- Tell me about the relationship you have with your home parent.
- Tell me about the relationship you have with your siblings (if any).
- Tell me about what you perceive it is like to grow up in a military family.

Tell me about some of your experiences growing up as a military-connected adolescent.

Probe with any of the following:

- What do you perceive as some the benefits of growing up as a military-connected adolescent?
- What are some of your favorite memories growing up? Do you think they were impacted by being a part of the military?
- What do you perceive as some of the obstacles associated with growing up as a military-connected adolescent?
- What are some of your least favorite memories growing up? Do you think they were impacted by being a part of the military?
- What is something that you believe your peers don't understand about what it is like to be a military-connected adolescent?
- Tell me about your friends. Do they come from military families too or are they civilians?
- What are some obstacles you have had in forming and maintaining friendships and/or relationships as a military-connected adolescent?
- What experience has a military-connected adolescent has had the most profound impact on you? Why?

Tell me about your experiences in school. (Classes, sports, extra-curricular activities, etc.)

Probe with any of the following:

- How would you describe yourself as a high school student?
- How would you characterize your experiences in school?

- What are some of your favorite memories in school? Do you think being a military-connected adolescent contributed to those?
- What are some of the difficulties you have faced in school? Do you think being a military-connected adolescent contributed to those?
- What do you do when you find yourself facing an obstacle in school?
- What are some things you have done in order to make it easier for you to fit in or seek success when moving to a new school?
- Did you find that moving to a new school put your ahead or behind of your peers? How did you seek to overcome these mismatches?
- Do you think being a military-connected adolescent has impacted your academic potential?
- Do you think being a military-connected adolescent has impacted your education? How?
- What is something you wish teachers knew about what it is like to me a military child?

Interview 2:

Tell me about the different places you have lived as a military-connected adolescent.

Probe with any of the following:

- What are some of the different places you have lived? When were you there?
- Where you ever stationed overseas? How was that duty station different than the ones in the states?
- How would you characterize what it is like to have to move to new places during your childhood?
- Of the different places you have lived, which was your favorite and why?
- Of the different places you have lived, which was your least favorite and why?
- Considering the fact that you have lived multiple places, where would you consider home?
- What is one of your favorite memories about the different places you have lived as a military-connected adolescent?
- What is one of your worst memories about the different places you have lived as a military-connected adolescent?
- How has moving as a military-connected adolescent impacted your friendships and/or relationships?
- What do you do when you move to a new place in order to help make the school transition better?

Tell me about your experiences in having a parent deploy to a conflict area.

Probe with any of the following:

- When and where did this deployment occur?
- Has your parent deployed more than once? If so, did it get easier or harder during the additional deployments?
- How did parental deployment impact your home life?
- How did parental deployment impact your academics?
- How did you keep in contact with your parent during deployment?
- Do you think your relationship with your home parent and/or siblings was impacted during deployment? How?

- What sorts of feelings or emotions would you say you experienced during parental deployment?
- What did you do in order to help focus on home and/or school during parental deployment?
- What were your experiences in welcoming your deployed parent back home?
- How do you think your parent's deployment impacted you (good or bad)?

Interview 3:

Do you think being a military-connected adolescent has impacted your life?

Probe with any of the following:

- Personality?
- Identity?
- Relationships with parents?
- Relationships with peers?
- Do you ever feel like parts of your identity are more visible than others?
- Do you ever feel like parts of your identity are completely hidden or invisible?
- What words would you use to describe yourself and why would you choose those words?
- In what ways are you like your peers? In what ways are you different? How does being a part of a military family impact these similarities and differences?
- Have you ever felt like you were not in control of your own life? Did being a part of a military family have any impact on these feelings?
- How do you feel you identify with the military culture?

Tell me about your plans for the future.

Probe with any of the following:

- Do you think being a part of a military family has had an impact on your future goals?
- Do you plan to continue being a part of the military as an adult?
- What advice would you give to younger peers about what to expect growing up as a military-connected adolescent?

Are there any last comments or thoughts you'd like to add before we end the interview?