

2018-01-03

# The Resiliency of Highly Mobile Military Children: Implications for Military and Education Leadership

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THE RESILIENCY OF HIGHLY MOBILE MILITARY CHILDREN:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY AND EDUCATION LEADERSHIP

by

Kim Diane Hunt

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

August 2017

Dissertation Committee

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION:    THE RESILIENCY OF HIGHLY MOBILE MILITARY  
   CHILDREN: IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY AND  
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## ABSTRACT

The life of a highly mobile child brings educational and social challenges. Highly mobile children who move at least four to five times during their PK-12 grade years generally experience greater difficulty in their social interactions and education than children with a more stable living experience. One specific group of highly mobile children, military children, face these challenges and more, due somewhat to the unique culture of the military. Military children are called upon to move across state lines and/or international borders and typically face multiple school absences and stress related to deployments of their active duty parent(s). There is a lack of research, generally, on the lives of highly mobile military children and, particularly, research that incorporates their own testimony.

This qualitative study was conducted to gain a better understanding of the experiences of highly mobile military children and the strategies they claim to have developed to cope with the consequences of multiple moves. A total of 25 young adults who were highly mobile during their PK-12 grade years were interviewed to gain their perspective. Grounded theory was used to analyze the findings that emerged inductively from their interviews. The unit of analysis was the highly mobile military child; however, some parents were interviewed to provide contextual information about the experiences of their children.

The participants' ability to successfully navigate multiple moves showed that the interrelatedness of having a strong supportive family, being part of a military community that created a sense of belonging, having the benefit of culturally sensitive educators, and having a combination of formal and informal support structures helped these participants build resiliency and the human and social capital needed to navigate the multiple moves they experienced in their PK-12 grade years.

This study responds to the gap in knowledge about the experiences of highly mobile military children by providing their perspective. This study better informs the community that works to support these children, including parents, school educators, and counselors, and it provides important knowledge to better support future generations of highly mobile military children.

## DEDICATION

To David, Allyson, Hallie, Eisley and Fynn – my inspiration for life’s journey. To the participants who gave so willingly of their time and to all military children and their families: past, present, and future.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, and foremost I would like to acknowledge my family – David, Allyson, Hallie, Arthur, Brion, Eisley, and Fynn – for their support throughout this journey. David, for your unwavering support and encouragement throughout the past 40 years and for starting our family on this journey of transitions 30 years ago. Allyson and Hallie, for helping us make each new duty station a home and completing our lives, for motivating me to understand the sacrifices and resiliency of military children, and for being supportive throughout this journey. Eisley and Fynn, for giving unconditional love and inspiring me to be a better person. My parents, who never quite understood but still encouraged my intense desire to pursue education even from my youngest years. And my late uncle, Dr. Donald Hardy, for lighting the fire of discovery and education that would inspire me throughout my childhood and beyond. I would also like to acknowledge our extended military family who have always been there for us no matter where we found ourselves in the world, and particularly, to those who shared their life stories with me.

I would also like to acknowledge the support and guidance of my committee: Chair, Dr. Lea Hubbard, Committee Members, Dr. Mary Jo Schumann and Dr. Christopher Newman. Thank you, Lea, for encouraging my interest in this dissertation topic, supporting me along the way, and providing endless hours of feedback and guidance. Thank you, MJ, for your support and encouragement but most of all for challenging me to think beyond the obvious and to strive for improvement every step of the way. Also, for your partnership and leadership in helping to support military families and organizations in our work at the Caster Center.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow doctoral students who were always supportive and encouraging of one another throughout this process, and especially to those with whom I shared time at the Caster Center: Jenny, Svitlana, Sue, Crystal, Michelle, and Azadeh.

Your support and friendship throughout our time together was invaluable to completing this journey. Thank you to Dr. Laura Deitrick for providing me with the opportunity to work in the Caster Family Center for Nonprofit and Philanthropic Research and to help support such amazing nonprofit organizations in San Diego, and to the other members of the Caster Center team for their support and encouragement: Pat, Connelly, Tessa, Meghan, Aya, Katie, Emily, Lyn, and Kim. I also would like to thank Dr. Robert Donmoyer and Dr. Fred Galloway for seeing past the “just the military spouse” narrative and opening the door for this doctoral journey to begin.

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CHAPTER ONE:  
OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

**Introduction**

The population of the United States is increasingly mobile, affecting the lives of millions of children. According to the United States Census Bureau 2013 report on geographic mobility and migration, approximately 18,358,000 children age 6-17 years moved their residence between 2012 and 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Children who experience multiple moves throughout their PK-12 years encounter many challenges related to education, home life, behavioral issues, and adapting socially with their peer groups (Coulthard, 2011; Finkel, Kelley, & Ashby, 2003; MacDermid, Schwarz, Nishida, & Nyaronga, 2008; Weisman, 2012). The focus of this study is on military children and specifically on one subpopulation of military children – those who moved at least four times in their PK-12 years. These children face challenges similar to other highly mobile populations, such as social challenges (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Finkel et al., 2003; Weisman, 2012) and education challenges (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Catalano, Haggerty, Oesterle, Fleming, & Hawkins, 2004; Gruman, Harachi, Abbott, Catalano, & Fleming, 2008). They also face many other challenges that are somewhat unique due to the culture of military life. For example, the children of active duty military members experience greater stressors as a result of an increase in the frequency and duration of deployments since 9/11, the increase in the number of deployments to combat zones, and the challenges associated with dealing with parents returning from conflict zones with visible and/or invisible wounds and the reintegration of the military member back into the family unit (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008; MacDermid et. al, 2008; Weisman, 2012).

Most current research that has investigated the actions of military children has been rather broad-brushed. That is, it has included those who come from a broad range of military families: Ones in which the parent in the service is deployed, the military parent is wounded, the family has not experienced mobility, both parents are active duty, or the family is transitioning from active duty to civilian life. This study is different because it focuses specifically on a narrow band of highly mobile military children who have spent the majority of their lives within the military culture. As opposed to the majority of military children whose active duty parent serves on average only seven years (Pew Research Center, 2011) and thus were likely to live rather stable childhoods, the military children in this study have moved a minimum of four times in their school years; live in a household with at least one continually employed parent; typically come from two-parent homes, with primarily highly educated parents; and have at least one parent modeling upward mobility due to the parent's longevity on active duty (Clever & Segal, 2013; Finkel et al., 2003). This means they are typically further immersed into the culture of the military community than many other military children and they are of a different social-economic status compared to many other highly mobile populations. These differences create a unique population of military children from which to learn. They provide important insight into issues of resilience as they are asked to navigate multiple moves.

Moreover, while some studies have been helpful in examining the lives and challenges of highly mobile youth within the military community, the direct voices of the military children have been primarily left out or taken a lesser role in these studies. Instead, the children's voices are heard through the translations of those around them: teachers, counselors, and parents (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008; Ruff & Keim, 2014). The preponderance of this research is carried out through the perspective of psychologists,

counselors, and other mental health professionals who are working with military families and children. This mental health lens means much of the research on military children is looking at only a small subset of military children who are already struggling. In contrast, the young adults in this study tell their story through their own lens. Due to the unique experiences of the participants, the study is not intended to represent the perspective of all military children or of all highly mobile children. The participants offer a greater understanding of the experiences, challenges, and strategies developed as they encountered multiple transitions, as well as the social and educational challenges that theoretically might have derailed them.

I begin with a background of the literature to date on highly mobile children in general and then proceed to discuss what we know regarding military children's transition challenges and strategies and the cultural context in which they are raised. I present the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, and the purpose of my research and my research questions. I then conclude with the organization of the study and an overview of the chapters that follow. To assist the reader with understanding the unique vernacular associated with the military community, a glossary of terms and definitions can be found in Appendix A, and a table of research participants and some of the demographic information collected during the interviews is presented in Appendix B.

### **Background of the Literature on Highly Mobile Children**

To understand the challenges high mobility can create for military children in their PK-12 years, it is important to understand the challenges of other highly mobile populations of children. Carolyn Weisman, a lawyer who has worked extensively in school districts with vulnerable populations, has defined these highly mobile populations to include "homeless children, foster youth, children from low-income and/or single-parent households, migrant students, youth in

juvenile correctional facilities, and children of military families” (Weisman, 2012, p. 527). In addition to the highly mobile groups cited by Weisman, Pollock and Van Reken (2009) have identified another group of highly mobile children, Third Culture Kids (TCKs). TCKs have been defined as children who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside of their passport country and who do not identify specifically with one country more than another (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Research suggests that all of these highly mobile groups of children face educational and social challenges.

### **Educational and Social Challenges**

Research has found that multiple moves often result in poor school performance (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Finkel et al., 2003; Grigg, 2012; Herbers et al., 2012). A combination of risk factors in some of the populations of highly mobile children exacerbate educational challenges (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Scanlon & Devine, 2001). Some studies focused on moves that were not natural transition points, that is, elementary to middle/junior high school, and then onto high school. Making a break in this learning at an unnatural point could lead to adverse consequences such as a gap in learning from a difference in curriculum from one school to the next (Gruman et al., 2008; Pears, Kim, Buchanan, & Fisher, 2015).

Some children and families have a much more difficult time overcoming challenges associated with multiple moves during their school years and begin to experience compounding challenges in both educational and social settings (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996; Gruman et al., 2008). Other research suggests that children who live in poverty or come from single family homes may have more trouble navigating multiple moves (Alexander, & Entwisle, 1996). While the preponderance of literature focuses on educational challenges, highly mobile children experience social challenges related to the need to adjust to a new home and new school, and the

trauma of losing friends, acquaintances, and extended family (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Finkel et al., 2003; Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, & Seal, 2014; Park, 2011). Studies also note a lack of belongingness or a sense of “cultural homelessness” among some highly mobile populations (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Military children are a subgroup of children who are also considered a highly mobile population who face similar, but also different, challenges.

### **Military Children**

In 2014, there were 1,326,273 (1% of the total US population) active duty service members in the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard, and of those, 56% were married and 42% had children (Military One Source, 2014). “The largest percentage of minor dependents of Active Duty members is between birth and five years of age (42%). The next largest percentage is 6 to 11 years of age (36%). Almost one-quarter (22%) of minor dependents are 12 to 18 years of age” (Military One Source, 2014, p. 142). Therefore, over half of military dependent children (54%) are in grades K-12. Military children in grades K-12 “move more frequently and over longer distances than most children” (Drummet et al., 2003, p. 280). Like other highly mobile groups of children, military children experience educational and social challenges.

Military children move more often during their school years than most of their peers. The average military child moves two to three times during the service member’s active duty career; therefore, those children who move four to five times move about twice as often as the average military child (Coulthard, 2011; MacDermid et al., 2008). Academic challenges exist among military children who experience frequent transitions in their lives (Catalano et al., 2004; Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008), although there are conflicting results regarding

academic achievement of military children. Researchers from The Project Hope Study (Popp, Stronge, & Hindman, 2003) found that although military children may experience gaps in their education due to many moves, the educational achievement of military children is equal or greater than the national average particularly for those attending schools run by the Department of Defense (DoD) (Popp et al., 2003, p. 12).

For military children, high mobility includes an extra layer of military cultural identity. According to Park (2011), military family identity is intertwined with the work of their uniformed family member. The military culture provides structure and support but also creates a “fortress” from which military families operate, isolated from the civilian world in many aspects (Hall, 2011). Some research has noted there is an advantage for military children who attend Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. DoDEA schools are unique because they serve military families on military installations throughout the world, therefore the children are surrounded by other children and adults who either live or understand the military culture and identify themselves similarly. This unique environment breaks down the barrier of military culture and “the fortress” that military children face in schools with a higher civilian population (Hall, 2008).

Other studies have found that there are many positive, strength-based attributes associated with military children. Despite the evidence of behavioral issues noted in other highly mobile populations of children, in general, military children engage less often in risky behaviors (Hutchinson, 2006) and are more respectful, adaptable, tolerant, and resourceful compared to civilian children (Hall, 2008). In spite of these relative advantages, the literature is clear that military children are often stressed far more than other highly mobile children due to multiple deployments and the dangers of war (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008;

MacDermid et. al, 2008; Schumann, Nash Cameron, Deitrick, Reed, & Doroliat, 2014; Weisman, 2012).

Most of the current studies on military children focus on the deployment issues experienced by military families at a single point in time during the deployment cycle. They neglect the other factors that create the full context of the military family and child. Furthermore, studying the child at one point in time does not offer insight into longer term affects and strategy development, nor does it take into account the cognitive development of the child at the time of the query (Blue Star Families, 2013; Cutuli et al., 2013; Drummett et al., 2003; MacDermid et al., 2008).

### **Individual Strategies to Address Challenges**

In 2014, I conducted a pilot study on the challenges associated with the mobility of military children. The study was focused on the strategies they developed for overcoming challenges associated with moving. The pilot study found that the participants often relied on siblings during the initial months of a move, participated in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music, scouting, etc.) that could be sustained regardless of family moves, avoided new relationships, engaged in the destruction of existing relationships, and overachieved in academics. Additionally, the pilot study found that the strength of families, school and community support, and peer relationships often provided the confidence and strength needed by highly mobile military children to develop strategies to navigate multiple moves. The findings from this pilot study, along with current literature, were used to develop some of the initial research questions for this study.

### Statement of the Problem

Research has shown that the structure of military culture creates challenges to navigating multiple moves for some highly mobile military children (Russo & Fallon, 2014). Yet, while research has been somewhat helpful in pointing us to some of the strategies used by military children to overcome their challenges, we know few details about the development and specific use of these strategies.

Moreover, although there are multiple studies on military families and children, little is known about the social challenges that highly mobile military children face as they transition to new settings from the point of view of the child (Russo & Fallon, 2014). Studies that do exist on the effects of military stressors on military families, and the children, in particular, come from the point of view of those living with – or in positions of supporting – the children such as parents, caregivers, teachers, and counselors. However, research is significantly absent on the lives of highly mobile military children *from the perspective of the children themselves*.

More research on the challenges and strategies that are needed to address the needs of this population of children whose parents are giving enormous service to the US is essential so that we are better able to inform the community as to what works to support these children. Parents, school educators, and counselors need to be more adequately prepared to support future generations of highly mobile military children. This study provides a more in-depth understanding of the challenges faced by highly mobile military children and the strategies they used to overcome these challenges throughout multiple moves by examining these issues from *their* perspective.

As this research will show, successfully navigating multiple moves for this population of highly mobile military children is the result of a complex set of interactions that highlight the

importance of the embedded interaction between family, military culture, the advantage of having culturally sensitive educators, and access to formal and informal supports.

### **Significance**

Highly mobile military children have unique experiences compared to other populations of highly mobile children which create barriers, both academically and socially, that may complicate the ability to navigate their multiple moves. If those who make policy or decisions for highly mobile military children do not know what these challenges are and what ways some children have been able to create strategies to overcome them, then there may be a lack of support structures, or the wrong support structures in place that are ineffectual in helping highly mobile military children navigate multiple transitions. Knowledge about this population will help guide policy and implementation of support structures for highly mobile military children, particularly for future generations of highly mobile military children, to successfully navigate multiple moves. This study is significant for current and future highly mobile military children, the active-duty military family, transitioning military families, and educators. Additionally, the DoD will benefit from the knowledge gained in this study as it works to support military families, retain talented active duty service members, and build morale, all of which are vital for military readiness.

Retention has been an issue in the military community for quite some time; however, only recently has the morale of the family been taken into consideration as a factor of retention (Masten, 2013; Meadows et al., 2015; Park, 2011). In 2004, a Rand study found successful recruiting and retention of the active duty force depends in large part on the extent to which service members and their spouses are satisfied with the military lifestyle (Harrell, Lim, Werber, & Golinelli, 2004). Understanding the support structures highly mobile military children need to

help them navigate multiple moves can assist the military in strengthening the interdependent well-being of military families, which can lead to greater morale within the military family and possibly contribute to a higher retention rate of the active duty military member.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative study of highly mobile military children was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of highly mobile military children and the self-identified strategies and supports the children themselves claim to have developed to cope with the challenges and barriers of multiple moves. This study provides new in-depth knowledge to those who are in a position to support the children and their parents who give so much in the service of the United States: educators, DoD officials, and military leadership.

In order to address this issue of the educational and social challenges associated with a highly mobile lifestyle for military youth, the following research questions were developed:

1. How do highly mobile military children experience multiple moves?
  - a. What are the educational and social challenges that constrain and/or support them as they transition to a new home?
2. What formal and informal support structures exist to support highly mobile military children's ability to navigate multiple moves?
  - a. What role does family play in helping these children address the educational and social challenges they face during multiple moves?
  - b. What role does military culture/identity play in helping these children address the educational and social challenges they face during multiple moves?
3. What are the implications of these experiences on the highly mobile military children as they transition into adulthood?

4. What are the implications for policy development in support of highly mobile military children?

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction to the study and an overview of the components of the study. Specifically, Chapter 1 included background information, the statement of the problem, and the purpose for the study. The research questions, theoretical concepts, and significance of the study were also presented. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on highly mobile children including homeless children, foster children, and TCKs as well as some of the social and educational challenges of these populations. Chapter 2 also includes literature on military children and culture. The literature review demonstrates an absence of the voice of the highly mobile military child in previous studies about military children. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the methodology used in this study and explains how grounded theory and semi-structured interviews were used to gain an understanding of the experiences of highly mobile military children. It includes a detailed description of the study sample; the recruitment of the participants; methods used for data collection and analysis; trustworthiness of my findings; and the limitations of the study, including my positionality as the researcher, the self-reflective nature of the interviews, and the self-selection of the participants. Chapter 4 presents the qualitative findings that emerged from this study. The first section consists of an introduction of the findings. This initial section is followed by an overview of the participants, a discussion of the role of family support and military culture, sacrifices of military children and their families, and the strategies they used for navigating multiple moves and other support structures, as well as an overview of education from the participants' perspective. Chapter 4 concludes with a look at how these strategies have

transcended childhood and the perception of the parents on the multiple moves of their children. Chapter 5 includes a summary of the purpose of the study, the methodology, findings, conclusions, and the significance of the study. Chapter 5 concludes with implications of the study for policy makers, military families, and organizations which support highly mobile military children; it also offers suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO:  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Introduction**

The US population is increasingly mobile and, as such, research on the effects of mobility on families has increased. According to the United States Census Bureau, approximately 18.4 million children, aged 6-17 years, moved between 2012 and 2013 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Highly mobile children come from many different backgrounds. Carolyn Weisman, a lawyer who has worked extensively in school districts with vulnerable populations, has defined these populations to include “homeless children, foster youth, children from low-income and single-parent households, migrant students, youth in juvenile correctional facilities, and children of military families” (Weisman, 2012, p. 527). According to an article in the journal *Military Medicine*, Finkel et al. argue that these children have many problems, “In general, children who move more frequently experience greater difficulty making friends, more school-related difficulties, and more emotional and behavior problems than children who move less frequently” (2003, p. 1019).

This literature review will lay the foundation for understanding the context and environment experienced by highly mobile children and examine research related to the issues they face both socially and educationally. This literature review will also help gain a better understanding of the challenges and strategies of *non-military* highly mobile populations in order to offer greater insight into the experiences of *military* children. I examine the literature describing the varied populations of highly mobile children, the issues they face, the challenges they confront, and the coping strategies they tend to employ. This general overview of highly mobile children is followed by a literature review specifically focused on military culture and

identity, then moves to specific challenges of military children and their families. This literature review was helpful in informing my research. Determining the challenges these children face, and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, is vital to the community that works to support them (including parents, school educators, and counselors) and to future generations of highly mobile children.

### **Highly Mobile Children**

The definition of highly mobile children includes families of migrant workers, those experiencing homelessness or domestic abuse, foster youth, and others who are not from the lower social, economic strata such as military children and Third Culture Kids (TCKs)<sup>1</sup> (Popp et al., 2003). However, studies on the topic of highly mobile children have focused primarily on the effects of high mobility on homeless and foster youth (Grant, Stronge, & Popp, 2008; Popp et al., 2003; Weisman, 2012).

Educational challenges among highly mobile children were found to exist across various socioeconomic groups, age levels, and types of schools (Catalano et al., 2004; Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008). A study of highly mobile children found they are more likely than their peers to have “lower test scores, lower marks, elevated risk of retention, and receipt of more elaborate special education services” (Alexander & Entwisle, 1996, p. 8). Gruman et al. (2008) studied the effects of academic performance and classroom participation for highly mobile children, controlling for other risk factors that might lead to poor student achievement, and found that high mobility had a negative effect on academic performance.

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<sup>1</sup> TCKs are children who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside of their passport country and do not identify specifically with one country over another (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

The following sections will discuss other populations of highly mobile children including homeless, foster, and third culture children in more detail. I will discuss some of the literature examining the challenges experienced by homeless children next.

### **Homeless Children**

Some of the challenges experienced by the homeless population are associated with constant moves and resemble the challenges faced by other highly mobile groups. Highly mobile homeless children experience greater adversity than other children who live in poverty, which results in additional risk to developmental outcomes due to the accumulation of risk factors (Rafferty & Shinn, 1991; Scanlon & Devine, 2001). Mikal, Rice, Abeyta, and DeVilbiss (2013) found that “children who experience homelessness are more likely than others to have changed residences frequently and have high levels of other adversities” (p. 841).

Education challenges of highly mobile homeless children are evident throughout the literature (Buckner, 2008; Buckner, Bassuk, & Weinreb, 2001). Ingersoll, Scamman, and Eckerling (1989) found through a longitudinal study of homeless children, even when controlling for poverty and other socio-demographic variables, students in first through twelfth grades who moved at least three times were 60% more likely to repeat a grade. Researchers also found that the length of time a child was homeless affected his or her academic outcomes. Lower academic achievement is associated with a longer time period of homelessness (Cutuli et al., 2013)

Cutuli et al. (2009) discovered that although homelessness was associated with higher mobility and lower academic achievement, there were some students who were resilient and showed academic “competence despite experiencing risk” (p. 844). Other researchers have noted this resilience in highly mobile homeless youth and have sought to identify why some children achieve academic success despite the risks and others do not. Research conducted by Masten,

Fiat, Labella, and Strack (2015) identified some of the protective factors that either negate or mitigate some of the academic risks of highly mobile homeless children. Among the protective factors found were ones previously identified in resiliency studies conducted by Masten (2013), such as parent-child relationships and good cognitive skills. Masten et al. (2015) also found that “early reading skills may be a protective factor for later learning among the most disadvantaged students, as well as a harbinger of future achievement” (p. 322).

The research on protective factors led Masten et al. to focus on academic success rather than failure for this at-risk population in order to develop adequate training for school personnel focused on promoting resilience in at-risk students. Masten et al. (2015) argued that by enhancing “the neuro-cognitive processes involved in goal-directed, voluntary control of attention; working memory; and self-control of emotions and behavior that develop rapidly in preschoolers and by continuing to develop into early adulthood,” schools can build the resilience of high risk students and mitigate the adverse effects of homelessness and high mobility among this population (p. 322). Masten and his team are currently studying the effects of interventions that improve executive functions, which could potentially apply to all highly mobile children.

Studies have shown that within the homeless population, high mobility is associated with high absenteeism and lower academic achievement in general. However, studies have also shown there is disparity of academic achievement for some within this population. While these studies on highly mobile homeless children are helpful in pointing out the academic challenges that are related to high mobility in general, they are limited because of the absence of qualitative in-depth data that might shed light on the possible reasons and cultural context for group variation test results.

Another population of highly mobile children that has been the focus of a considerable body of research is foster children. These studies find that foster children also have similar challenges as homeless children but there are some interesting differences.

### **Foster Children**

We know that when placing children into foster homes, school mobility is often the result (Morton, 2015). In fact, 69% of foster children are likely to change schools from kindergarten through grade 5 (Pears et al., 2015). Because school mobility is common among foster youth, its effects on their academic achievement have been widely studied (Morton, 2015; Pears et al., 2015). In a comparative study of 86 foster youth and 55 community youth in the Pacific Northwest, researchers found that school mobility was positively associated with behavior problems and negatively associated with academic and socio-emotional competence (Pears et al., 2015). When controlling for earlier behavior problems in kindergarten through grade 2, early school moves were “significantly and negatively associated with the child’s socio-emotional competence in grades 3 through 5” (Pears et al., 2015, p. 1218).

These adverse findings associated with school mobility have been found in other research as well. In a study that focused on the relationship of school mobility among foster children and earning a high school credential, Clemons, Lalonde, and Sheesley (2016) found that “frequent school moves within the foster care student population [was] associated with low graduation rates” (p. 198). Their study of Colorado high school students in the foster care system showed that for every school change, there was a 39% increase in the likelihood a student would leave school without a high school credential, and the odds increased if a child changed schools during 12th grade. Studies conducted by Emerson and Lovitt (2003) and Shin (2003) reflect the same findings for academic achievement among foster youth. However, Pears et al. (2015) found some

of the adverse academic achievement could be mitigated if children are given a strong foundation of skills in the early years of schooling, particularly kindergarten through grade 3, once again pointing to educational interventions that could potentially support these students' academic success.

While the previous studies focused on using quantitative analysis to examine the adverse effects of school mobility on foster youth, Morton (2015) used a qualitative approach to explore the perceptions of 11 foster youth. Morton (2015) found that the most common barriers to academic achievement for foster youth could be grouped into three categories: special education, mobility, and transition. She found that many of the children developed a sense of futility when trying to fit in and felt detached from their current setting. These feelings of being on the outside led to anger and acting out which carried over into the school environment. Morton's work supports the findings of Pears et al. (2015) that students in foster care experienced a greater number of behavior issues, which were associated with lower academic achievement. Morton's findings also suggest many of these behavior problems stem from anger and hurt experienced by foster youth throughout their childhood. While Morton, in her case studies, discussed the various barriers these children faced, she did not adequately address the ways these children overcame their obstacles. In fact, many still seemed to be suffering from the effects of their time in the foster system. A more in-depth qualitative analysis of their coping strategies is missing from the research.

Both homeless and foster youth, in general, experience adverse academic achievement associated with school mobility; however, for foster youth, behavior problems were associated more strongly with low academic achievement than was evident from a review of the research on homeless youth. Another highly mobile population of children are third culture kids (TCKs) who

differ in many ways from homeless children and foster youth. I will review the literature on highly mobile TCKs next.

### **Third Culture Kids**

Pollock and Van Reken (2009) defined third culture kids (TCKs) as children who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside of their passport country and do not identify specifically with one country over another. These children move frequently during their PK-12 years, experiencing cross-cultural and cross-border moves multiple times. Like most military children, TCKs do not usually experience homelessness, they often come from two-parent families, and they do not suffer from poverty (Lam & Selmer, 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Additionally, parents of TCKs are usually more educated and, in general, obtain a higher socio-economic status than most other populations of highly mobile children (Lam & Selmer, 2004; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). Perhaps due to the parents' educational attainment and socio-economic status, research on TCKs has not focused as much on the education challenges compared to social challenges. TCKs, in general, do quite well in school, so studies focused on poor academic achievement do not exist.

In fact, TCKs are more likely to attend college than many other highly mobile populations of children. In a recent study, it was reported that TCKs are four times more likely than non-TCKs to earn a bachelor's degree (81% versus 21%), and 40% of TCKs earn an advanced degree (compared to 5% of the non-TCK population) (Thompson & Hayden, 2012).

TCKs are most likely to attend international schools, which typically have a strong academic reputation and a high multinational composition. Antonio Morales (2015), a high school teacher at an International School in China, asserts that the multitude of international schools contain a "cornucopia of cultures, languages, ethnicities, and educational curriculum,"

which requires supportive programs to assist students to ensure a successful transition to a new school curriculum and culture (p. 52).

In spite of the more privileged life of this highly mobile population, they do experience challenges associated with mobility. Research suggests that they likely will not complete their schooling in one school (Langford, 2012), and studies often point to a sense of not belonging or a sense of cultural homelessness among TCKs (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2010; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009). TCKs are often reluctant to speak with non-TCKs about their life experiences for fear of sounding arrogant or of not fitting in and, like foster children, tend to avoid long-term friendships or attachments because of a past experience with loss and the transitory nature of those relationships (Ittel & Sisler, 2012; Pollock & Reken, 2009). TCKs feel as if they live between different worlds and do not have a feeling of belonging anywhere (Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009; Thompson & Hayden, 2012).

Unlike most other highly mobile populations, parents of TCKs often are highly educated and have achieved a high socio-economic status. However, similar to other highly mobile populations, TCKs move far from home, feel a lack of belongingness, and feel a need to acculturate to new environments. In general, TCKs are also reluctant to form too many strong attachments.

Some highly mobile military children comprise a very small portion of the TCK community, although many have been stationed overseas. The reason military children are a very small portion of TCKs is because military children typically live on military installations and attend American schools with American students when stationed overseas. The existing literature on this sub-group of military TCKs is virtually non-existent, and calls have been made within the TCK community to study this sub-group of military TCKs (Lambiri, 2005).

## **Military Culture and the Children Who Live in It**

In 2012, according to the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, there were 2,228,348 active duty military personnel and 3,066,717 family members (spouses, children, and adult dependents) in the United States. Nearly half of all active duty service members are married and have children (Military One Source, 2015), and these families move an average of two to three times during their military careers (MacDermid et al, 2008; Ruff & Keim, 2014). Military families comprise only one percent of the population in the United States; therefore, despite the almost daily media coverage about veterans returning from multiple deployments, military culture is unknown to most residents within the United States, creating a military subculture within American society (Huebner, 2012; Park, 2011). Many of the people who come in contact with military children and families in schools and communities do not have an understanding of the environment and culture of military families and may be ill-equipped to provide support and understanding in schools or other social settings.

The unique culture of the military creates a sense of identity, not just for active duty personnel but for their families as well (Hall, 2008; Moore, 2011). Family members, for example, normally experience multiple moves, and multiple moves mean a military child must not only transition into a new environment but they must also navigate that environment within the context of the military culture. The constructivist view of identity “assumes a person plays a role in constructing both a sense of who they think they are and the reality within which they live” (Berzonsky, 2011, p. 57). While some characteristics of military children can be found in the other populations of highly mobile children, the culture in which they grow up creates a unique structure and experience. Therefore, to understand the identity formation of military children, it is important to examine how the unique lifestyle of highly mobile military children

and the culture in which these children are raised affect their ability to transition and acculturate into a new environment time and time again.

Recent studies have focused on the military-civilian divide and clashes between the military and civilian communities (Hall, 2008, 2011; Wertsch, 1991; Zucchini & Cloud, 2015). This literature argues that military families are set off from other populations due to the strict structure of military life. Hall (2011) uses multiple case studies of children she worked with in the Department of Defense (DOD) schools overseas to emphasize the different cultural context in which military children live. Hall posits that the insularity of this culture can lead to a lack of belongingness for military children who find themselves in a school or community that lacks an understanding of military culture (2008; 2011).

During active duty, military members and their families have a “strong sense of belonging to a supportive community with a shared mission and values,” which some research has shown can provide a source of support throughout the transition from active duty to civilian life (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 99). The military culture provides structure and support but also creates a “fortress” from which military families operate, isolated from the civilian world in many aspects (Hall, 2011). Military children often express a sense of pride for the service of their active duty parent and their family are providing for their country but also, just as the active duty service member, military children find it difficult to communicate with others who do not understand or identify with the military lifestyle (Hall, 2008; Huebner, 2012; Moore, 2011). This strong sense of community can also cause readjustment issues with military families when they transition to civilian life and no longer feel that sense of connection to the military community (Koenig et al., 2014; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009).

The personality and persona of the military is often characterized as having a strong sense of pride, honor, and integrity (Moore, 2011) that can cause service members and their families to avoid seeking help when they need it. The Department of Defense recognizes this problem and has established protocols and measures to counteract its effects (Drummet et al., 2003; Hall, 2011). Huebner's (2012) research noted that military families "pride themselves on their strength and ability to successfully confront challenge" (p. F4); therefore, they do not readily seek or accept outside help. Despite the higher level of daily stress within the military family when working through deployments and multiple moves, there is a tradition of "soldiering on" without outside help. Hall (2008; 2011), who has extensive experience counseling military families, noted that when military families do come for help, these families have no desire to learn how to become a civilian family; they want help in learning how to live within the military community. Military families want to retain their unique identity tied to military culture; at the same time, they must learn to live within a society that does not fully understand who they are or how they live (Hall, 2008, 2011).

According to Park (2011), military family identity is intertwined with the work of their uniformed family member. Identity is intertwined with military culture and extends beyond what Hall (2011) and Wertsch (1991) refer to as "the fortress": the structure and support within the tight-knit military community. The identity follows them into civilian communities, keeping them separated from others around them and creating the illusion of a warrior class (Zucchini & Cloud, 2015). "While the insularity of military culture promotes unity and resilience for the rigors of war, it can also leave service members less equipped and less comfortable in a civilian environment" (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2014, p. 12). The military culture and the military identity, which become a part of the military family and child, leaves them unable, and

unwilling, at times to explain to their teachers, classmates, and neighbors what their experiences are and how their needs can best be addressed.

Research suggests that the structure of the family plays a role in the challenges faced by military children in general. Finkel et al. (2003) noted that “the negative effects of moving appear greater for children in single-parent families” (p. 1019). Finkel et al. stated that positive family relationships are associated with psychosocial wellbeing (2003). Within military families, children typically come from two-parent households. However, the experience of single-parent households is similar to that of military families when one parent is deployed for extended periods of time which affects the structure of the family (Finkel et al., 2003).

Military families often avoid seeking outside help for stressors they are facing because they cope within a “... structured environment that pressures families to behave a certain way. That is, military spouses and children informally carry the rank of their spouse or parent, which includes guidelines for behavior and pressure to conform” (Drummet et al., 2003, p. 279). Additionally, some families experience divorce and career stagnation, as well as voluntary and involuntary transition out of the military as a result of the inability to transition successfully from one permanent change of station (PCS) to the next (Teachman, 2012).

Unnoticed by most of the country, the children of active duty service members also serve their country, often throughout their entire childhood. The challenges faced by this highly mobile group of children are unique and warrant an investigation into how they navigate transitions. Research points out that the issue of identity and culture is vital to understanding the unique challenges military children face when they transition from one new environment to the next (Coulthard, 2011; Ruff & Keim, 2014). The military lifestyle can be difficult to navigate even when children have been born into it. “While they [military children] are often described as a

resilient group, the cumulative effects of multiple moves and significant parental absences can erode this resilience” (President’s Commission, 2011, p. 13).

Multiple moves require continuing acculturation into a new environment – not always an easy task to undertake – and often places undue burden on these military children. Despite the evidence of behavioral issues noted in other highly mobile populations of children, in general, military children engage less often in risky behaviors (Hutchinson, 2006) and are more respectful, adaptable, tolerant, and resourceful compared to civilian children (Hall, 2008).

Military moves are more likely than civilian ones to be over long distances or international borders, therefore military children must deal with working through the loss of friendships as well as deal with the emotional impact of starting over far from what has become familiar during the previous duty station (Drummet et al., 2003). The longer distance can make adjustment more difficult for children. Multiple moves can disrupt the activities children are involved in, as well as the social networks they have created. They can create a feeling of a rootless life and cause difficulties in building deeper relationships and long-term commitments (Park, 2011). According to Park, this happens “Especially during adolescence, [when] interruption of peer relationships can be detrimental to a child's psychosocial development” (2011, p. 4).

The average military child moves two to three times during the service member’s active duty career; therefore, those children who move five or more times move about twice as often as the average military child (Coulthard, 2011; MacDermid et al., 2008). With each move, military children are coping with a new home, school, and community while still bound by the military culture they did not choose and which plays a prominent role in their identity and how they cope and adjust during transitions (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

Unlike other highly mobile populations, highly mobile military children serve through deployments of the service member in their family and they worry far more than their peers over the dangers of war, and even death, while enduring constant moves (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008; MacDermid, et. al, 2008; Weisman, 2012). These challenges have intensified since the events of 9/11. Park (2011), for example, has written,

Since the start of the Global War on Terror, military children and families have faced multiple tests associated with unprecedented lengthy and multiple deployments; shorter stays at home between deployments; and greater risks of death, injury, and psychological problems among service members. (p. 65)

**Deployment.** An examination of the literature on military children during deployment can provide additional insight into the cultural context in which military children live and provide important information as to some of the challenges these children face. One study of children and caregivers of deployed service members noted that these children experienced more emotional difficulties compared to the national average, and that the length of deployment and mental health of the primary caregiver significantly affected the extent of the emotional difficulties of the children (Barker & Berry, 2009; Chandra et al., 2010). The study by Chandra et al. (2010) used structured interviews at a single point in time with a dyad unit (parent and child) to determine the effects of deployment on the children of deployed military service members. This study found that older youth and girls of all ages were most likely to experience school, family, and peer related difficulties when one parent was deployed. These studies tell us that although many military children enjoy the benefits from having a two-parent household, the increasing length and more frequent deployments of the last decade have undermined that advantage (Chandra et al., 2010).

Many military children struggle with a combination of emotions such as anger, sadness, fear, confusion, abandonment, fear, anxiety, or depression when faced with a deployment, move,

or seriously wounded parent (Blue Star Families, 2013; Hall, 2008; Huebner, 2012). Many families also develop problems during deployment. The increased family pressures and stress are often reflected in the maltreatment of the children when community (military, civilian, extended family) support is lacking. As noted by MacDermid et al., research shows there is an increased risk of child maltreatment during a combat-related deployment (2008).

Although military children have learned many different coping strategies, other people who are a part of their lives can also contribute to children's coping strategies. Research conducted by Blue Star Families (2013) shows that "children are more resilient and acclimate to deployments better when they sense their communities and those close to them support their service member and believe in the importance of their deployment" (p. 95). However, the existing studies of military children and deployment do not distinguish between the highly mobile child and one who may have a more stable and grounded civilian community due to less frequent mobility.

Some military families also face the possibility of a service member returning with serious wounds. Although most research shows that those returning from deployment with serious wounds will most likely be separated from the military and their children will no longer be highly mobile, some wounded military members stay on active duty depending on the severity of their wounds, particularly those with undiagnosed "invisible wounds" such as PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) or TBI (traumatic brain injury) (Schumann et al., 2014). As active duty service members, they will be subject to a possible change of duty station, prompting moves for their children ("Return to Duty," n.d.). We do not know much about those families who are coping with undiagnosed "invisible wounds" other than that they do exist. However, we do know they will face many of the same challenges of children of other wounded warriors but, due to the

culture and mindset of the military, most of what happens within “the fortress” will remain inside the military and not be discussed (Hall, 2008), which could compound the challenges military children face during multiple transitions.

To date, most of the literature on military children focuses on the deployment issues experienced by military families with only a cursory discussion of the multiple moves and adjustments they make over time when moving from one duty station to the next, and most of these studies are completed at a single point in time during the deployment cycle (Blue Star Families, 2013; Cutuli et al., 2013; Drummett et al., 2003; MacDermid et al., 2008). Moreover, they do not provide a reflective look at the time span and cognitive development of the child at the time of the deployment cycle. The studies also do not question how mobility during this time period affects the children from their perspective.

**Challenges of military children during transition.** Recent literature has focused on the process of military service members and their spouses transitioning to civilian life, but it has not fully examined the effect of these transitions on military children during active duty who experience multiple moves. The transition process marks a period of change from one role identity to the next (Ashforth, 2001). Relocation has been identified as one of the primary issues with the strongest impact on military children (Blue Star Families, 2013; Park, 2011; Schumann et al., 2014).

Mikal, Rice, Abeyta, and DeVilbiss (2013) note the transition to civilian life

is generally accompanied by a period of increased stress and decreased wellbeing due to the disruption of, and adjustment to, norms, expectations, social networks, and social capital. Various forms of social support can help buffer the effects of such disruptions, or directly improve outcomes. (p. A51)

The Military Family Research Institute at Purdue University states, “Transitions can bring changes in structure, shifts in family roles, and tensions created by the needs of individual

family members, all of which can generate stress” (MacDermid et al., 2008). However, this literature focuses on a point in time of transition without taking a reflective look at the process holistically and how it affects a person with each successive transition and its impact on their future. Herman and Yarwood (2014) claim that transitions cannot be discussed as simply a singular event but rather should be discussed as an on-going spatial process, due to its fluid nature and the interactions of self with the environment and society. Identity is strongly embedded in military culture, making transitions more difficult because military children need to assess their old roles and sense of identity (Brunger, Serrato, & Ogden, 2013; Herman & Yarwood, 2014). They need to create a new narrative of self to overcome educational and social challenges experienced through multiple moves and throughout the deployment and reunion cycle (Drummet et al., 2003; Koenig et al., 2014; Park, 2011). Studies that focus on interviewing children at one point in time do not take into account the cognitive development of the child; the studies lack the ability to take a reflective look back at how the children have developed strategies for coping with these transitions.

**Education challenges of military children.** There are conflicting results regarding the extent to which military children suffer academic challenges. According to Ruff and Keim (2014), military children comprise nearly four percent of the U.S. school-age population. One study, The Project Hope Study, found that although military children may experience gaps in their education due to many moves, educational achievement of military children is equal to or greater than the national average (Popp et al., 2003). These results are in direct contrast to the reports of academic achievement for highly mobile homeless and foster youth. However, later studies support the findings that academic challenges exist among military children who experience frequent transitions in their lives (Catalano et al., 2004; Gruman et al., 2008;

MacDermid et al., 2008). One exception remains, however. “Students attending DoDEA (Department of Defense Education Activity) schools score above the national average on standardized tests of achievement, including the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) and the Terra Nova Achievement Test” (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012, p. 65). DoDEA schools are unique since they serve military families on military installations throughout the world; therefore the children are surrounded by other children and adults who either live or understand the military culture and identity as they do. While DoDEA teachers do not typically receive specialized training on military culture, their experience of working with highly mobile military children on a daily basis gives them an understanding of this population that is missing from educators and schools that do not experience the same high level of turnover within the military context.

A study conducted by Marine Corps School Liaisons found that the majority of issues related to education were related to transition challenges from one school to the next, such as curriculum differences, credit and record transfer, and graduation requirements (Aronson & Perkins, 2013). Further, “the differences in curricula and school requirements result in educational gaps for military children, which might entail repeating classes and lessons, and missing crucial topics such as multiplication and fractions” (Ruff & Keim, 2014, p. 104). One qualitative study found in the literature included focus groups with children as well as adults: Bradshaw, Sudhinaraset, Mmari, and Blum (2010) reported the most significant stressors during transition from one school to the next included adjusting to the physical campus and culture of the new school, entering school at random times of the school year, and attempting to assimilate into the social groups which were already pre-established.

The wellbeing of the military family has direct implications for the service members and their children (Drummet et al., 2003; Hall, 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008). The wellbeing of the service member is directly related to the feeling of support within his or her family. If the family is not considered in recruitment and retention, it has lasting effects on readiness. As stated in the 2011 special report, *Strengthening our Military Families*:

The quality of education available to military children can affect overall recruitment, retention, and morale. Military families frequently say that the quality of their children's education is one of most important criteria when selecting a place to live. Military children face added stressors due to frequent relocations. (President's Commission, p.13)

The extensive research on education and military children has led to the development of school liaisons on military installations and the creation of reforms such as The Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (ICEOMC) which, when fully adopted, will help to facilitate transitions of military children within the United States (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Esqueda et al., 2012). Help in these areas is accessible, growing, and well-documented; however, what is lacking, even among today's educators, is understanding and knowledge of the social challenges and coping strategies developed by highly mobile military children from their perspective.

**Social challenges of mobile children.** Literature on the social challenges of military children during relocation is scarce. Primarily, the literature examining social challenges of military children focus on education and the deployment cycle and virtually ignore the longer-term social challenges children may face due to multiple moves. Learning to successfully transition among multiple moves seems vital for the future of these children and their families, as well as for the morale of those who are currently serving on active duty. Overcoming social challenges and adapting to constant change builds resilience (MacDermid et al., 2008).

The Military Family Research Institute at Purdue argues, “Although it is generally thought that many personal attributes among individuals exhibiting resiliency may be relatively fixed, the latest literature suggests that those attributes may be optimized – that is resilience can be taught” (MacDermid et al., 2008, p. 18). Therefore, the strategies highly mobile military children have developed can be taught to other highly mobile children to help them build resiliency and overcome challenges. Resilience and social capital formation have been discussed throughout the literature on families and coping strategies of military children. Therefore, these two theories, resiliency theory and social capital theory, were explored to inform the research questions and interview guide for this study.

### **Theoretical Considerations**

#### **Resilience**

There are three areas of resiliency theory that can influence resiliency building for highly mobile military children: individual resilience, family resilience, and community resiliency (VanBreda, 2001). Resiliency is a term that arises often from the literature on highly mobile children and on military children (Cutuli et al., 2013; Hall, 2011; Huebner, 2012; MacDermid et al., 2008.). Many articles focused on military children even use the term resiliency in the title because the relationship between resiliency and successful transition is inextricably linked. Dr. Meichenbaum, an expert in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, describes resilience as the ability to bounce back from stress, “handle setbacks, and perseverance in spite of ongoing stress and even when things go awry” (p. 326). Resilience within the military family and with the military community have a direct effect on the formation of individual resilience for the military child. As reported by Calhoun and Tedeschi (2013), in looking retrospectively over their experiences, some people who have overcome multiple stressors can point to growth in self-confidence,

tolerance, and a broadening of perspective on life that can be directly related to overcoming traumatic events and building resiliency.

Much of this research on resiliency focuses on the support that the family provides in helping their children develop coping strategies to deal with transitions. For highly mobile military children, while family structure is of primary importance, their connection to military culture and their peer relationships are also vital in developing resilience. These strategies are also supported by school counselors, others in the mental health professions, and school faculty and administration (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Bradshaw et al., 2010; Hall, 2008, 2011; MacDermid et al., 2008). This community of supports that builds resilience is also linked to social capital formation.

### **Social Capital**

Coleman's operationalization of social capital is one of the most often used theories in sociology and in research in education (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016). Coleman (1988b) operationalized the meaning of social capital rather than giving it a specific definition. Coleman (1988b) states that social capital "comes about through changes in the relations among persons that facilitate action...social capital is less tangible [than physical capital], for it exists in the relations among persons" (p. S100). Coleman (1988b) goes on to explain that trustworthiness within the group and between the persons is vital in the creation of social capital. A strong community structure and a strong family will build social capital through trust (Coleman, 1988b). Rogošić and Baranović (2016) further explain that social capital is available within the community as well as the family. This explanation of social capital implies the quality of family relationships and the family structure and the quality of relationships between members of the community directly support social capital formation.

The theoretical concept of social capital is helpful in this study because many of the strategies used by highly mobile children, such as family support and peer relationships, suggest that there is a vital link to social capital and successful transitions. Studies have found that peer acceptance was more likely to influence students in a positive way, rather than teacher support, unless the teacher support was perceived by the student to be significantly above average (Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008). According to Catalano et al. (2004), peer acceptance and teacher support provide social capital, which is correlated with higher academic achievement. School, itself, is a place where a child can gain social capital, but for highly mobile children, school mobility means a disruption of the ability to gain social capital (Catalano et al., 2004).

If there are other factors working together within the highly mobile child's life such as family and peer relationships, as well as the wider military "family," then they can bolster social capital and strengthen resilience (Coleman, 1988b). Coleman (1998b) theorizes that if these various elements of social capital work together to create a strong closed network, they can help to mitigate other outside stressors or challenges to the child. Therefore, these strategies may all potentially be helpful for highly mobile military children. However, we need to know more from the perspective of the children, not just from their parents, teachers, and counselors, and we need to know more about how these different forms of support work together to form social capital for highly mobile military children as they navigate multiple transitions.

Qualitative, in-depth interviews could reveal both a greater in-depth understanding of these different support systems and how they work together from the perspective of the highly mobile military children. This qualitative study can also provide a broader understanding regarding whether there are other means of building social capital that have been developed by

highly mobile military children throughout their multiple moves that are thus far unknown. We know that social capital accumulation is important for self-confidence and academic achievement (Catalano et al., 2004). Given the multiple moves experienced by highly mobile children, it seems essential to better understand how these children can acquire social capital to gain the resilience needed to navigate a highly mobile childhood.

**Family structures.** The support and influence of family is directly tied to both resiliency building and social and human capital formation. Although aspects of military life can be difficult for families, positive family functioning boosts a service member's morale, retention, and ability to carry out missions (Shinseki, 2003). One of the most important strategies for successful transition for highly mobile military children is the support of the family: specifically, the support and attitude of the primary caregiver and siblings (Blue Star Families, 2013; MacDermid et al., 2008). However, although there is a plethora of resources available for the military and their families, often military parents do not know these resources exist (Ruff & Keim, 2014).

One of the most powerful factors in determining a military child's ability to transition to a new home is the attitude that is modeled by the parents; parents who convey more of a sense of resiliency will help their children develop resiliency (MacDermid et al., 2008; Palmer, 2008).

MacDermid and his colleagues found,

Without doubt, the single most influential factor in promoting resilience in children appears to be the presence of supportive relationships especially with parents, but also with adults outside the home. Therefore, interventions that target parenting practices, improving parent-child interactions, and fostering additional adult relationships may be particularly useful. (p. 9)

Siblings also play an important role in coping strategies. MacDermid et al. (2008) and Park (2011) suggest that for some highly mobile military children, siblings may prove to be more important than for civilian children in providing a support system that is not readily available in

other places. Siblings travel with them, have similar lived experience, and provide stability and continuity that can help highly mobile children as they navigate their multiple transitions.

The importance of continuity found in this research is instructive as we attempt to investigate the life experiences and consequences of military children who live highly mobile lives.

### **Discussion**

This literature review has examined challenges faced by highly mobile children. I also reviewed literature that gave contextual background to military culture and military identity, which is vital to understanding military children. Some of the strategies for coping and building resilience to help face the educational and social challenges caused by frequent moves were also examined. Given most of the literature on military children focuses primarily on the deployment cycle and, more recently, on the children of wounded warriors (Blue Star Families, 2013; Chandra et al., 2010; Huebner, 2012; Schumann et al., 2014), it seems essential that a focus on the experiences and challenges of highly mobile youth (from their perspective) is needed. It is imperative to hear directly from the voices of the military children who are typically left out or assume a lesser role in these studies. Instead, the children's voices are often heard through the translations of those around them: teachers, counselors, and parents (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008; Ruff & Keim, 2014).

The existing literature is therefore limited in scope and is focused on one moment or event in time, such as during the deployment cycle. Further, the studies that focus on interviewing military children at one point in time do not take into account the cognitive development of the child and the ability to take a reflective look back at how they have developed strategies for coping with these transitions. Therefore, the impact of mobility has not

been effectively studied from the children's perspective reflecting back over the multiple moves experienced during their PK-12 years.

In order to uncover more detail on the social challenges faced by highly mobile military children, this qualitative study, which interviews young adults who were highly mobile military children in their PK-12 grade years, provides an in-depth look at their experiences of navigating multiple moves from their perspective. This study allows the researcher to dig deep and to encourage participants to take a reflective look back at the ways in which they developed coping strategies during their multiple transitions during their PK-12 years. Understanding what strategies have already been identified in the literature for other highly mobile populations has provided some foundation to inform this inquiry on military children.

### CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover the self-identified strategies and supports used to navigate the educational and social challenges experienced by highly mobile military children throughout their PK-12 years. A qualitative design, rather than a quantitative or mixed-method design, was chosen for this study because, as Merriam (2009) points out, a qualitative design is best for “research focused on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied” (p.1). Creswell (2009) notes, “Qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p.5). This study focused on the perspectives of young adults who reflected back on their experiences as highly mobile military children when they were in their PK-12 educational years. Additionally, using a qualitative design was the most effective method to explore the participants’ own interpretation of their “experiences, how they constructed their worlds, and what meaning they attributed to their experiences” (Merriam, 2009, p. 5).

This qualitative design will answer the following research questions:

1. How do highly mobile military children experience multiple moves?
  - a. What are the educational and social challenges that constrain and/or support them as they transition to a new home?
2. What formal and informal support structures exist to support highly mobile military children’s ability to navigate multiple moves?
  - a. What role does family play in helping these children address the educational and social challenges they face during multiple moves?

- b. What role does military culture/identity play in helping these children address the educational and social challenges they face during multiple moves?
3. What are the implications of these experiences on the highly mobile military children as they transition into adulthood?
4. What are the implications for policy development in support of highly mobile military children?

### **Description of the Study Sample**

A total of 33 people participated in the research, including 25 young adults who identified as highly mobile military children and eight parents representing ten of the young adults in the study.<sup>2</sup> The following sections will describe the young adults and the parents in greater detail.

#### **Young Adult Demographics**

The sample of young adults in this study represented most branches of the military: Navy (40%), Marines (16%), Army (20%), Air Force (8%), Coast Guard (8%), and Army National Guard (8%). The rank of the active duty parent ranged from E9 (senior enlisted) through O7 (senior officer)<sup>3</sup>, and four participants reported their active duty parent entered the military as enlisted, earned their college degree, and became an officer (prior-enlisted). Of the 25 young adults who participated in the study, 18 were female and seven were male, two joined the military, and four had spouses or significant others who were active duty or veterans. Two of the

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<sup>2</sup> A table containing all of the demographic details for each participant can be found in Appendix B. Enlisted members typically enter the military without higher education, at a younger age, and typically from a lower socio-economic background compared to officers who come in with college degrees and are typically a bit older at entry into the military.

<sup>3</sup> A full list of ranks for the military branches can be found in Appendix C. Appendix A contains definitions for military terms used in this dissertation.

participants had no siblings, 16 had one sibling, and the remaining seven came from families of three to four children. These young adults were highly educated with 88% holding or currently working towards bachelor's degrees, and 28% holding master's degrees or currently enrolled in a master's program; the remaining 12% had some college or had completed an Associate's degree. With one exception, all participants were employed or enrolled as full-time students. The participants in this study currently reside in California, Oregon, Washington, Texas, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, Florida, Germany, and Greece. Participants moved an average of seven times throughout their childhood, ranging from four to 12 moves. An average of six moves were made during their PK-12 grade years. The median number of moves was five during their PK-12 grade years. Participants reported they had attended an average of six different schools throughout their PK-12 grade years, ranging from three to 13 different schools. Most had attended public schools during the majority of their PK-12 grade years, 17 had attended a Department of Defense school at least once, and two had been homeschooled for a portion of their school years. Nine of the participants had also attended private school at least one time, including parochial and international schools. The majority of the participants, 19 out of the 25, had moved to an overseas assignment at least one time, and ten had moved to an overseas assignment more than one time.

### **Parent Demographics**

A total of eight parents agreed to participate in the study. Out of the eight parents in the study, six of them had one child who participated in the study and two of the parents represented two children who participated in the study, for a total of ten of the young adults in the study. All parent participants were female and were not the active duty parent. Of the eight parents, three

grew up as “military brats”<sup>4</sup>. Parents represented Army, Navy, Marine, Air Force, and Coast Guard. All parents had at least some college with most (six out of the eight) holding bachelor’s degrees or higher. The majority of the parents in the study were employed; of those, the majority worked in education.

### **Recruitment of Participants**

The initial group of interviewees represented a purposeful, convenience sample from Navy, Marine, Coast Guard, and Air Force families who were known to me, the researcher, or known to my family members. The sample was convenient due to the familiarity with the researcher; however it was also purposeful because the participants had to meet the definition set forth by the researcher for this study based on the literature (Creswell, 2009): They moved four or more times during their PK-12 grade years, completed their secondary education, and were not older than 31 years old. During the initial interviews, additional participants were recruited through a snowball sampling technique constructed from the suggestions from the initial group of interviewees who also met the criteria for the study (Creswell, 2009). Most young adults who participated provided at least one other person to contact. Many of those suggested for participation agreed to participate. Other participants were informed of the study through word of mouth of acquaintances of the researcher and contacted the researcher directly to ask to participate.

Participants from the various service branches were included to identify potential differences and similarities of experiences and support among the various branches. Merriam (2009) stated that multiple perspectives are important in qualitative research and provides

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<sup>4</sup> A term used to describe military children.

“significant contributions to the knowledge base” (p. 1). Additional demographics mentioned in the literature that affect the development and challenges of highly mobile children were also considered when choosing participants for interviews to ensure a mix of genders, diversity of schools attended, and presence or absence of siblings (Coleman, 1988a, 1988b; Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008).

The age of the young adult participants allowed me to interview those who completed their secondary education (from 2-12 years ago), experienced multiple moves, and had entered into the next phase of their lives (i.e., post-secondary education, military service, employment, etc.). The age of the participants allowed them to reflect over the course of their entire PK-12 years and allowed them time to have moved into their young adult roles and gained some ability to analyze their experiences. The range of years that had lapsed since participants completed secondary school varied among the participants, and their ability to recall experiences may have affected their ability to recall events. However, participants expressed a great deal of certainty that they remembered their experiences very well. In addition, to fill in any possible gaps in the young adults’ recall, parents were recruited through the young adult participants at the end of their interviews. After completion of the young adult interview, each was asked to provide an introduction and contact information for their parents to participate in the study. All but two parents who were contacted agreed to participate. Of the two parents who did not participate, one did not respond back to the original email communication despite follow-up attempts, and the other chose not to respond after reading and being asked to sign the consent form. Eight parents agreed to participate and were also interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) developed to add additional context about the family during the multiple moves. I continued to recruit to reach across as many branches as possible, to obtain a variety of ranks of

the active duty parent and a mix of genders. Further recruitment of participants ceased when data saturation had been reached, which meant I was hearing similar themes from all participants and no new data was emerging from additional participants (Merriam, 2009, p. 80).

### **Methods**

Charmaz (2006) notes that an intensive interview permits an in-depth exploration of a particular topic with a person who has had the relevant experience. I chose to conduct at least 20 intensive interviews with participants who met my criteria, therefore I created a semi-structured interview guide to ask in-depth questions about their life experiences as a highly mobile military child. A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix D) was used to capture the young adults' experiences relevant to the proposed research questions but allowed for the ability to diverge from a more structured alternative in order to gain more information about a detail or response. Berg (2007) and Kvale and Brinkman (2012) assert that the semi-structured interview guide is the ideal method to gain the most in-depth knowledge from interviewees. Additionally, the questions were designed to inspire in-depth responses from the participants using open-ended questions because, as Creswell (2009) notes, this is the most effective form of questioning in a qualitative design to allow the participants to express their points of view. The interviews required these young adults to adopt a reflective look back on their experiences as military children who moved at least four times throughout their PK-12 years.

While participants needed to move at least four times, these moves needed to be in the context required by the military. A military-related move included: (a) permanent change of station (PCS) orders, (b) a move onto or off of base housing that necessitated a change in schools, or (c) a move at the time of retirement. Because the average military child moves two to three times (MacDermid et al., 2008; Ruff & Keim, 2014), I defined highly mobile military

children as those who moved at least four times during their PK-12 years because that is about twice the number of moves for the average military child.

The interview guide was designed to encourage participants to use a reflective lens to consider the multiple moves, identify social and educational challenges associated with multiple moves, as well as any coping strategies they developed throughout their PK-12 grade years within the military culture structure that helped them attain their self-identified goals. Self-reflection can lead to biases through self-selected memories of past experiences (Bryman, 2012; Kvale & Brinkman, 2012). The limitations of using a retrospective reflective lens were mitigated by interviewing some of the parents. While the unit of analysis in this study was the highly mobile military child, I chose to interview some parents to provide a contextual basis for some of the events and to provide additional information on the multiple moves experienced by the highly mobile military children. Some of these young adults were very young at the time of the earliest moves and recall might have been difficult, therefore parent stories could fill in any gaps from the participants' reflections. Patton (1990) noted that interviewing multiple sources about the same story or experiences can provide triangulation to the information that emerges from qualitative research, which could help mitigate some of the disadvantages of using a reflective lens.

The 33 completed interviews lasted 50-90 minutes and were recorded using an audio recorder to be certain I was able to capture all of the information provided by the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The recorded interviews were then professionally transcribed verbatim from the recordings. Whenever possible, the interviews took place in person, but some also occurred over Skype and FaceTime when geographic location of the participant would make an in-person interview too difficult. Immediately after each interview, a research memo was

written based on the thoughts and impressions of the researcher about the interview and the participant. The memos were written by the researcher to enable reflections on comparisons of previous interviews and to note particular points of interest such as quotes from the interview and information that seemed to contradict or confirm statements from previous participants, as well as to make necessary changes to the interview guide (Merriam, 2009). As noted by Corbin and Strauss (2007), “The very act of writing memos and doing diagrams forces the analyst to think about the data. And it is in thinking that analysis occurs” (p.118). Some of the initial themes that were used to code the interviews were refined through the process of creating analytical memos following the interviews. Charmaz (2006) notes, “memos provide ways to compare data, to explore ideas about the codes, and to direct further data-gathering” (p.12).

### **Data Analysis**

Resiliency theory and social capital theory informed this study, both in designing the study and in creating my interview guide. Because the research questions were derived from the literature, they were already pre-coded to some extent, which aided in the organization and the analysis of the interview data. I also used the codes that emerged from the analytical process of creating memos (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Merriam, 2009). However, I used grounded theory to allow for the emergence of new understandings of the participants’ lives as they related to their high mobility (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 2009). As such, my study was inductive, grounding the theoretical account of my findings in the perception of those who were interviewed (Bryman, 2012).

As Merriam (2009) notes, some data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection. The codes were analyzed for categories, themes, and ultimately theoretical explanations. Grounded theory “provides a procedure for developing categories of information (open coding),

interconnecting the categories (axial coding), building a “story” that connects the categories (selective coding), and ending with a discursive set of theoretical propositions” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Charmaz (2006, p. 2) notes that using grounded theory as a method for analyzing data “consist[s] of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves.” I used this method to continually compare the data collected with the categories that were emerging from the literature and from the stories of the participants such as supports, education, and cross-cultural moves.

I first used themes that emerged from the literature and were used to inform my research questions (Saldana, 2013). I read through the transcripts and listened to the recordings multiple times to be sure I was capturing all of the codes and themes emerging from the data. I then used open coding, looking for chunks of data that were creating common themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2007). The codes were further refined with each reading until data saturation had been reached (Merriam, 2009). In vivo coding was used to allow the verbiage from the interviewees to help guide the categories and themes that emerged (Saldana, 2013). As noted by Guest, MacQueen, and Namey (2012), this type of thematic inductive analysis that arises out of grounded theory can be defined as

a rigorous, yet inductive, set of procedures designed to identify and examine themes from textual data in a way that is transparent and credible. Our method draws from a broad range of several theoretical and methodological perspectives, but in the end, its primary concern is with presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible. (p. 15–16)

Participants’ feelings and perceptions were coded, as well as their actions and the support structures and cultures that shaped their stories and experiences.

Some of the codes and categories that emerged included: family support, parent support, sibling support, locus of control, sacrifice, extracurricular involvement, type of school, education challenges, school structure, curriculum, teacher interactions, social challenges, creating

friendships, formal support from military, military culture, and implications for adulthood. These were later condensed into major themes of support, (or locus of control), education, and military culture.

### **Trustworthiness of Findings**

To ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of my findings, during the interview I adhered to the recommendation of Kvale and Brinkmann (2012) and used techniques such as repeating back an answer for clarification to be certain I understood the participant correctly. I used member checking to determine the accuracy of my findings (Creswell, 2009) by verifying the information from the transcript with the participants. After each interview was transcribed, I sent them back to the participant for any corrections and asked each one to let me know if they had anything to add after reading the transcripts. None of the participants made changes beyond spelling of names and places.

To ensure accuracy, participants were also asked to review their own transcript of their interview to verify the accuracy of the transcription. About 70% of participants returned the transcripts, and all stated they agreed the transcriptions were accurate. Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that member checking is one of the most crucial techniques for assuring trustworthiness of the findings; therefore, once completed, because this study is from the perspective of the highly mobile military children and I wanted to be sure I was not telling my story or somehow overlaying my experiences or the experiences of my family, I asked participants to review and verify the accuracy of the findings in Chapter 4. About 40% of the participants responded and agreed the interpretations portrayed in the findings were accurate and they did not have any issues with any part of the findings from Chapter 4.

## **Limitations**

### **Positionality**

Merriam (2009) has noted that the researcher is the primary instrument in qualitative research. As such, since I also had similar experiences to the participants I was interviewing, it was my intention to approach my research with an open mind and to allow the participants time and space to tell their story and experiences without narration of my own experiences. My position as a military spouse of over 20 years, an educator who has worked in Department of Defense schools in Germany and London, a volunteer in Girl Scouts and school reading programs on military bases, and the mother of two highly mobile children has provided me with a clear yet arguably biased insight towards the effects of high mobility on military children. Due to my personal experience and the initial recruitment of participants, I was acquainted with nine of the interview subjects prior to the beginning of the research (six young adults and three parents).

As the spouse of a Navy officer and mother of two highly mobile military children, I consider myself an insider-outsider. As Patton (1990) notes, the interviewer can hold an insider-outsider status in qualitative research. I consider myself to be an insider because of my personal connection to a highly mobile military lifestyle. However, my role as a mother is quite different from that of the highly mobile military children, therefore I was also an outsider to this particular group. As an insider, I was able to gain respect and unhindered admission into the participants' world due to the trust developed through our mutual knowledge and experiences (Coleman, 1988b). However, as an outsider, I was conscious of my own opinions and experiences and worked to keep mindful of them as I focused on the experiences and opinions of my participants.

As a mother of two military children, I watched as they struggled with moves, feelings of isolation, and alternating feelings of joy and resentment as they navigated their way through new homes, schools, and communities. Through my observations, I noticed many different strategies they would try during our multiple moves. As a parent, I encouraged them to join extracurricular activities because that seemed to make transition easier in their new communities. We attempted to keep a positive attitude about moves, which appeared to have a positive effect on their ability to develop strategies and mitigate some of the challenges that inevitably came with each move.

From my work as an educator and as a volunteer in Girl Scouts and with school-based reading programs, I began to notice similarities in other military children and the way they seemed to cope and adapt with multiple moves. While they experienced challenges and there were some very difficult days, in my classes and in the activities I supervised, it was interesting to watch the way different children adapted to their moves. I noticed many of the same patterns of behavior as I had with my own children such as joining extracurricular activities, not getting too close too quickly, and/or sometimes creating friction before a move to avoid facing the sad feelings of leaving others behind. These observations made it easier for me as a parent, teacher, and activity leader to identify some of those who seemed to be struggling.

While I developed my own theories and ideas about the types of strategies these children used, I did not specifically ask them about the strategies or what worked for them. I now understand the best way to help children navigate multiple moves is to listen and understand through their experiences and perspective what strategies were effective for them and ways in which others can support them. Therefore, it is my intent to bring the stories of these children to the forefront by attending to my biases. I compensated for my biases in multiple ways such as member checking information by repeating back during and sending completed transcripts after

interviews for participants to review. I used member checking to confirm or challenge the findings and test the trustworthiness of my data. I created analytic memos after each interview, which also recorded my feelings and reactions so that I could be aware and minimize them from interfering with my investigation. My intention in creating these memos was, to the extent possible, to identify my own biases or perceptions so the effect on my findings were monitored and the coding and analysis remained as objective as possible.

### **Self-Reflection**

As young adults, the participants in the study were asked to reflect on their early childhood through the present day and discuss, given their current developmental stage, events that may not have been obvious at the time of occurrence. Self-reported data can be biased by the participants' selective memories and the developmental stage of the study participants at the time of occurrence as compared to the developmental stage at the time of reflection (Bryman, 2012; Kvale & Brinkman, 2012). A retrospective look back will allow the interviewee the opportunity to see the collective whole of the transition process and the strategies he or she developed during his or her multiple moves. However, as Erik Erikson pointed out in his book, *Young Man Luther* (1993), when a person takes a look retrospectively at his or her life, he or she can actually create their own meaning making of the situation and become the creator of their own story:

To be adult means among other things to see one's own life in continuous perspective, in both retrospect and prospect. By accepting some definition as to who he is, usually on the basis of a function in an economy, a place in the sequence of generations, a status in the structure of society, the adult is able to selectively reconstruct his past in such a way that, step for step, it seems to have planned him, or better, he seems to have planned it. In this sense psychologically, we do choose our parents, our family history, and the history of our kings, heroes, and gods. By making them our own, we maneuver ourselves into the position of proprietors, of creators. (pp. 111-112)

In other words, participants may have selectively created their past; however, the purpose of this study was to explore, from their point of view, the challenges of highly mobile military

children and the strategies they developed to help navigate multiple moves. With that goal in mind, gaining their perspective (however potentially flawed) offers important insight. As such, my study was inductive and grounded the theoretical account of my findings in the perception of those being interviewed (Bryman, 2012).

### **Self-Selection**

Participants in this study were very enthusiastic about telling their story. Most participants, when contacted, were quick to point out they wanted to be able to counter the negative perception many people had of military children. They felt it was important to get the story of other military children, not just the negative narrative which seemed so prevalent. While the participants in this study were very enthusiastic about wanting to portray a more realistic image of military children, as noted in the findings in Chapter 4, some participants mentioned siblings who had different experiences and struggled more. While I tried multiple times to contact these siblings for interviews, they did not respond to these attempts to be interviewed. It is possible their stories would be quite different from the participants and thus could alter the findings reported here. Therefore, the findings from this study reflect only the experiences and perspectives of those who self-selected to participate, an obvious limitation of this study.

CHAPTER FOUR:  
SUPPORTS AND STRATEGIES TO NAVIGATE THE CHALLENGES  
OF MULTIPLE TRANSITIONS

**Introduction**

In this chapter, findings are presented from the interviews of 25 highly mobile military children and eight of their parents. An overview of the population interviewed is provided in this chapter, followed by an in-depth examination of the experiences and challenges of highly mobile military children and the strategies and support structures they used to navigate their multiple moves. These experiences are examined from their perspective.

**Population Background**

A total of 33 individuals participated in the research, including 25 young adults who identified as highly mobile military children and eight parents representing ten of these young adults. To meet participant qualifications, the young adults had to be from families that had experienced multiple moves and therefore spent a significant number of years (over 20 years) in the military. This is in contrast to the general population of active duty service members who serve an average of seven years for enlisted and 11 years for officers before separating from the military (Pew Research Center, 2011). The participants in this study came from homes with a strong sense of service, a long-term exposure to military culture, and family members who had reached the rank of senior enlisted or officer (see Appendix E for a description of military ranks). Participants in this study moved an average of six times and attended an average of six different schools during their PK-12 years. Most of the young adults who participated in the study experienced at least one overseas move which they reported had a primarily positive and permanent influence on their lives (see Appendix B for a detailed table of participants). While

the majority of participants had spent most of their PK-12 education in public schools, many of the participants had also attended a Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school during at least one tour of duty.

Participants were highly educated and nearly all (88%) held at least a bachelor's degree or were working towards one. While there are not statistics on the level of education achieved by the children of separated service members, compared to the general population with a bachelor's degree (33%), the education level of the highly mobile military children in this study is quite high (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). Additionally, 28% of the participants had earned a master's degree or were currently working towards one compared to 12% of the general population who hold an advanced degree (master's, professional or doctorate) (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

### **Family Support and Military Culture**

Resiliency, which emerged from the interviews, proved to be the most influential factor in helping the highly mobile military children transition among multiple moves. Through the analysis of the interviews, it was clear participants primarily attributed their resiliency to the support of their family and to their sense of belonging or connectedness within the context of the military culture. The embedded interaction between family, military culture, and formal and informal supports available to participants was vital to their ability to adapt. Other factors that had influences on their ability to navigate multiple moves included their age at the time of the move, their grade level in school, the type of school they attended (private, public, DoDEA, etc.), and/or the time of year of the move.

## Family as Support

When participants were asked what they would want civilians to know about military children and their experiences moving multiple times during their PK-12 school years, these young adults most often mentioned the importance of the support of a strong family. Throughout the interviews with both young adults and parents, a focus on the importance of family unity and support emerged. As one participant explained, it is important for everyone “to know how much we value our family and ... that they are our constant” (Marine female child). Another young woman who was part of an Army family and spent most of her time overseas, stated that she and her brother made it through their multiple moves because of strong family support: “I feel, in many ways, you look for an anchor during those years going through school, and for me, it definitely was my family unit that was able to provide that, even amongst all of the instability.” Family was commonly talked about as providing a sense of continuity that was important in supporting multiple transitions. One young man explained,

I was always with my family and so as I moved more and more, knowing that I had my family there had made things much easier. When I was able to rely on my family, it was a great constant. I would know that even if I was in different places, my family was the same, so we're good. (Navy male child)

A young man raised in a Marine family mentioned the strong feeling of being a part of a family unit: “We were kind of the core, my mom, dad, myself, and my siblings would move, bouncing around the country.” Another young woman mentioned the reciprocal support that ensued. She said, “You have to be really supportive of your immediate family. It really brought me and my mom close together” (Army National Guard female child).

In addition to the supportive atmosphere created by family, many of the young adults mentioned their families played a direct role in helping them build coping strategies. One young woman explained, “I think the family unit is really important. I think that's one of the biggest

parts of the whole strategy building in general is just the family unit” (Navy female child). Many explained how their parents would encourage them to join extracurricular activities, which enabled the highly mobile military children to get involved and engaged in their new environment. As one young man said,

I think a lot of it was my parents were pushing for me to get involved with other kids and staying active. I was always a little bit of a quiet kid. They really tried to do as much as they could to help get me engaged with other things, with other people.

One young woman echoed the sentiment saying, “They would just try to help us do things wherever we were, get us involved in things or encourage us.”

Another young woman whose father was in the Navy added, “My dad...was very much encouraging that we don't just sit at home, we needed to do something. He didn't care what that was. Whatever we wanted to do, he was like, ‘Okay. Let's do it.’” Another young woman who was also a daughter of a Navy officer mentioned, “My mom was the one who signed me up for all of my extracurricular activities when I was younger and wasn't able to decide what I wanted to do yet.”

These young adults often mentioned the important role that parents played in providing a safe space at home when they were in an unfamiliar school and facing the stress of trying to make new friends and fitting into their new environment. One young woman whose father was still on active duty in the Navy mentioned, “Coming home was a very safe place for me and my brothers. We needed the time away from our friends to deal with what was happening.” The family support helped to provide comfort when faced with challenges to make friends and assimilate into their new environments. Another young woman from an Army family discussed the importance of knowing her family was there for her:

My parents have always been very, very supportive of my sister and I and anything that we [wanted to] pursue. So I think having their unfailing support and knowing that they

would always be there should anything happen... We didn't have to worry too much about anything else because we knew that we'd be taken care of by Mom and Dad.

One woman who grew up in the Navy and had moved more than 10 times in her PK-12 years explained the benefit of being able to talk to her parents:

We always sat down and we always talked about our day, talked about something new or didn't talk and just sat and ate and listened but I think that too kind of helps to build the family, the structure, and make sure that even if you're having a bad day and you don't want to talk to anyone, you can always talk to your family. It's not like *you* against the world. It's *us* against the world and just creating that family idea.

This idea of support during the multiple moves for the “us” extended to providing support in education.

**Parent support in education.** Parents also offered support directly related to education as children moved from one duty station to the next. Support was mentioned both in terms of helping to fill in academic gaps from multiple moves across different curriculums but also in advocating for their children at school with teachers and administration. Many of the participants mentioned the support of their parents as vital to their transition from one new school to the next. One highly mobile Air Force child explained,

I was highly mobile and there were some challenges to that. I also had awesome parents. They really spent time to make sure that they were investing in me... The reason that I did okay is because I had that family structure to help push me.

Another young adult, the daughter of a retired Navy officer who attended over 12 different schools in her PK-12 years, remembered the direct educational support provided by her mother before each move:

Our mom always bought workbooks and had extra work for us to do while we were moving or asked our teachers if they could make copies of worksheets that were coming up before we would leave, so that we could try and have some semblance of staying on track, even if the new school was going to be very different.

Another young woman mentioned the importance of support due to the time of year they usually moved. “Some moves are always harder than others, but I know that our mom really

concentrated a lot on trying to make sure we never missed any curriculum, even though we had the unusual move time of November.”

One young man raised in a Navy family summed up the importance of military parents supporting and advocating for the education needs of their highly mobile military children when asked what advice he would give to a young military family just embarking on this highly mobile lifestyle:

Educationally, I guess my advice would be just to be involved in your children's education because ultimately, really for most of their life, you're the parent of your child and that's your responsibility to try to find the best education you can for your child and to be involved. You know your son or your daughter far better than anyone. You should be the one that's helping to, or you're in the best position to, give them the best education that you can moving around.

The support they received and the help they received while navigating so many different types of schools, diverse curriculums, and cultures was cited by participants as one of the reasons they succeeded academically.

**Siblings as support.** Siblings were also a very important part of family support during this highly mobile time in their lives. All but two participants in the study had siblings. Those with siblings often pointed to the benefits of having a sibling who shared these moves and challenges with them, helping them adapt to a new home and new school. Siblings often acted as friends and special support systems during those first few weeks, or even months, in a new and unfamiliar setting. As one young woman pointed out, even if the siblings were not interested in the same things, “It was just nice to have somebody else there who was not an adult, who was grappling with the same stuff, even if we weren't necessarily talking it out” (Air Force female child). Another young woman who grew up in a Navy family mentioned, “We [my siblings] had each other through the transitions. It made it easier in that way because there's always at least one

person that we could talk to.” Another young woman who grew up in a Coast Guard family stated,

My sister and I are really, really close. I think that’s because we moved [together]. She was my best friend when I didn’t have friends. When you don’t know anyone, you have your sibling. They know what you’re going through like nobody else does.

These adult children described a special bond that was created among them and their siblings through this shared experience of navigating multiple moves. This bond, which was created through their shared experiences, was not only important as support during the moves but also served as a bond into young adulthood. Thinking back on these experiences, one young woman explained, “There was nobody else who understood my experience and empathized, and had the same feelings and experiences as I did. So I think having her to share that with was essential for me” (Marine female child). A young woman who grew up in an Army family echoed the previous statement:

We [my brother and I] are the only two people in each other's lives that know every single move and have a vision of every single place that each other have been. We don't have one friend that moved to all the same places that we did - it's just the two of us.

**The non active-duty parent.** The non active-duty parent was a vital support as well as a tremendous help in preparing the child for moves. In this study, the non active-duty parent was the mother for all participants, and they felt that this parent was extremely important for their transition and adjustment. One young woman whose father is still active in the military stated,

I think my mom was really crucial to us having any sort of semblance of normalcy with a move. She was kind of the go-to. She is the classic military wife. She has got it all. She's got everything the way it needs to be. She knows where everyone needs to be. She knows whatever you need to do, and she always told us when we were upset that it wasn't so much like a separation or this big change.

Another young woman mentioned,

Well, she [my mom] was the one who was organizing everything and doing everything for us before we got to the new place. Then once we were there, she was the one telling us where to go and who to talk to. What to do at the school or in the new place, or

whatever, like that was really her doing all that, and so that my dad could go to work and do his thing. (Navy female child)

One young woman reinforced the idea that mothers were essential to successful experiences. She explained that she came to realize “how valuable my mom was in growing up and [in supporting] our experiences and that she was always strong and always there for us” (Marine female child). Another young woman raised in an Army family mentioned how her mom made sure the new house felt like home for the children from the first day:

Any place we went my mom always unpacked our rooms first and our rooms were always ready to sleep in. No matter what the rest of house was like, it could’ve been in boxes, our rooms were ready and set and it was still like home wherever we were.

The ability to feel comfortable and at home from the first day in a new house gave a feeling of support and comfort to the young adults throughout their multiple moves.

**Locus of control.** Discussion of family support exposed how these young adults were able (and encouraged) to develop their own sense of control and how much that contributed to their positive experiences. Families gave opportunities for highly mobile military children to feel they had some sense of control over their lives and their moves. Even though all of the participants explained that the ultimate decision about moves was out of the hands of the family, and even the active duty service member, having an opportunity to express their opinions about the move was important. One young woman who grew up in a Navy family described the process her family took before each new set of orders was negotiated and how important she felt being included was in the transition process. She stated,

They [my parents] always helped us to feel like we had some say in the move as well, because even though we knew that whatever choices we made, my sister and I, about where we wanted to go next, it was not guaranteed we'd get those things even if our parents wanted them too just because that's the nature of military life. But we were always told what the next possibilities for duty stations would be. And we were always asked what we thought we would be interested in doing, would we want to go to this place or that place; these are your options. I feel like those were all really key to helping us be ready for the transitions and helping us keep a positive mindset throughout. Our

parents did a great job of-- especially our mom-- of making sure we were prepared anywhere and felt that we had some say.

Gaining a feeling that there was some form of control over their lives was illustrated in the many different examples that they offered to explain how it helped ease some of the anxiety over an impending move. In some cases, the young adults were included in discussions about identifying the top move choices, which also included some decision-making ability over various aspects of their lives such as the school they would attend, the house the family would choose to live in, which bedroom to have, how to decorate their room, and, in most cases, the ability to help make decisions about the packing process.

“Pack outs” – when families were PCSing and all of their material goods were being transported to their new duty station – seemed to be a time when children were given more control over the move process. Many of the participants mentioned having choices over what was packed first, what went with them on their moves, and which items they felt were most important to include in making the move more comfortable. One young woman raised in an Army family mentioned the importance of choosing items during the pack out that brought comfort and familiarity to the transition:

We always had our chosen stuff when we had to pack, there’s always things that always made us feel like home, what made us feel the safest. We always had all our important stuff wherever we lived and slept in transition.

Another young woman raised in the National Guard remembered,

I remember we would go through, then would make piles of things we wanted right away, things that can come in moving truck in a couple of weeks or moving to the smaller house like when we moved from Waltham to Hanscom Air Force base, we had to put some stuff in storage; things that would be okay if we didn’t see them for a while because they had to be put in storage.

Feeling some agency or sense of control, empowered them and helped these young adults process through the multiple moves making it easier for them.

Others explained they felt their parents gave them the confidence to feel in control in a new environment and when making new friends. One young man explained,

I remember my mom explaining, ‘You've got new friends here, you made new friends there, you made new friends here. You're good at it.’ I think my mom telling me that-kind of putting it out for me to see - and able to recognize [my ability] because, at a young age, I didn't understand what was going on, at eight or nine.

When parents were transparent about an impending move, these military children felt most empowered and able to thrive. As one young woman explained, “We knew if there was kind of a hint of a move on the horizon. It was never a secret. It was just kind of like, okay there might be this move coming up but we were always, always, always told” (Navy female child). Another woman explained what her parents told her that gave her a sense of security. She said, “You never know, things happened so fast and things changed all the time, so just know that we're in this together and it's an adventure and we're not sure where we might end up” (Navy female child).

Despite the support they were given, it did not mean that all decisions were easy to accept, even when they had some control over them. One young woman recounted that when she was given the opportunity to stay behind at a place she loved or move to a place she did not want to go – a place that had a bad reputation for experiences among other military children – she chose to move with her family,

They talked about if there was a way for us to stay there for that year, would I want do that, if it was even possible. Although I wanted to for some reasons, my dad was always gone. He was going to be home for a whole year going to the academy. It was a school and he was going to be home every night. We had never had that, so I chose to go.

In the end, the importance of keeping the family together was more important to this military child than remaining in the comfort of the place she had grown to love. Inclusion and transparency were important strategies parents used to help their children feel more empowered about the moves, to create buy-in, and to cultivate a positive attitude despite the fact that military

families, in the end, have little power over when and where the military were assigning them takes them. Moving often and leaving behind friends, family, and familiar surroundings was a part of the culture in which the children grew up and which families became accustomed to.

### **Military Culture**

Another key element of support in helping these adult military children adapt was their embeddedness within the military culture, a culture which led them to feel a sense of understanding and created a feeling of belonging and connection to other military families. All but one participant was adamant about the importance of a military culture in giving highly mobile military children a sense of belonging and identity. The one participant who did not feel it was a unique culture felt it was more of a subculture with many unique attributes.

Highly mobile military children, unlike children of parents who leave the military when they are still young, spend the majority, or all, of their PK-12 years within a military context. Growing up in a military environment with other individuals who were a part of this lifestyle helped many participants build community. One young woman described it this way:

There's this sense of community life, when you move from place to place, when you go to a base. That can be considered home no matter what base it is, even if you've never been there before in part because they look the same. They feel the same and you know that those people there have either experienced what you've experienced or are going to or it's just -- there's an understanding.

Another described the sense of belonging and a military identity that was shaped based on mutual understanding, "It's a culture of understanding [regarding] what you're giving up to serve the country and strong tight-knit communities and kids who can understand each other." A young man who grew up in a Navy family described the feeling of community he observed:

I think it's [the military] a very socially supportive atmosphere for families - or can be. No community is 100% this or 100% that but by and large, the folks in the military are a community that understands the values of community, brotherhood, togetherness, family and want to support each other no matter where in the world you go.

**Connection to other military families and children.** The strong sense of belonging to the military culture also led the participants to discuss how connections to other military children and families provided the support they needed. Military families formed an extension of their own family: "... my support was my family and then my Navy family, my friends that were going through the same thing that I was going through" (Navy male child). This connection gave them a greater sense of belonging. It confirmed they were not alone in this journey and that others were experiencing the same thing, or something similar.

Living on base accentuated this feeling of belonging, especially when first moving to a new duty station. "We had people you'd say hi to; they would greet us because that's what you do in any Army base. People would knock [on your door] and you bring some food over" (Army female child). One young woman mentioned how comfortable it felt for her to be around other military families and how it allowed her to be herself: "I really loved living in Rhode Island because most of the other kids around there were also military kids and where we lived everyone – every family – was a military family. I could completely be myself there." Another young woman mentioned that for her, the connection to other military families made the multiple transitions easier: "It was always easier for me, at least when I was in the States and I had to go back to the States, it was easier for me to connect with military families and military kids."

In addition to giving them a sense of belonging to a community with shared experiences, being part of the military also gave them a network, a support group of sorts. Throughout their PK-12 grade years, highly mobile military children began to realize that other military children understood their experiences without having to explain and clarify what life was like, unlike civilian children who did not have first-hand experience with military life. While most reported having civilian friends, many as their closest and best friends, there was something different

about the connections and understanding they had with them compared with the relationships they had with other military-connected children. One young man who grew up in a Marine family recalled a sense of connection to kids at a new school saying, “There were also maybe two or three kids from the base that went to this off-base school, so it's like we were brethren more or less.”

These adult children explained that when meeting another highly mobile military child there was an instant connection to the other person, the other “insider,” and there was an interest in discovering the different places they had each lived and how their experiences differed or were similar, or even if they crossed paths. One young man from a Marine family discussed at length how the commonality a person shares with another military child was an opening that enabled him to create a friendship. “If someone's a military brat, you obviously have something in common immediately and you lean on that to start a conversation.” Another participant who grew up in a Navy family described meeting other military kids as a relief in terms of social connections:

I think it's just like there's an immediate understanding if you meet another military kid or a military brat and you can relate to each other in a way that other people don't. Because if you've experienced two, three, four or five plus moves and they have as well, its like, ‘oh thank God someone understands,’ and we don't have to be weird. We don't have to have this awkward socialness at first. You can just talk to each other and it's much more normal.

These connections often led to long-term friendships, as described by this young woman:

The people who you do meet and who you are friends with, you form really strong bonds with. Even if you don't talk with them for a while, you immediately can pick up where you left off. I find that that's a -- or at least some of my friends who are military, that's more of a common trait that you can, even if you haven't seen each other or talked to each other in two years, five years, what have you, you can pick up and go right back into the same patterns. Because you have that understanding and that bond of your shared military childhood.

When meeting civilian friends, it often became clear they were part of a culture that was different from those raised outside of the military culture. Many of the highly mobile military children reported shutting down when discussing their multiple moves with those outside the military. They stated it was obvious people were not really that interested and did not quite understand what a nomadic lifestyle was or what it meant to them. As one young woman mentioned, it was easier to relate to other military kids, especially ones who had moved than to try to relate to civilian peers who had never left their hometown:

Most civilian people hear that you've moved schools, at that point 13 or 14 times, and automatically the first thing they say to you is, 'That must be so terrible,' or 'that must be so difficult' or 'how do you make friends?' While the military kids just say, 'Wow, that's interesting I've been to these many places. Where else have you been?'

One young man who grew up in an Air Force family mentioned how much easier it was to understand others who had the same experiences:

If you're a military kid that's highly mobile, there's this camaraderie from doing that. If you're outside of that bubble it's very hard to articulate how you feel or because for me, there was no choice. That's just the life that we lived.

Another young man who grew up in the Navy shared the same feelings:

When interacting with people who have had no military experience whatsoever, it's a lot harder for me. It's a lot harder to understand how their life experiences were hard. Most of the time honestly, most of the friends that I have kept in touch with are military brats.

Another young man who also grew up in a Navy family stated, "We're a very close-knit community. We all look out for one another because we all share that commonality. We all understand what each other is going through."

When living on base or overseas, many participants noted the support offered by other military families and how they all "look out for one another". One young man who grew up in a Navy family stated,

We all look out for one another because we all share that commonality; we all understand what each other is going through. That would be one of the things that it's not just the

military active duty members who serve with one another but also their families with families. We all try to help and provide for one another. That would be one thing that people should know about military life.

Reaching out to other military families is an important part of the transition process and is engrained into the culture of the military family, as one young woman whose father is in the National Guard remembered,

When we would move somewhere and there would be a military family in the area, they'd reach out to us. We'd become close with their family. That always helped the move. Then, say they moved away and another family would soon move in, then we kind of do the same thing. It was just like this rotating pattern of like a family would come out and you'd spread your love to them.

There was a feeling among participants that the military connection is so strong that it overcomes other barriers and boundaries. Differences in political views, identity, and nationalities are put aside because the bond or sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves connects them. This connection helped the participants when transitioning and trying to fit into a new environment. Through their shared military experience, this community is stronger than their differences. One young man raised in a Marine family explained,

You're pulling people from California culture, the Texas culture, and you're bringing it all together. I think that there's a lot more understanding as far as people who are different. It wouldn't seem so because a lot of people think that all military people are conservative, stuck in the olden days and everything like that, but I think in a lot of ways, it's [the military community] a lot more understanding, and tolerant, and open-minded because you're used to having all these different ethnicities, all these different people from different geographic locations.

A young woman who was raised in an Army family, primarily overseas, echoed the previous sentiments indicating that commitment to service transcended political viewpoints:

I always felt like in the military, community [made] someone's political background irrelevant. There was just an understanding and respect for service, but in the sense of you're not serving a specific motive or a certain political agenda. There's a certain bond between military families, irrelevant to the political environment at the time and irrelevant to maybe holding different opinions, and that the opinions within the military are very diverse. The families are very diverse and there's a power in that.... A lot of other Americans don't always realize that.

Additionally, friendships were made across national boundaries with children of other nations' military forces who had also experienced high mobility in their childhood. Connections with other military families gave these participants a military identity which often superseded their national identity. One young woman explained this connection with a friend she met while living abroad:

One of my closest friends is actually the daughter of a Navy officer from another country. We connected right away because we were very similar, our families were very similar and we had the same experiences of a father who deployed and a mother who helped us make the multiple transitions. My connection to her is deeper than to other Americans I meet who do not understand this lifestyle.

**Symbols.** The participants often described their sense of belonging to a military culture by pointing primarily to symbols – representations of their military life. For example, many of the participants mentioned the “base” or “post” and their experiences shopping on a base in commissaries (grocery stores) and exchanges (department stores). These specific locations gave them an identity as a military family and helped the young adults navigate transitions throughout their lives, even into college. One young woman who grew up in a Navy family mentioned feeling at home on a nearby base while she was away at college, even though she had never been to that base before and her father was never stationed there. When she felt the need to get away from the university setting and be in an environment that felt like “home,” she would drive over to the base and sit in the coffee shop to do homework or shop in the commissary or exchange. She stated that “even though it was an Air Force base, it was familiar and I felt like I belonged.”

One very strong symbol of belonging to the military community that was described by many of the participants was the military ID card they received at the age of 10. In many ways, it was a symbolic rite of passage for many of these children who are provided their own military ID card to gain access to the base and the amenities contained in them. As one young woman, whose dad was in the Air Force, mentioned,

Everybody has their IDs, but obviously not the kids that weren't part of a military family, and then just to have that in my wallet next to my driver's license or something when I was older, it's kind of interesting, like a little badge of belonging to that culture.

This symbol of belonging was a physical representation of their identity which made it difficult to give up when they were no longer considered a military dependent. According to one young adult giving up your military ID card was “like getting kicked out of the club and losing your sense of identity” (Navy female child). The military ID card was a symbol of the identity that many of these adult children had owned for 10-16 years. Another young woman from a Marine family echoed this sentiment:

I think the worst thing was when they took away my ID card, then I was like, “no,” because for me I very much identified still being a military child and now just because I'm 26 they're taking it away from me. That actually—that was like the last blow and then even though I identified with that I didn't have any tangible thing to hold on to—to be “I am this.”

Even the vernacular that military children become accustomed to as they grow up creates a sense of belonging and group identity. Although, as one of the participants pointed out, all cultures have their own vernacular, for those growing up in the military culture, this vernacular is a part of who they are and the experiences they have had. As one young woman stated,

I never really realized that “commissary” was not just another word for grocery store in everyday language, until I started having people look at me crazy when I said oh I went to the commissary with my mom, and then I had to explain to them what a commissary was. (Army female child)

Another young woman from a Navy family explained,

You don't use words like commissary and exchange and PCS with someone who doesn't have connections to the military because they have no idea what any of those things are. And you don't really talk about the base or military life with people who haven't experienced it because they just – they don't know or understand what that is. They don't really grasp that the base is a place for families to be as well and not just the sponsor, not just the active duty person. They don't – I mean there are a lot of specialized terms and words and abbreviations associated with the military that if you are not in the know, you would be very lost.

**Sacrifice.** Although a sense of belonging to the military community helped these highly mobile military children navigate their multiple moves, there was also a feeling of sacrifice or service to country that emerged as a common theme throughout the interviews. The young adults understood this was a life they were born into and one that was expected of them. Sacrifice for country, for the greater good, is both implicitly and explicitly taught to highly mobile military children. The children understand more than most the sacrifices of those who serve on active duty through the experiences of their own families and those around them. One young woman from a Navy family summed up the sacrifice for an active duty parent, non active-duty parent and a child in one reflection:

That's a really different thing that military kids go through. My dad, he was deployed for the first three years when I was born. He missed out on a lot of stuff. He missed out on the baby steps. Those things you do as a baby that he wasn't here to see like my mom would because he was deployed.

In the military context, it is understood that the family, to help maintain the service member's ability to serve the country, must also make sacrifices to support the active duty parent. This sense of sacrifice for the greater good or cause within the military culture made it easier to accept change and moving as a necessary part of their lives, even though it clearly presented many challenges for the families and, in particular, for the highly mobile military children. As one young man whose father served in the Air Force pointed out, this lesson of sacrifice and service extends beyond the service member to the family as well:

I think I get a little more defensive when people say negative things about the military just because I was a part of that. I saw the sacrifices that people would make with their time, it's not just them going abroad, [its] what it does to your family, what it does to your kids; us moving around all the time.

This comment made by a female participant who had grown up in an Army family sums up the feelings of many of the participants: "We actually sacrifice a lot, move a lot, live without our families, don't get to see our extended family as much as normal people." It is a sacrifice for

these children to leave friends and start all over again and again. One young man mentioned how each time you move, you have to say good-bye to the friends you have made and, before social media, that often meant losing contact with them. He said, “This was in the days before Facebook and I didn't have any email address and I was in the third grade. I said ‘bye’ to my friends for the last time; I wasn't going to see them again, or talk to them at all.”

While some of the highly mobile military children in this study readily spoke of their “sacrifice,” others were often reluctant to use the words “serve” or “sacrifice.” One young man whose father was in the Navy pointed out that the children also make a “commitment.” He stated,

[The children] are certainly not going to work each day or have a uniform or in harm's way in the way that someone on duty is on the ship or even just working to advance, or just working in an office or whatever it is. They haven't done that. But they have [made] a very large commitment that's been made to the military and to the country.

The sacrifice that is most commonly talked about today and has been the focus of much research for military families is the sacrifice a military family makes when the active duty member is deployed away from home. Deployment was remembered as a time of sacrifice for all members of the military family, but it was also a time when the importance of the support structures that had been created over years of military service and multiple transitions were highlighted.

There were times the deployment of a service member affected the move of the military family. Some families chose to move on base during the deployment to be closer to other military families for support. As one young woman mentioned,

We found out when I was a fifth grader, we found out about halfway through my fifth grade, my dad was getting deployed so my dad went to Iraq. He was stationed in Iraq for about 16 months he was there including processing in and out. My mom, my sister, and I, we moved from town onto base because we knew military families there from previous years.

While, for many, deployment created a sense of unity and support within the family and between military families, it also brought new challenges and added stress to the families making it difficult at times for the military children and their families to interact with those who did not have an understanding of what they were going through. It also put added strain on the families to live with the knowledge of danger to the service member who was far from home.

The young adults in this study were a part of a unique set of military families: those who served both Pre- and Post- 9/11. After 9/11, the tempo and duration of military deployments increased dramatically, affecting the entire family (Blue Star Families, 2013; Coulthard, 2011; Hall, 2008; MacDermid et. al, 2008; Weisman, 2012). For many of the Navy and Air Force participants, this encompassed longer and more frequent deployments. One young woman from a Navy family mentioned that having her dad gone for so long made her more compassionate towards others:

I think military kids have a better understanding of everything because of all the things they had to go through with parents leaving. Like when my dad was deployed. It's really hard when your parent leaves for a year and you don't see them for that entire year when they're deployed. They're definitely more understanding, more compassionate because they know what it's like to not have your parent there for a whole year.

Additionally, deployment to direct on-the-ground combat zones increased (more so for the Army, National Guard, and Marine participants), and some participants discussed the impact it had on their families. One young woman mentioned the effects of deployment on her and her mother:

My dad was deployed for either six or nine months. That was the first time that had ever happened. I remember that being an especially difficult school year. I don't think that anything changed in my performance or anything like that. I just remember there being more stress and my mom being worried and feeling that worry myself.

One young man who grew up in the Navy summed up the feelings of deployment as a sense of loss:

For military kids, we've all gone through the pain. We know what it is to experience loss, probably more than most. Most people when they say you're experiencing loss, you think of death. In a way, when a parent leaves for deployment, especially for the young kid, it's just like they're gone. They just disappear.

This sentiment of loss was echoed by a young woman who grew up in a Coast Guard family:

I remember realizing for some reason events like that had a lot of significance to me as a child, because it felt like it was almost directly involving my family. I remember going to military funerals and things like that as a kid and really understanding what that meant, and I think that it's a harder concept to grasp when you're not close to it. It's something that takes a lot of maturity for the average person who doesn't grow up in a military family to understand and grasp.

Grappling with life and death at such a young age is something that is a part of life for many military families and the children grow up with an understanding that this is a sacrifice that is sometimes made by those who serve.

As noted earlier, participants mentioned the support of the family unit at home as an important structure for overcoming the sadness and stress of a deployed service member. The ability of the parent left at home to help fill in those gaps and to provide extra support was a factor mentioned by many of the participants. One young woman remembered,

I think it changed a lot of social feelings if the [active duty] parent was deployed during the time versus if he was just traveling or doing stuff for work. I think it impacted our home life. I remember being a lot sadder and having a lot of emotional situations; more so in the first few months when he was deployed. I remember a lot of memories of my mom having to do a lot of stuff that she didn't normally have to do.

One young woman mentioned that when kids who were not military-connected asked about deployment, she did not want to answer because "There's always a chance that my dad might die, so please don't ask about his deployment, because I don't want to talk about it." She went on to explain that part of this reluctance to talk to others who did not understand was the immediate assumption that all military families support the policies of the government or the military interventions the government orders. Although she was very proud of her father's

service and understood the sacrifice he and their family was making, she did not support the reasons he was there. The pride she felt in her father helped her accept the need for multiple moves, but it did not necessarily translate into her support for specific military policy. This was a sentiment shared by many of the participants in this study.

### **Distinction Between Family Pride and Military Policy**

While most of the participants felt an identity within the military culture that they grew up in and felt a sense of connectedness, many expressed their own sense of identity apart from military operations. All of the young adults were proud of the service of their active duty parent and often defined patriotism through their pride and support of service members, veterans, and their families. Despite their pride, many were quick to point out this was not the same as being militant or supporting all of the policies of the administration that sent service members off to combat. As one young woman mentioned, “I’m a free-thinking individual. Just because my dad is in the Army doesn’t mean I agree with the policies that are put upon military individuals.”

One young woman whose father served in the Air Force emphasized this distinction between being a part of a military family and support for military policy:

Just because we were raised in a military family doesn’t necessarily mean that we are more militant or more markedly patriotic, or that we totally agree with everything like the direction the country is going. I think there was sometimes a false sense that military families are automatically going to be on board with whatever the military was doing.

Another young woman mentioned that the term patriotic to her was synonymous with the military members themselves and the sacrifices they make, not necessarily to the policies of the government.

I remember as a kid defending military members to other kids in school that clearly their parents weren't very pro-military, or whatever the case would be, their political views or whatever. I remember defending military personnel, because to me they were good. That was my dad. It was a knight-in-shining-armor type of thing, and it wasn't until I got much older that I began to understand that not everybody felt that way. At this point in my life,

I can, of course, see both sides of the picture and even my own perspective has changed a lot in different ways, but I'm still very patriotic.

Another participant who was raised in an Army family brought up the political rhetoric in terms of supporting the military and veterans. She felt that politicians often take advantage of using the support of the military and veterans without really understanding anything about them or the families.

We talk about the military in terms of funding or supporting veterans. Politicians that choose to or not to. The military is associated sometimes with a lot of conservative values that sometimes, that don't make sense to me, in a way of [defining] patriotism.

It is clear from the statements of participants that many of the highly mobile military children in this study make a clear distinction between the policies that come from political and military leadership and their pride or feeling of patriotism in connection to the service of their active duty parent and family. This pride served them well when it came to facing yet another move; they understood the role the family had to play in supporting the active duty parent's service.

### **Education**

The participants in this study were highly educated. As noted previously, most of the participants in this study earned a bachelor's degree or higher. Many of the participants mentioned strong academic achievement throughout their school years. One young woman raised in an Army family mentioned, "I was always a really good student. I've always gotten good grades and worked hard and never had any concerns or anything." Another young woman from a Navy family mentioned, "Academics-wise, I always wanted to be the straight-A student. When we were homeschooled, our parents expected a lot from us. I would definitely push myself to try and keep my grades up, push myself to be a straight-A student."

Despite the strong academic performance and attitude toward academic achievement of most of the participants, some specific educational challenges did emerge throughout their childhood primarily due to the time of year a child moved, differences in the curriculum across the various school, the understanding that teachers had of the needs of military culture, and the type of school attended: public, private, DoDEA, or homeschool.

While most participants did not experience moves outside of the summer months, some of the participants who moved during the school year noted how difficult it could be. As one young woman raised in a highly mobile Navy family mentioned, the time of year their moves took place added a confounding factor to the move:

We normally always started a few weeks into school and then moved. We would not just be moving schools, but a lot of people don't realize that curriculum from school to school, even in the same city, can be wildly different.

Differences in the curriculum across schools challenged many of the participants. One of the most cited problems regarding curriculum were those focused on state history curriculum. Some participants expressed positive feelings of learning in-depth about another state, while others felt it was a waste of time since they felt it was a place they would never return to nor would they ever consider home. Others mentioned not having state history at all, if they were attending DoDEA schools overseas, international schools, or host-country schools. One young woman who attended fourth grade in DoDEA school said students were taught a little bit about each of the states so they would be able to keep up with other students if they moved back to a state that continued the local history.

One young woman who moved during the middle of high school noted the curriculum and a social problem:

The curriculum is flipped in Texas so it goes biology, chemistry, physics. My first semester in Texas as a 16- year-old, I wound up in a lot of classes with 14-year-olds which was trying at times because I was trying to make friends in the middle of high

school and I wasn't necessarily trying to make friends with people two years younger than I was.

The type of school a highly mobile child attended, whether it was home school, private school (international or parochial), or DoDEA, influenced their academic experiences. Some of the participants pointed out the structural differences between schools prepared to deal with highly mobile populations (international and DoDEA schools) compared to public schools with a smaller population of highly mobile children who were not prepared to acclimate military children to a new school. As one young woman reflected,

I think you can tell the difference between that community that knows and expects students coming and going. The approach is totally different and also with the attention that your teachers give you. A lot of the teachers in the public school system in the states, they have an occasional Army kid in the school, but there wasn't ever a presence enough for that to alter their teaching in any way, or maybe they didn't quite know how to integrate or reach out to students.

Another mentioned the comfort and familiarity with staying in private Catholic schools most of her life: "I think the transition to the public school, even though I was younger, just like the one year I was there was harder just because it was a public school environment. Private school was just smaller and [provided a] more warm environment."

In general, these highly mobile adults felt that military-connected schools seemed to provide greater support for their education. During their PK-12 years, many participants stated it was sometimes easier for them when they moved and attended a new school that enrolled primarily military children. This was the case with DoDEA schools as well as public schools on or near a military base with a high percentage of military children. One young woman who grew up in an Army family stated,

In a military school or kind of military setting, people know that you're new and lonely. They already know that, so I think there's some goodwill in younger people and older people. They're like, "I'll give this person a shot."

Another young woman who grew up in a National Guard family mentioned it was easier to deal with the stress of deployment in a school with a large proportion of military children compared to her previous private school because all the students in the school she attended had shared experiences:

I didn't like to have to talk about it [deployment] at school [in her private school] because it was uncomfortable. Because [civilian] kids being younger didn't really understand. They ask awkward questions like what happens if he dies when he's over there. I'm just a third grader, I don't know how to respond to that. When I was in the military school, I was just like, oh this is – Everyone goes through similar things. We didn't really have to talk about it.

The understanding or knowledge of military culture in the DoDEA schools or schools near a military base with a heavy military population contrasted to some of the experiences of other military children in public schools with few military children. Educators' knowledge or lack of knowledge about military culture played a role in their relationships. As one participant, a young man whose father was in the Navy, recounted, he had to spend time explaining to other kids and teachers what his life was like: “None of them had any experience with the military; maybe some distant relative of theirs but no personal first-hand experience. To them it was very mystifying.”

One young woman who grew up in a Navy family noticed that although military-connected schools have many advantages, one of the things that make them great is also one of the drawbacks. Schools that are good at working with highly mobile military children learn how to help them feel supported through the constant change that is taking place in their school from year to year. The turnover of students is tremendous, sometimes up to 35% of the student population (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001). This also means as often as kids are coming into a new school, a similar number are leaving, which can lead to challenges for those left behind. She pointed out, “Something else that I feel I experienced – Like I said, being back

in a DoDEA school is like those three-year rotations started becoming clear to me. After the first three years, I lost a lot of friends and I had a really hard time with that.”

While many participants felt teachers in DoDEA schools were more understanding of highly mobile military children, some participants felt teacher empathy was not always attributed to the type of school.

Participants were asked if they had experienced a different level of support or learning environments based on their teachers’ understanding or experience with military life. Overall, teachers were remembered by students as supportive but there was a sense of stronger understanding and support among teachers who either taught in schools with high populations of military children or who had their own lived experience in the military. One young woman explained that “there’s a different connection between a [military] student and a teacher in a DoDEA school in that setting.”

A young woman who was trained as a teacher and grew up in a Navy family mentioned she felt a teacher’s ability to understand military culture gave the teacher a deeper understanding of what was going on in military students’ lives:

I think in typical American public school, having been trained as a teacher myself, a lot of times teachers assume things about students in their home lives. And that plays out in the classroom when the kid doesn’t have their homework finished or they moved into the school year at an awkward time of the year, the teacher might assume that perhaps the child doesn’t have as much educational support at home as they should. They write them off a little bit, but in a DoDEA school, they know that’s not the case and they’re able to and more willing to work with the students.

Another young participant who also grew up in the Navy also shared these sentiments.

He reflected on the DoDEA teachers he had known in the six years he spent abroad,

They were teaching as part of their career or they themselves had formerly been in the military or they were civilians, but they were working with DOD systems for many, many years. They all understood military life, were able to connect with student on an individual personal level. I think that helped them refine their teaching techniques to help

get the point across to students who might have been struggling because they have that greater understanding of what life was like.

And another young woman echoed the importance of cultural sensitivity:

A lot of the teachers in the public school system in the states, they have an occasional Army kid in the school, but there wasn't ever a presence enough for that to alter their teaching in any way, or maybe they didn't quite know how to integrate or reach out to students.

Although many participants who attended DoDEA schools were quick to point out how much easier it was to work with teachers who understood military culture, they were not the only teachers that participants felt displayed cultural sensitivity. A young woman who grew up in an Army family mentioned the importance of cultural sensitivity of the teachers in the international school she attended:

I feel like in an international school, again, and it's just for me, maybe the teachers themselves are just into moving around so you have a lot of teachers that have moved between international schools and different countries. They understand cultural sensitivity, not that sensitivity ever needed to be an issue, but, just in general of - how to interact with people from different cultures and different backgrounds and being inclusive.

Whether participants attended public schools, international schools, or DoD schools, many of the participants were quick to point out that their experience (positive or negative) was related to the individual teacher's cultural sensitivity. One young woman's story speaks to the importance of cultural sensitivity. She remembered being in school with very few military children; however, her classroom teacher was sensitive to the needs of mobile families and developed a process of choosing a student as a buddy for the new students who came into the school. This "buddy" lived near her family and even walked with her to and from school every day. Although the school and the buddy were civilian, they had a cultural sensitivity that allowed the military child to not only feel comfortable but to acclimate to her new surroundings easily.

The many experiences of having supportive teachers throughout their PK-12 years, coupled with the importance of parent support of their education, clearly eased the transition experiences for these highly mobile children, but it was often the particular strategies that they themselves developed that allowed them to successfully navigate military life.

### **Strategies**

As these highly mobile military children moved, they tended to adopt strategies and behaviors that would help make the next transition easier or less challenging because as one young adult explained, the challenge gets “both easier and harder”:

Moving around so much gets both easier and harder at the same time. The more you do it, it gets easier because you know what to expect, you know how the process works, you're not surprised by as many things that might happen but it also gets harder because you're able to build closer friendships and closer bonds with the people that you knew in that location. (Navy male child)

One of the key strategies for adapting to a new school mentioned by many of the participants was that they learned how to survey a room or situation quickly and watch for people they felt had common interests or values before approaching them. One woman said, “I think I just got bolder and smarter at knowing who would be a good person to talk to or feeling people out, watching them and seeing the kind of kindred spirits. People who I think I would associate well with” (Navy female child). Another Navy child, a young man, described the process he would use when moving to a new school:

Initially, you play a more passive role. You just listen to different people and see where you could potentially join in on a conversation. Where you can maybe start small talk maybe you make a joke or something like that. Ease into the, break the ice kind of situation where you can find a way to relate to these to the other students, other kids and go from there.

This sentiment of hanging back and observing was echoed by a young man who grew up in the Air Force:

You [military kids] are really good at observing things, you're really good at making sure that I'm always watching and listening and I think that's a byproduct of moving so often as you don't want to be the kid that stands out every time because you already do.

Another young woman mentioned she would observe and look for smaller groups of people because she felt she would fit in better with them:

When we were in Japan or when I was in elementary school, we [the young woman and her sisters] just approached a person who was sitting on their own and you get to know them. I would just go for smaller groups of people maybe one or two people or somebody on their own that looked approachable or they were more reserved and quiet and I just introduce myself and try and create a friendship.

Many of these highly mobile children felt they needed to observe the other students in order to successfully integrate into their new school. A young woman who grew up in an Army family mentioned finding common ground with other kids at the school. Often those would be other military kids because “it was, I guess, a much lower barrier to entry to get to know people when I didn't have to unload all of this experience onto them for them to understand what I had gone through.”

These young adults explained how they developed strategies for getting better at finding the “right” friends – friends who would share common core values. One young man who grew up in the Navy explained,

Well, one of the things that I think was a really good blessing from moving around so much is that I started making new friends all the time. I was, I think, more attune than other folks who hadn't been in the military as to what kind of friend that you do want to make because I know a lot of people, I guess and so by the time that I moved to -- I remember thinking when I moved to middle school in Annapolis that I wanted to make the right friends and good friends and that I was okay with not being hip or cool with the folks in the class who were that.

The idea (and strategy) of finding friends who fit your ideas and beliefs rather than changing to fit them was a common theme expressed by the majority of the participants in this study. However, many of them mentioned there was some degree of adapting and assimilating by

making minor surface changes to their clothes or mannerisms while staying true to their core values and beliefs.

In order to assimilate and adapt quickly, many of the participants mentioned trying to act, dress, and/or talk like those around them without losing their core values. One young adult, however, pointed out a problem that can arise from choosing friends or trying to assimilate to a particular group too quickly:

It's [the behavior of the kids at a school towards the newcomer] that they're normally someone who likes novel or new things and you're the novel or new thing at the school as soon as you're the new person. But once they actually speak to you or get to know you even a little bit, the newness and the sparkle wears off and they're not quite as interested because most of the time those are the extremely extroverted people who you most likely won't have a lot in common with. (Navy female child)

This woman was not alone in her feelings. Many of the highly mobile military children explained that they were actually introverts who had to act more extroverted to adapt more quickly into a new setting. Many learned to behave in a more extroverted way so they could meet new people. This woman who grew up in a National Guard family stated, "I'm an introverted individual but I'm not afraid to go up and start a conversation with somebody, if I need to, or I don't know anybody."

Others mentioned developing a strategy of adapting to their new environment by taking on different social characteristics than those they used at their previous home. One woman explained that she could "try something else new." – in other words, trying out different roles. She credits her love of theater because she "could be someone [else] and "change and reinvent [myself]" (Army female child). Another young woman noted that it was helpful to reinvent yourself if you adapted and changed to assimilate into the different culture you found yourself in.

Everywhere you move has a different culture; each school has a different culture. And, even if you're not going to completely reinvent yourself, you do need to put on the face with a mask of fitting in with whatever that culture is because they're not going to adapt to you.

Another young woman, raised in an Army family explained her strategy to fit in and make the transition easier:

I guess just to be open minded and receptive to different cultures, different ideas, different kinds of friends, because everywhere you move the culture is going to be different and if you just kind of embrace it, instead of trying to get what you used to have back, it will go a lot smoother.

Not all highly mobile military children were able to develop the strategies they needed.

One young woman mentioned the difficulty her brother had compared to her and she attributed his difficulty to his refusal (or possibly inability) to adapt:

During moves, I would attempt to adapt and he [my brother] would not. My parents would encourage him to do all the things we're talking about like extracurricular activities but he would either start and quit or just refuse to go, and he also hated school. My brother was the example of what not to do as a military kid so it did make it a lot harder at home.

In addition to developing strategies to adapt, part of finding new friends and adapting to a new environment involved the continuity of extracurricular activities.

**Extracurricular Activities.** Part of adapting and assimilating was to join extracurricular activities, which helped highly mobile military children meet friends with common interests and offered a sense of continuity from one duty station to the next. One participant discussed the importance of playing sports: "It [football] was great because it forced social interaction, but for me the reason why I think it worked is because I'm an introvert... football helped because that's what the popular kids did." He was not alone in mentioning extracurricular activities as a way for a highly mobile military child with an introverted personality adapt and assimilate. Other participants also pointed to their involvement in sports. For example, one participant mentioned,

It [swimming] gave me something to talk about with people because for me going to sports that every parent throws their kid in at some point whether it's for the summer or whether they pursue it... gave me an opportunity to, again, meet more people that were outside of school even though most my friends were in school and then it gave me something to talk about with people that was always something that I would bring up. (National Guard female child)

One young woman who grew up in a Navy family discussed how extracurricular activities

Really helped with having a distraction --not so much thinking about, 'I miss my old friends, I miss this and that.' It definitely helped with transitioning. I was able to make a whole new group of friends from my extracurricular activities, which is really nice.

Another young woman who grew up in a Navy family recalled how helpful it was to join an extracurricular activity, particularly because it started during the summer: "I started doing marching band when I arrived in California. That was the best decision I've made because I have friends before I started school. I knew people before I was thrown into the chaos of being in this enormous high school."

Many young adults mentioned gaining confidence from the extracurricular activities, which helped them adjust to new places and accept change. One woman explained that she "gained a lot of [her] leadership skills and [her] confidence from soccer and the roles that [she] had to play especially in Mr. Manual's soccer program" (Marine female child). Another participant advised young highly mobile military children to join a sports camp as soon as they moved to a new location to gain confidence in their new surroundings because "...that also helps them feel confident and at home like, 'Hey, I'm in this different place but at least I could still do what I love and what I loved at my old home'" (Marine male child).

A young woman raised in an Army family also mentioned how the continuity of extracurricular activity provided confidence and support for her during her moves. "I played soccer my whole life and I still attribute it to my being confident. Through all of these years, whenever we went somewhere, I got on a soccer team. That was always there."

These highly mobile military children were clear that joining sports and other extracurricular activities gave them the opportunity to make new friends. It also gave them the confidence they needed to successfully transition to their next move, which meant they were

particularly upset when they were denied the opportunity to participate in their chosen sport. This happened to some of the participants when attending a new school that did not have a strong military culture. In DoDEA schools or international schools where the population was smaller, these military kids had the opportunity to play because all students were encouraged to participate. In contrast, when attending larger sports-oriented civilian schools in the states, competition was much more fierce and civilian educators didn't understand the importance of the continuity extracurricular activities offer the highly mobile military child. One young woman raised in an Army family found,

We were in this soccer life [in her overseas DoDEA school] and I thought I was really talented and then I went to try out for the high school team at Carlisle [PA] and I wasn't picked up just because the coach knew I was going to be moving in two years. He didn't think I was worth it, which I remember really hurt my feelings and fueled my teenage angst.

Sometimes coping strategies were not enough to ease the reality of yet another move, and these military young adults recalled how they acted out and treated their friends. Fighting with friends became a coping strategy. They said they either deliberately created walls or barriers, or purposely chose not to care about maintaining relationships, because they were going to move on anyway. For example, one young woman mentioned, "I'd fight with friends at school and then I'd realize, you know what? It doesn't matter. I'm moving" (Army female child).

In some cases, a new move gave them an opportunity to reinvent themselves and meet new friends. A young woman who grew up in a Navy family remembered,

I got in a fight with one of my friends and I said, "I'm moving in two months. I'm not going to talk to you anymore." That aspect – I remember I would look forward to a move in that regard, if I was having difficulty making friends at my school, or if I had friends at the current school that I was having problems with.

Another young woman explained that although she did not approach a move this way, many people she knew did: "I've had good friends that knew they were about to move, stopped

hanging out because that's their coping mechanism. They just can't. They can't let it hurt that bad again, so they just don't."

When participants were asked what type of advice they would give to young military children or families who were looking forward to a life of multiple moves during their PK-12 grade years, they brought up many more different strategies they used during their own highly mobile childhood such as, "Don't sit alone and look like a strange person; don't always expect the first people to approach you to be your lifelong friends" (Navy female child). Another young woman, also from a Navy family, advised others that the best way to make friends was,

You just have to go into the classroom, find someone that you want to be friends with and just get to know them. You had to force yourself to do that. You couldn't just try and keep to yourself because then you're not going to make any friends and everyone has to do the same thing.

The young adults often mentioned they made the best of each experience and duty station because they knew they had to and trying to fight against it did not make sense. The needs of the military and the need to consider the active duty service member's career is one you learn to accept even at a very young age. Where the military needs the service member to be, the child[ren] and family must go. For example, one young woman remembered,

It wasn't his choice [my Dad] any of the places that he got. He might get a say in one place or the other but whenever his job was up, when it was time to move he didn't have a say in that and so he made it very clear that we didn't get a say either. He doesn't get to choose and we don't get to choose and it was kind of we go where we're told to go and it'll be an adventure.

Another young woman who also grew up in a Navy family said,

Probably after moving the second time in Japan, it was just I guess more of ... just something we were just used to at that time. We're just used to having to move, making new friends. Just used to having to adjust. It was forcing yourself to adjust basically.

As these two young participants noted, the needs of the military were always the priority when it came to choosing where the active duty member was sent and where the family would

follow. There was a shared understanding among the family and those who made the military a long-term commitment that they could not always have a definitive say in where the family moved or stayed. The needs of the military and the importance of certain duty stations for the active duty member's career oftentimes dictated moves for the families; as one young man mentioned, "we were always looking out for the best interests of my dad's career" (Air Force male child). This sentiment was echoed over and over amongst all of the participants, regardless of branch or rank.

This notion of making the best of it, accepting the situation you are placed in, meant for many of these participants that strength, determination, and – as one participant mentioned – "the pain and fears" just needed to be worked through (Navy male child). Although most participants did not say this explicitly, the common theme was that moving was something you have to do; you know you have to do it so you do; military commitment comes first. One young woman who grew up in an Army family talked about how her family approached a move as a team: "It was just we had to do it together so it made us work as a team. It was a team-building exercise." Moving was a part of their norm. One young woman who grew up in the Navy summed up her thoughts on adapting to your life parameters this way:

When you're in a place, you're there, you're committed to it. That's your life for the time that you're there whether you realize you're there for a year or you think you're there for five years. That's your life. You make the best of it.

Another participant who grew up in the National Guard also accepted moving as a normal part of life. "For the most part, moving for me was always one of those things that, it's just part of part of our life." And another young woman who grew up in a Navy family summed it up as the need to accept change and to look for other options and opportunities within each new place,

I think it goes back to those strategies of like okay well let's just find something new and see what else is out there because there are so many options. I think that's another thing

that's really come through from all these moves is realizing that there's always another option and there's always more things out there.

### **Existing Support Structures**

Participants were asked if they knew of any supporting organizations or entities that existed to help military families navigate their multiple moves. Many of the participants mentioned the informal structure of military families helping one another, while others mentioned the support provided by their schools. As one young man recalled,

I think the military community itself in Germany on base, they were very supportive but I can't remember any formal organization that we ourselves got involved with that would help make the transition a little bit easier a little bit smoother.

A few mentioned support organizations that were primarily for those moving overseas, but overall most participants did not recall formal supports provided to the families through the Department of Defense (DoD). Some participants mentioned they had either heard of or had first-hand experience with some support organizations that were not run directly by the DoD, such as the United Services Organization (USO) or the branch relief societies (Navy Marine Corps Relief Society, Army Emergency Relief, or Air Force Aid Society). Two of the participants knew about the Military Child Education Coalition and the Red Cross. One young woman who grew up in the Army remembered,

The only one that I was familiar with was the Military Child Education Coalition. The only reason why I know that one is because I volunteered at it. I volunteered at the Red Cross of the hospital and that was more just what I did.

The formal support offered by the military that was most talked about by the participants who experienced an overseas move was the USO. At a new overseas location, families were offered an orientation to their new duty station and the surrounding area. The only children who were able to benefit were those who moved during the summer months. Those participants who moved during the school year did not participate because of the necessity of getting back into

school after days and weeks spent away from school during the actual move. Those who did participate mentioned it as one of the best ways to get to know a new area and to get to meet other kids before starting school. One young woman who grew up in a Marine family mentioned,

I did like that they had that orientation thing going on. I don't think that it was mandatory, we decided to go and I remember they took us to go see a castle there nearby, just cultural outings where you get to be with other people that are of your age.

Another young woman who grew up in an Air Force family mentioned the same program:

The USO was also really helpful because there's a class that met I think for a week or something right after we moved there, and it was basically like you're in Germany now, and here's what you need to know. And, so it was just my mom and my brother and I because my dad was working at that point, but it was like, "Here's what some road signs mean," and "Here's some basic phrases," and "Here's what the money looks like" and "Here's a map of the country" just sort of a crash course in Germany. And, I think that was really helpful in sort of making it seem less overwhelming.

Some of the highly mobile military children who lived on base overseas mentioned Youth Services as a good way to help young people feel they had a safe place to hang out and gave them opportunities to meet other kids. Youth Services had a facility on the base for the kids to hang out and play games or watch TV. They also arranged trips for the kids and organized summer camps. They also coordinated the competitive sports programs for the military children in the area.

A couple of the youth and a few of the parents mentioned the Sponsor Program run through the military. The program matches an active duty person who is already at a base with someone coming in. When moving overseas, this would often include family support. One young woman recalled,

We had a sponsor in Germany too. It wasn't an organization per se, but just having the family there who picked us up from the airport, and showed us around the post and that kind of stuff. That was really, really helpful especially because they had kids that were about my brother's and my age to get off the plane, and the first people that we met was basically a family that mirrored ours in a lot of ways, really made things a lot more fluid.

One young woman mentioned her family had used a School Liaison Officer when they moved to California and then to Virginia but did not really remember much about the experience.

Some schools had formal structures in place for helping new children acclimate to their new surroundings. International schools and DoDEA schools overseas were particularly focused on helping new children transition to their new school and environment. For example, one participant mentioned a school policy that was in place when she and her family first moved to a new duty station:

It was much easier to go back to an international school community, as opposed to going from an international community back to public school in the US, for me. It was pretty easy. I appreciated that for one, the school had set up – again, it was a community that was used to kids coming and going so frequently. They had an orientation set up for new arrivals and you have a student ambassador. It was really easy to get back into the social sphere and school environment.

While some formal supportive structures provided by the military, schools, and a few military-connected organizations were discussed, they were mentioned generally in the context of helping families who lived on base in the US or who experienced an overseas move. Although most participants were not aware of formal support structures, some remembered the informal structures – specifically, how the families relied on each other. As one Navy child mentioned, he could remember that the “moms and this network of moms and kids that were there, all going through the same thing. That [support] was what I was aware of.” One young woman remembered how the moms supported one another especially during the holidays when the service member was deployed:

My mom was always – She'd call them support groups. I know when we were living on military bases, during holidays my mom would always invite these mothers over with their babies for Christmas or Thanksgiving when their husbands are deployed. That was like – All the women in the neighborhood would cook for each other and be really supportive of each other. It brought the kids together too just because they're spending so much time together.

Another young man who grew up in an Air Force family reflected on the importance of the informal support structure of military families and the military community in general:

The military community is pretty awesome. It's pretty small and every family you go through a lot of the same things. When my dad was deployed and we had tons of mother-child dates with other families and we would hang out and there was like that really tight-knit support group that you really only get from a military background. We tapped into that a lot. That was the one thing that was continuous throughout growing up was we had the military lifestyle to back us up which to a certain extent being a civilian now I miss.

While many formal support structures are necessary to navigate these multiple transitions, it seems what is most memorable to these highly mobile military children is the informal structures that the military families create to assist each other.

### **Cross-Culture Experiences**

Although support for navigating multiple moves was important when these highly mobile military children transitioned within the United States, the context of the military culture and this community took on a particular importance when they moved overseas. As previously mentioned, the connection to – and the feeling of belonging in – the military community provided support to these highly mobile military children. Being able to be part of a subculture when faced with a cross-cultural experience made them feel more like an insider.

Overseas assignments created stronger bonds among military families who were stationed overseas together and with other military children who had similar experiences. In fact, highly mobile children within the military community who did not have an overseas experience were viewed by those who did have the overseas experiences somewhat as outsiders. Some of the participants, inspired by their own experiences abroad, mentioned identifying as a Third Culture Kids (TCKs) or Cross Culture Kids (CCKs). According to Pollock and Van Reken (2009), TCKs are children who have spent a significant portion of their developmental years outside of their passport country and do not identify specifically with one country over another. Cross Culture

Kids (CCKs) are people “who have lived in—or meaningfully interacted with—two or more cultural environments for a significant period of time during [their] developmental years” (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009, p. 27).

There was a feeling of strong supportive friendships and closeness to other military families with the same overseas experiences echoed by many participants who were stationed overseas. One young man stated, “When [overseas] I was part of a DoDEA school. Sharing stories with other military kids going to school on base, they all understood my stories even though my stories are different from theirs.” One young woman stated,

There were also still a lot of families that mostly moved amongst US bases. For me, I could always identify and connect more with someone who might have had the experience being abroad. It's like the inter-sectional overlapping of Military Brat and TCK [Third Culture Kid] thing. For me, I also had a lot of friends on post that hadn't lived abroad but it was certainly easier to connect with the ones that had.

The cross-cultural experiences of these children had a profound impact not only on their identity as military children but also created in them a sense of understanding and curiosity and a more open-minded view of the world and of other cultures which often has long term implications in their adult life. One young woman who spent time in her teenage years overseas reflected on the change it brought to her perspective and stated, “You just have a different understanding of the world around you.” Another young woman who grew up in an Air Force family explained her experience this way:

Just the physical process of leaving America when I was 10, not only to visit but to live somewhere else was such a huge broadening of my conception of what the world was. And, it suddenly made, I think, the rest of the world seem so much more real in a way that it hadn't up to that point. I think it also made me well, definitely made me less afraid about traveling in the future at any point. Having had that first experience with the world when I was so young I think was a really, really good thing to hit me in my formative years to have a sense of other cultures that early and that directly that early was really important.

These feelings were decidedly different from their American highly mobile military peers who had not had these same cross-cultural experiences. One young man who spent two tours overseas compared his outlook on different cultures as compared to some of his American peers who had not lived overseas:

I'm not as surprised if someone from a different culture does something because that's the way that their culture functions. It doesn't catch me by surprise as it would some other Americans who maybe have never left their hometown or home state.

One young woman mentioned not only a better understanding of the global community but also the sense of serving as well while living overseas:

So they [highly mobile military kids who lived overseas] have a certain insight to a pulse of the nation ..., as well as outside of the States, how people view Americans or American interest, globally, or how Americans are acting, and so that, again, that was something that was very present in my mind, from a very young age. That my parents were always instilling in us. Like 'you're here in this country and of course, it's part of your home now, but you're also a guest and you're an ambassador. You're representing America,' which is a heavy, pressure-filled thing, but yes. You serve as an ambassador. You represent your country.

The memories were so profound for many of these children that the memories of first contact, even at a young age, are still vividly recalled today. One young man recalled,

When we moved to Belgium, in particular, I do remember the first few days being particularly unsettling. I was fearful and nervous because things were just very different and the fact that everyone spoke a different language made things very confusing. I remember, in particular, I can remember even as young as I was, I can remember going to the airport at Belgium, when we first got there, going through customs. I can visually see the stainless steel countertops of the folks there because it was such an important event.

Although in the beginning an overseas move seemed overwhelming, the strong bonds and attachment to others within this subculture grew as they acclimated to their new surroundings.

As one young woman mentioned,

We went to Germany. I just hated my parents. I just felt they had taken me away from everything that mattered to me. I got over that pretty quickly, because I think the good thing about Germany ... it was a small close-knit community and most of the kids there had experienced the same things, so it was easy to make friends. People were open to that, I think. I made a couple of my closest friendships there in Stuttgart. (Army child).

### **Moving Back to the U.S.**

While family and military culture and their sense of belonging served these military children well as they engaged in various moves internationally, perhaps the final but equally important transition they were asked to make (moving back to the US) proved very difficult. The military community they had experienced overseas was a very strong support system with families forming close bonds and supporting one another. The cultural influence of the host country, in many cases, had become a part of their lives, such as the food, language, and customs.

Some of the highly mobile military children turned to these two identities of TCKs and CCKs to help explain why they felt different and not truly back home after moving to the United States. For example, one young woman explained that she felt “less at home in the place that was supposed to be my home.” She went on to explain this feeling prompted her to learn more about her experience: “I actually got interested in researching and understanding what I was going through.”

The participants who had spent time during middle school and/or high school overseas felt a particular affinity for the host nation in which they resided. One young woman mentioned her feelings when returning to Germany many years later: “There's a very gut-level emotional response I have to a lot of just the most miniscule things of German culture, that it reminds me of my childhood. I do have an emotional connection to Germany in that sense.” Another young woman who grew up in a Marine family remembered returning to the states:

When I first moved back to the states I remember very much missing Germany, missing mostly the food, missing hearing German. But I just remember I missed so much and I put up a German flag in my dorm room and that's very much into remembering and trying to – utilizing the culture that I had learned from there. But then I also ran into the problem of almost reminiscing so much, I'm liking so much the things from Germany of

that culture and coming back to the states is somewhat more difficult, so it's almost like a reverse culture shock in a way.

It was not always easy for these children with cross-cultural experiences to transition back to the United States. Many of them felt a lack of belonging as an American despite their strong sense of belonging to the military culture. There was a sense that they missed or gave up a part of their lives and identities while they accompanied their parents overseas and they didn't really know the US. One young woman who grew up in an Army family reflected on her experience with her American peers when she returned to the U.S. for college:

I didn't have those memories of going to the Friday night football games or – These are silly examples but things that people can identify with and things that I couldn't. I had a totally different set of memories that usually didn't overlap with a lot of my peers who were Americans.

The difficulty in moving back to the States was even more profound for those who were further immersed into the culture of their host country, such as those who attended local schools or extracurricular activities, lived out in town instead of on the base, learned the language of the host country, and made friends with the local children. Moving back to the states was oftentimes particularly difficult, causing them to feel like an outsider, to some degree, in their home country. As one young woman from a Marine family said, “It gave me solace that there were other people who were experiencing these same weird feelings”

Another young woman explained,

That was hard for me coping with – I feel like being – having not been an American in a way for seven years. In the references to the kids throughout and little things, like they talk about a commercial that was on three years and I had no idea what they're talking about.

One young person who spent most of her teen years overseas stated, “Still to this day when people say... that I'm American, it doesn't feel like I'm American, period. You feel like you have to explain... I'm American but I've lived here I've done this and et cetera” (Navy

female child). The cross-cultural experiences, overall, left these young adults with an acceptance and understanding of other people and cultures, as well as a more open-minded attitude about accepting new challenges and transitioning to new places, despite the difficult they had when first acclimating back to their “home” country.

For those who experienced cross-culture moves, as well as the other highly mobile military children, the experiences and the strategies they developed to navigate their multiple moves transcended their childhood and are visible in the attitudes and beliefs they still hold today.

### **Transcending Childhood**

Some of the strategies and experiences from years of multiple moves transcended childhood for many of the participants. During college and beyond, participants gave examples of ways their highly mobile life continued to affect their attitudes and behaviors. Many participants mentioned that, even in young adulthood, they retain a sense of identity with their lived military experience as a child and to others who have the same experience. One young man mentioned his recent experience:

I went to a restaurant and I had paid for my meal with my Navy Federal debit card and the cashier is like, “You’re in the military.” We had a conversation about I guess her family was in the Navy as well. We had a conversation about that and it just started like that. It’s that feeling of wanting to relate to other military.

Another young woman who grew up in a Marine family had a similar experience after moving away to college:

Then there happened to be one girl who her dad was in the Navy and she said that and soon as she said that, I was like, “Oh my gosh, she’s like me.” I remember I just approached her immediately actually in the class. I was like, “Hey, my dad is in the military too,” and she’s like, “Oh, really? What branch?” We just have that instant kind of connection there and then we ended up getting a drink afterwards and talking about it. It was really nice.

Most participants expressed a desire for change or a feeling of never being quite satisfied in the place they were, both metaphorically and physically. Participants mentioned, often hesitantly, that they had a hard time staying in the same place for too long, whether that was a physical location, a job, or a field of study. One young woman who grew up in a highly mobile Navy family mentioned she has discussed this with some of her fellow highly mobile military friends:

Some of my former military friends [from childhood] who are now military brat adults are starting to find “homes” in places as they live some place for a long time. But none of them really seem to feel like they had a specific “home” when they were younger.

While some participants expressed this need or desire for change or the inability to be satisfied with their current situation as a negative characteristic, others saw it as an extension of the lifestyle they led as highly mobile military children. As one young woman who grew up in an Army family pointed out, the urge to move never leaves: “I don’t know if I expect change because I love change. I love moving out and I have a job and I still do it, so I crave it. Like every four years I wake up, ‘Time to go.’” Another young woman from a Marine family feels the same way:

I open myself up to a lot more opportunities than I think I would have if I would have just remained in one place. It's almost like that and your mindset has already been confirmed, you're so much more open to doing it again.

Another young man raised in a Marine family summed up the normalization of a highly mobile lifestyle in his adult years:

It's like I moved around so much and solved this new thing, never stayed in one spot, never had the same group of friends, never stayed at the same school, just never at the same house. Like why would I – I was raised that way, why would I want to stay in the same spot and do the same thing forever and ever, you know what I mean? It just doesn't make sense if you're raised a certain way. People learn and adapt late in life but I think that, yes, those formative years definitely played a huge role. That's really psychological in a sense too. You don't even realize at a young age that you're getting all the stimulation and experiencing all this change. Your brain is probably wired in a certain way. How are you going to change that in later life unless you consciously try to do it?

One participant mentioned that moving so often and learning to adapt became an advantage in his young adult years:

Being involved in so many things when I was younger, always trying to join an activity or join a club after moving and meeting new people, that really gave me a boost in my confidence, my ability to speak and greet people, my ability to make friends and whatnot. That really carried over in my ability to just develop new connections with new people even here into adulthood. (Navy male child)

Another young man who grew up in a Navy family summed up his feelings of how highly mobile military children approach an impending move even in adulthood: “We don't feel like our identity is tied to a single location.”

Multiple moves put moving into perspective. One young woman explained that she uses these experiences to embrace change that comes your way. “I think also when you move a lot you're not afraid to move. You want to move and experience new things that a lot of people don't. They're terrified.” This sentiment was echoed by a young woman who grew up in a Coast Guard family: “I love seeing new places and meeting new people. Even within the US, there's so many different cultures in each state. I got addicted to the traveling that came with being a military kid.” Another young man emphasized this advantage of learning to adapt to change throughout: “I think one of the byproducts of just moving all the time is that you just get good at acclimating to change especially change that is driven outside of your control.”

**Adaptability and resilience.** Many of the participants mentioned how this experience as children helped them adapt to change and has provided them with the ability to overcome negative situations better than other young adult peers. As one young man mentioned, “In my experiences people don't deal with rotating friends, rotating groups and moving to new places very well. For me it's nothing at all.” Others mentioned how it made them better able to adapt and understand other people. One young man, when asked about advantages to his highly mobile lifestyle, replied, “I would say learning how to adapt to different situations, being able to go to

different places and experience different cultures. I think it's made me more understanding of different people's behavior and me being more open to different people.”

Many participants remembered how much easier it seemed to be for them to transition and adapt to the changes of going off to college than their peers who had never moved. One participant who grew up in an Army family mentioned, “I know tons of people that even moving from their hometown to college was a huge deal and for me it was just like it's getting in the car and go. This is just another thing to do.” Another young woman remembered how it felt to head off to college: “It felt like okay, I could do this, I've done this before. Let's do college.”

Similarly, a young man who grew up in a Marine family mentioned moving as an adult is easier and he can adapt to any new situation given time.

I feel like right now, I definitely appreciate the fact that I can leave and go somewhere new. I know it will suck, that's something I am aware that will happen, but it will only suck at first. Eventually, I will make friends. Eventually, I will find somewhere to hang the hat and call home, but I'm never scared to leave.

Another participant who grew up in an Army family mentioned how her experiences help her navigate new situations even today:

I think that I feel like I'm pretty decent at testing out the waters and figuring out people, and what people are about and value, and how they want to interact. I guess that I'm able to adapt. That's due to my experiences growing up.

Home for a highly mobile child is often very hard to define, and that uncertainty follows them into adulthood. The concept of home is something most of the participants did not really think much about until they were older and went off to college. It became very apparent for them when people would ask “Where are you from?” Each has developed their own unique way of defining home that has transcended into adulthood. As one young man stated, “I always say that home is a relative term” (Air Force male child). A young woman who grew up in the Army summed up what many of the participants said when she compared the notion of “home” for

highly mobile military brats to those who do not move as often: “What home means is different. It's where your family is, it's not a location like it is for most people.”

When people ask one young woman where she is from, her answer is typical of most of the participants in the study:

Where was I born? Where have I lived the longest? Where are my parents from? Where did I like it best? Where did I move here from? That's typically what I would ask when someone would ask where I was from.

Another young woman said she often does not bother to give an answer unless they probe. “I usually just say I'm an Army brat. Then if they ask more, then I tell them more.” If they do ask more, “I'll tell them I'm an Army brat but I was born in North Carolina. But I mean it would be hard for me to consider that my home, I don't know anybody there anymore.”

Another young woman who grew up in the Coast Guard reflected that as a highly mobile military child, she was both an insider and an outsider wherever she lived:

I've rarely considered myself - I've never considered myself a local in those places. No matter how much time has been spent in those places, I've always considered myself as somebody, an outsider looking in. To ask the opinion of somebody in the military is to ask for unique perspective of somebody who is on the cusp of the outside and the inside, someone who understands what's going on in the community they're living in, but also sees it with a different outsider's view.

In other words, for highly mobile military children, home is where they find themselves, where their family is, where they currently live. Most of the participants were comfortable with not having a set location as “home” because, for them, home is family.

As discussed previously, family was a strong support structure for these military children, and it remains so even in adulthood. As one young woman mentioned, “My family growing up, were very-very close, my sister and I, and my mom and I, talk almost every day whether it's through text message or phone calls, my dad and I talk all the time as well” (National Guard

female child). Another participant who grew up in an Air Force family explained her thoughts on the closeness of military families:

I think I have a different relationship with my family than other non-military kids do just because I think it's always – it was strange in high school and it's strange today too when I hear people talking about the fights they got in with their parents, or how their parents just don't get them. That was never an issue for me, and at least with a lot of the close military friends I have, its, I think, a lot less common in military families to have animosity between parents and kids.

Many of the young participants mention their parents as role models for themselves and how they support their own children (or future children) as young adults.

I will definitely try to embody the supportive care that my parents showed me because like I said, they were very helpful whenever we went through a difficult move, I had to say goodbye to some very close friends. I would try to keep that a tradition of being a very supportive and caring parent. (Navy male child)

Trusting in the belief that life would work out in the end and that they would have the ability to face and overcome life challenges seemed to be lessons that many of the participants developed and carried with them into adulthood. Many of them mentioned having developed the belief that things would turn out fine in the end helped them in their current lives to take change and adjustment in stride. As one young woman mentioned, the lesson she learned,

Retrospectively I think that was kind of an important thing for me to sort of understand that you can trust that even though your things [household goods] are going away for now, they will come back at some point and that kind of expectation being met after we got a new house and here's our stuff is a very comforting sort of lesson to learn at a young age. (Air Force female child)

Another participant mentioned the consequence of experiencing multiple moves and transitions in her own personal growth:

I think it's forced me to be more independent than a lot of my peers and more mature than a lot of my peers because you are faced with these changes, in these new social situations and interactions at a much younger age and a much more rapid pace than your peers. (Navy female child)

### Lessons Learned About Military Children

At the conclusion of each interview, participants were asked to name three things they would want civilians to know about military children. Many of the statements underscored the themes that emerged from their interviews: (a) family is very important; (b) we sacrifice and “serve” too; (c) we, and our lives, are normal; (d) we are resilient; and (e) we have a lot of unique experiences. This is a sample of some of the responses from the participants:

<p>“We have unique experience of a transitory nature not being in the same spot. Then maybe secondly, because of that we can see and understand different viewpoints and maybe are able to do that better than some civilian people.”</p>
<p>“You get to have new experiences that you wouldn't have otherwise.”</p>
<p>“I guess that it's a lot more normal like day-to-day than you would think.”</p>
<p>“I'd want them to know that military kids are highly adaptable, usually open to making new friends and learning about new people.”</p>
<p>“It's a fine line I want to walk here when I say this because you didn't make someone who grows up in the military a dependent child to someone in the military they never made the commitment or decision to be in the military. They're certainly not going to work each day or have a uniform or in harm's way in the way that someone on duty is on the ship or even just working to advance, or just working in an office in place or whatever it is. They haven't done that. But they have a very large commitment that's been made to the military and to the country.”</p>
<p>“Military kids themselves are a lot more resilient being able to go through move after move.”</p>

### **What Did the Parents Say?**

Eight parents also participated in the research. Their statements echoed those of the young adults for the most part. They also felt that a strong family and a sense of belonging to the military community were central to helping highly mobile military children navigate their multiple moves. The only real difference in their responses came in the knowledge of support systems when a few parents knew of organizations or support mechanisms that the young adults did not remember or did not know as much about. Here is what the parents had to say on these topics.

#### **Challenges**

Most of the parents, while acknowledging moves were not always easy for the highly mobile military children, seemed to focus more on the positives of the moves. When they did talk about the challenges, they most often cited the difficulty their children had in leaving friends behind. As one mother from a Marine family stated, the challenges to moving were more pronounced as the children grew older and their relationships held more emotional value: “Ninth grade, the moves became more difficult, because it was more of an emotional change on the children when the friends were the big deal.” For another Navy mom, no single move struck her as especially challenging; they all brought about some level of difficulty in different ways for the children.

You're constantly breaking them away from any friendships that they have since made in that duty station or that school year. Sometimes the moves were mid school year, so then you're trying to finish up one school and start another school where you're right in the middle of the school year, so then you have a whole trying to match their schedules and try to get a seamless transition.

Another mom from an Air Force family echoed the sentiments of leaving friends behind:

When we left there [Alabama], it started to get a little bit harder because there were connections and friends and stuff that were going to stay there and that we were the ones leaving and their friends were staying there.

Some parents mentioned that middle school was, for their children, a difficult time to transition and added to the challenges of high mobility. One Navy mom mentioned a particularly bad move for her daughter but was reluctant to point to the move as a cause of the challenges she faced with her daughter's mood swings at home: "I don't want to solely blame being a military kid on that because she had been used to that." She felt because the family had already moved multiple times without an issue, the challenges must have arisen from a combination of things, "her personality, her age, the military, moving from Virginia down to North Carolina, going into middle school, all those things. I think it was a combination of everything." Another mom also mentioned middle school as a difficult move for her son but particularly because he was in a school with primarily non-military kids:

Kids were always very kind and friendly until he was in middle school. That was in his sixth-grade year, and his seventh-grade year were pretty horrible. These kids were mean because he moved to a school where kids weren't accustomed to other military kids and newcomers because it was a smaller school.

Another Navy mom echoed this sentiment when she remembered her son being bullied when they first moved back to the states and he entered middle school. The situation became so bad, they moved back to the parents' home state while the father was deployed to get him away from the bullying.

The parents were clear that deployment on the other had was a significant burden for these children – for the whole family. One mom from a Marine family mentioned the challenge of deployment in connection to a move: "I think that probably the hardest one [move] would be the one arriving once in California, [their] father had to deploy for one whole year."

Most of the parents mentioned the challenge of moving from state to state and having to work through different educational curriculum requirements and content. A Coast Guard mom mentioned, "It used to annoy me that the curriculum could be so different from state to state." In

addition to the curriculum if children were in special programs, each state had its own set of requirements. As one Navy mom reflected, “When we would change states, sometimes that was such a huge issue like, you were in one [gifted] program in one state, then you have to be tested again with the next state.” Another parent from an Army family echoed the statement about special programs:

Every time you moved from one place to another... it [special needs program or gifted program] was always being reevaluated and whether or not you met the criteria or standards for the specific school system, that was the problem I would say especially for the special needs kids.

## **Family**

Just as the young adults remembered a strong family unit as central to support for military children, parents recalled importance of family and other military-connected families in supporting their children as they transitioned from one duty station to the next. As one Army mom mentioned, “A strong family is the key to success.” A Navy mom mentioned how important their family became in helping to navigate the whole experience: “Just living in a foreign country itself ... you learn as your family – the thing that it did for us, was kept us tight-knit because all we had was each other.” Another parent mentioned the importance of a “keeping the family together, the nuclear family together, the four of us....” And another stated, “Every place yes, there were definitely challenges and I think because we’re really a tight unit, of four, our family, it’s helped us talk things through and have a very open relationship.”

Some of the parents also recalled how important it was to give their children some control over decisions about a move when possible. As one Navy mom recalled,

It was because we decided as a family to do it. We included them in that decision. You can’t always do that as a military family. Sometimes you don’t have a choice, but that particular time we could have gone to Japan or we could have cancelled and gotten other orders. It was our option. So we included them on what they wanted to do and I think that may have helped them to transition back overseas again.

## **Military Culture**

The parents who participated in the study also mentioned the importance of the military community and, in particular, other military families in helping children transition to a new location. As one Navy mom explained, their children consider other Navy families as part of their extended family. When they were asked about support, this woman pointed to the fact that “sometimes with the Navy, you have what you call your extended family.” Another parent mentioned the connection to other families when living on base as “giving an instant connection.” And finally, one Marine mom offered her thoughts on what it means to be part of a military community. She said it’s

the way we become a family, the support of when our husbands deploy, the wives are left by themselves, a wife is giving birth by herself because her husband's gone, how everybody comes and helps, cares for another spouse...

## **Support Organizations**

In addition to being part of a family and part of a military culture, many of the young adult participants – as well as the parents – mentioned the USO or the youth programs as support organizations helping with the military transition. Although, sometimes the sponsor program worked well and sometimes it did not, as one parent noted,

I believe they still have the sponsorship programs, where a family as a new unit would quote-unquote *sponsor* you and at one time where some units would try to match up families with the same type of children or same ages of children to hook them up with. Sometimes that worked and sometimes that didn't because the sponsoring family dependent on their situation can be very helpful or not so helpful.

Other parents mentioned the Family Service Centers on the base as helpful, but most parents felt the supports were directed more at the service members or spouses and not so much at the kids or the family unit. For the participants in this study, successful transitions were inextricably related to being part of a supportive family and a sense of belonging to a wider military family community.

### Parent Reflections on Their Highly Mobile Military Children

Parents were also asked to name three things they thought other people should know about their children and the children of other highly mobile military families who were asked to live a highly mobile life. Their answers often showed the pride they felt in their children and other military children. Here are a few of those responses:

“They're survivors. They'll take what life throws at them and go with it.”
“They're really interesting people. They started off having a different life and some unique experiences.”
“I think military kids have a certain knack of being able to walk into a room and it doesn't matter if the group of people they're interacting with are strangers, they can adapt to different cultures, different groups of people, different situations, different age groups.”
“They have learned to adapt to different situations and surroundings and to be resilient in that. They are brave, strong and courageous because they have to be.”
“I would say they're great kids.”
“Open to trying new things.”
“Military children sacrifice a lot.”

### Conclusion

The embedded interaction between family, military culture, culturally sensitive educators, and formal and informal supports available to highly mobile military children was vital to the ability of these military children to develop resiliency and successfully navigate the multiple transitions throughout their PK-12 grade years. These young adults, in reflection, attributed their success to the support of their family: parents, siblings, and their extended military family who

helped to support their sense of belonging within the military community and helped them to connect to others who shared common experiences and challenges. Many of the lessons they learned from these experiences transcended into adulthood. The participants in this study faced many challenges throughout their childhood that were not easy, such as continually trying to find new friends and places to fit in, dealing with bullying because they were always the “new kid,” and, in the midst of moves, often dealing with the deployment (absence) of one parent. These challenges brought much angst and suffering but enabled them to build resiliency. This resiliency has allowed them to face challenges in their adult lives with the confidence that they can overcome them. As mentioned previously, many of the participants noted they had overcome challenges in the past so they knew they could handle them again. Life was not about lamenting challenges you could not control; it was about taking control of your reaction to those challenges. Although, as mentioned in earlier chapters, this sample of highly mobile military children may or may not reflect the stories of all highly mobile military children, their ability to navigate multiple moves can provide important implications for other highly mobile military children and their families as well as for the military, educators, and policymakers who seek to find improved ways to better support this group of highly mobile military children. I discuss these implications in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER FIVE:  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Summary**

The purpose of my study was to learn about the experiences of highly mobile military children and what strategies or structures helped support them to overcome challenges they faced as they navigated their multiple moves during their PK-12 years. Most research is not based on the perspective of the military child but instead from the perspective of parents, teachers, and other adults within their sphere of influence. This study is different. Twenty-five adults who were highly mobile military children were the focus of my investigation. However, eight parents were interviewed as well to provide additional contextual information about the multiple moves that the young adults may not have been aware of in their younger years.

Participants were interviewed using semi-structured interview guides. Two semi-structured interview guides were created and used, one for the 25 young adults who were highly mobile military children, and another for the eight parents who participated. Each participant was asked to recall their personal experiences about each of the multiple moves they made. The participants provided a wealth of information on their perception of challenges, supports, and strategies that were developed to help them navigate multiple transitions during their PK-12 years.

Resiliency is a term that often arises from the literature when reporting the experiences of highly mobile children including highly mobile military children, which suggests a relationship between resiliency and successful transition (Cutuli et al., 2013; Hall, 2011; Huebner, 2012; MacDermid et al., 2008). The findings from this study reinforce the importance of resilience. The resiliency of these young adults was constructed by the interactions that occurred between

strong family support, military culture, other informal and formal support structures, and their attendance at culturally sensitive schools working with teachers who were sensitive to their particular needs. A strong family unit and being part of a military community created a sense of belonging that was key in creating resiliency among these highly mobile military children. Additionally, a combination of formal and informal support structures helped the highly mobile military children build the human and social capital they needed to navigate the multiple moves they experienced during their PK-12 grade years. Attending a school with culturally sensitive teachers was important in supporting the children as they experienced educational and social challenges such as differences in curriculum and integrating socially into new communities with individuals who were unaware of their needs.

The participants in this study represent a small percentage of highly mobile military children, and their experiences may or may not be reflective of other highly mobile military children. Further, their experiences are different from other military children who have not spent the majority of their childhood in an active duty military family. They come from a more stable socio-economic background and have benefited, for the most part, from two-parent households. Due to the nature of promotion within the military, at least one parent modeled that hard work and education were key to continued employment and upward mobility. In the case of these participants, most had two parents who encouraged and modeled the value of education.

The following sections provide a synthesis of the challenges, supports, and strategies the young adults who participated in my study faced, from their perspective. I situate these findings within the literature on highly mobile children and discuss the implications for policy and make recommendations for further study.

**Research Question #1**

Some of the challenges that were discussed by the participants in this study reflected challenges found in the literature for other highly mobile populations – challenges associated with educational gaps due to the widely varying curriculum that existed from one school to another (Catalano et al., 2004; Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008), and social challenges which included the requirement to leave old friends and make new friends every couple of years, and the constant need to adapt to a new environment (Drummet et al., 2003; Finkel et al., 2003; Koenig et al., 2014; Park, 2011). Many of the participants mentioned one particular challenge was coping with a feeling of homelessness, which is also consistent with literature on other highly mobile children (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2010; Moore & Barker, 2012; Pollock & Van Reken, 2009).

**Research Question #2**

Despite their many challenges, what emerged from the participants in this study was the strong support structures that were in place that helped them navigate their multiple transitions. Through the support from family, being part of a military culture, and attending culturally sensitive schools with culturally sensitive teachers, these young adults explained that they were able to experience their multiple moves successfully and transition into their young adult lives. The highly mobile military children and their parents who participated in this study described numerous adverse situations the children faced in their PK-12 years as a result of constant moves, deployments, and other challenges. Yet, in the end, they all claimed that it was family that provided the greatest level of support and that their families remained strong throughout, continuing to remain as a close-knit unit beyond active duty life.

The findings from this study are consistent with research that emphasizes the role that family plays in supporting resiliency among children and in pointing out the importance of a strong family unit in helping populations such as highly mobile military children adapt to constant changes. A 2015 Rand study, which researched the various definitions of resilience found in a variety of Department of Defense publications, asserts the following definition as best describing what family resiliency means to military families: “Family resilience can be defined as the ability of a family to respond positively to an adverse situation and emerge from the situation feeling strengthened, more resourceful, and more confident than its prior state” (Meadows et al., 2016, p. 4). The young adults and their parents who participated in this study mentioned the importance of keeping a positive outlook during each move, despite challenges, in order to emerge from the move as a stronger family unit that continued to work together.

Other research supports the importance of a strong family unit in overcoming challenges and stressors. In their book *Stress, Coping, and Resiliency in Children and Families*, Hetherington and Blechman (2014) found evidence that supportive family relationships can mitigate some of the negative life events experienced by children. The comments from the participants in this study support the assertion that a strong parent-child relationship and the subsequent secure attachment between parent and child (Bowlby, 1988) is a vital protective factor for building family resilience, which in turn builds individual resilience to help overcome challenges and adverse situations.

Most of the participants expressed the importance of parental support in their educational achievements in helping them to adjust, and to fill in, the education gaps created by multiple moves. These findings are once again consistent with research on the importance of parent involvement in school for educational achievement (Smrekar et al., 2001; Aronson & Perkins,

2013). The kind of education that they faced in each new community mattered. These young adults were clear that when they had culturally sensitive teachers who recognized their challenges, it helped them have a positive educational experience. This finding adds to the current body of literature on the importance of cultural sensitivity in our educational system as it has a significant effect on highly mobile children. It supports previous research on the effects of teacher support, which has been well-documented (Catalano et al., 2004; Gruman et al., 2008; MacDermid et al., 2008).

The highly mobile military children in this study explained that they also gained support from the sense of belonging that came with being a part of a larger military community. Once again, these findings are consistent with the literature on the importance of community in creating a social identity and building social capital as a means to overcome the challenges of a highly mobile lifestyle (Berzonsky, 2011; Chandra et al., 2010; Hisano, 2015). The findings also support the research by Finkel et al. (2003) and Easterbrooks et al. (2013) that emphasizes the important role that belonging specifically to a military community has on highly mobile military children. The shared experience these children gained as being part of the military became a source of support and resiliency for them.

The findings from this study extend our knowledge of transitions among military children by exposing the role that identity plays in influencing their lives (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013; Herman & Yarwood, 2014). As Dowling (2009) argues, identity is a lived experience, and for these highly mobile military children, much of their experiences from childhood corresponded to a sense of identity that came from most of them living, shopping, visiting the doctor, and going to school on a military base where they were immersed in military culture. In this community they were connected to other military children and families, and they gained a

sense of pride and respect for the service that they and their family were a part of. This finding is also consistent with the research of Paden and Pezor (1993), who noted that military values such as pride and a sense of community help to support and build resilience in military families.

Symbols and language all created a military culture and, from the participants' perspective, it created a sense of belonging, which helped them navigate the multiple moves. As previous research on this topic has shown, identity formation is strongly tied to symbols such as traditions and rituals within the community (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). According to Gover (1996), language and symbol are used for bridging a person's personal identity to their social and cultural community. The participants in this study often cited symbols, language, and traditions as ways in which they described military culture. The connection to military culture, through these symbols, allowed the participants in this study to feel they belonged to a larger community, which helped as they transitioned from one duty station to the next.

Consistent with previous research by Park (2011), who found that multiple moves provide the opportunity to grow and experience new cultures, meet new people, and make new friends which leads to positive outcomes, children in this study suggested that moving gets easier as time goes on because of the many strategies they used and then refined with each subsequent move.

### **Strategies**

Although my findings are consistent with previous research that examines both the supports and challenges faced by highly mobile military children, to date there is scant information on how highly mobile children use various supports to overcome challenges and navigate their multiple moves. Many of the participants in this study mentioned various strategies they developed that helped them transition to new schools and homes. They honed

these strategies over time during their years of multiple moves. Their strategies included learning to be flexible and adapt in many ways to new situations without changing their core values. Keeping their core values intact and being true to who they are allowed them to learn to accept and adjust to new situations, and to observe surroundings to find and seek out people with common interests and attitudes. Another strategy they used was to become involved in extracurricular activities that provided continuity as well as a means to meet other people with similar interests. The importance of continuity for highly mobile children is confirmed by Backhaus (1984) and Bradshaw et al. (2010), who found that consistency for mobile children helps to build a sense of comfort.

The findings from this study add important understanding to the experiences of highly mobile children by providing knowledge regarding the specific nuanced strategies used by highly mobile military children for adapting and adjusting to change. This knowledge was missing from the literature and could only be found through a more in-depth investigation of the participants' experiences from their perspective.

### **Research Question #3**

As noted in Chapter 4, many of these strategies and supports associated with these children's experiences during their PK-12 years have transcended their childhood into their young adult lives. Many participants mentioned that, even in young adulthood, they retain a sense of identity with their lived military experience as a child and benefit from the sense of belongingness and being connected to others who have had the same or similar experiences. Most participants expressed a desire for change or a feeling of never being quite satisfied in the place they live, both metaphorically and physically. Participants mentioned, often hesitantly, that they had a hard time staying in the same place for too long, whether that was a physical location,

a job, or a field of study. While some participants expressed this need or desire for change or the inability to be satisfied with their current situation as a negative characteristic, others saw it as an extension of the lifestyle they led as highly mobile military children.

Many of the participants mentioned how this experience as children helped them adapt to change, and they believe it has provided them with the ability to overcome negative situations better than their other young adult peers. Contrary to the current media representation of military children, these children have grown into resilient young adults who are confident that, although life brings many challenges, they have the ability to face adversity and to overcome challenges that are put in their way because they have done it before.

Home for a highly mobile child is often very hard to define, and that uncertainty follows them into adulthood. The concept of home is something most of the participants did not really think much about until they were older and went off to college. Family was a strong support structure for these military children, and it remains so even in adulthood.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

In conclusion, the findings that emerged from this study confirm the literature in terms of family support and a sense of belonging for overcoming the challenges of highly mobile military families. However, the findings for this particular population deepen what we know from the existing literature. The opportunity to interview participants who are now young adults, and who are able to be reflective of their years as highly mobile military children, provided a deeper understanding of what it means to have family support and a sense of belonging to the wider military community, from their perspective. Through their reflections we learn about the importance of the interconnected support of a strong family and the support they received from being part of a military community as key to navigating multiple moves.

Social and human capital formation are a means of building and supporting resiliency in individuals, families, and communities (Coleman, 1988a; Coleman, 1988b). Coleman's theory of social capital (1988a) posits that differences in achievement in similar populations can be attributed to the social capital accumulation, the relations and connections between and among people within the social structures and norms of a given community which can provide or inhibit the ability to gain the benefits of human capital formation. Human capital is the development of skills and capabilities that enhance a person's ability to function within society (Coleman, 1988a; Coleman, 1988b). The strong relations between highly mobile military children and their families, combined with having education supports and a sense of belonging to the military community, worked together to help these young adults develop skills and knowledge, thereby increasing their own personal human capital and their ability to build resiliency against current and future challenges.

The findings from this study show the embedded interaction between all three major themes – family support, military culture, and education support – and how the interrelatedness of these factors help to build resilience, human capital, and the accumulation of social capital needed by highly mobile military children to adapt and persevere through multiple moves and sustain them into adulthood.

The participants mentioned the benefit of moving into schools that had structures in place to support mobile populations and the benefit of educators who had the cultural sensitivity to help highly mobile military children as they adapted to a new school and curriculum. Attending schools that were responsive to their needs added to their social capital through the strengthening of social connections and was extremely important in helping them transition.

These lessons can have implications for future highly mobile military children, their families, the military and military support organizations, as well as schools and educators who seek to build structures that support highly mobile military children.

### **Implications for Highly Mobile Military Children**

The young adults who participated in this study often made comments or mentioned that they believed they were the only ones who felt the way they did about transitions and multiple moves. However, what emerged from this study is that these children expressed feelings and told stories that indicated they shared a lot of common experiences. Developing a strong sense of family attachment to parents and siblings was vital for the participants in the study as they transitioned from one school to the next.

They also developed a desire and need to continue to move and to seek out new experiences. They were not afraid of embarking on a new adventure or choosing a different path from their peers, and they had a strong commitment to education and life-long learning. These findings can be used heuristically to build supports that encourage a positive, open-minded outlook and a strong commitment to life-long learning.

### **Implications for Family**

Military families who are either facing multiple moves or are currently experiencing them can learn many lessons from the participants in this study. Despite the benefits they derived from their supportive families, these highly mobile military children also reported feeling a sense of homelessness. Military families will need to recognize that supporting their children's education and extracurricular pursuits is vital to helping them navigate the multiple transitions and the challenges that accompany those moves. Not all families look alike; although the majority of participants in this study came from a traditional nuclear family, there were some young adults in

the study who came from divorced parents. The structure of the family seemed less important than the level of support they received and, for the young adults in this study, they all felt support from their parents.

Given the important role that family plays, for single, active-duty parents who may have to leave home for extended periods of time, it could be beneficial to include the other parent – to the extent possible – in the daily lives of the military children and to reach out to extended family or to the larger military community to maintain continuity for highly mobile military children.

### **Implications for Policy-Makers**

Military leaders need to understand the importance of military families and commit to policies that strengthen and support family resilience. Military support organizations play a vital role in filling this gap, but the leaders within the Department of Defense (DoD) also need to understand the relationship between strong families and operational readiness of active duty forces. Strong families are linked to higher morale within the active duty forces, which is vital to troop readiness and retention (Saltzman et al., 2011; President's Commission, 2011). Given the results of this study, policies that create transition resources for families and provide formal structures at each command for incoming families and children should be a priority of DoD leadership.

Schools that include highly mobile military children should implement policies to support their teachers in learning about and understanding the unique characteristics of military children, as well as the unique challenges that are associated with high mobility (an idea that has been identified and called for by the findings that emerged from this study). It is also clear from the findings of this study that some highly mobile children can be challenged by gaps in curriculum due to multiple moves but feel supported by teachers when they have an understanding of their

unique challenges. Addressing the need for culturally responsive teaching can make a difference in their lives. Schools with high mobility should implement specific policies on welcoming and integrating new children into their classrooms and into the culture of the school. A welcoming and understanding school culture can help a child adapt quicker and allow them to feel supported during the transition process.

### **Implications for Leadership Studies**

The highly mobile military children who participated in this study exhibited individual development of leadership skills. It is common knowledge in the study of leadership that leaders are not born, as the Great Man Theory once led us to believe (Northouse, 2007); they develop over time. A simple search of the literature on resiliency theory and its importance throughout the study of leadership will yield thousands of results, from Heifetz's discussion of adaptive leadership (1994) to Otto Scharmer's "Theory U" (Scharmer & Kaufer, 2013). These studies lead to one primary conclusion: Leaders must be able to adapt to changing situations and cope with challenges, through building resilience. The highly mobile military children in this study exhibited increasing levels of resilience as they navigated their multiple transitions and, therefore, are exemplars of building resilience through adaptation to continual changes in environment.

Additionally, in today's global and increasingly mobile world, it is imperative leaders understand how to navigate among different cultures, whether national, organizational, or regional. This environment calls for leadership that "transcends cultures to understand what works and what does not work in different cultural settings" (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002, p. 3). Highly mobile military children have exhibited the ability to cross seamlessly through cultures as they adapted to multiple and varying environments both

domestically and internationally. They gained the skills needed to quickly observe a new situation and to adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of each new environment they found themselves a part of. Our society has recently become deeply divided among ideological lines; leaders who are able to understand these cultural nuances are vital to building a more peaceful future. These highly mobile military children have learned through multiple transitions from one new environment to the next to recognize and work within these various cultural norms and expectations and therefore exhibit the traits we need to see created and strengthened among leaders of today.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

While the participants in this study provided in-depth knowledge of their experiences as highly mobile military children, further questions about the experiences of other highly mobile military children and other highly mobile populations of children have emerged. There are many opportunities for further research based on the participants' insight. Some of this research is described below.

More research is needed to compare college degree attainment of highly mobile military children with military children who did not experience the same high mobility during their PK-12 grade years. This study included children who came from primarily highly educated families in which the parent who was active duty served for over 20 years. Further research is needed to determine if their experiences are a result of the long-term exposure to mobility and the military culture, or if short-term exposure to military culture (those who left the military after 12 years or less of active duty service) has the same effect on children's experiences with multiple transitions.

A more robust study of military children who identify as CCKs or TCKs is needed to compare their experiences and strategies to other CCKs and TCKs. This subgroup of military children is often left out of the research associated with CCKs and TCKs, and scholars who currently study this topic have called for more research on this subgroup.

The children who moved during the middle of the school year seemed to feel this had a more negative impact on education by creating greater gaps. It also did not allow them to create friendships or become familiar with their new environment before school began. More research using a larger sample is needed to determine if moving kids during the school year versus during the summer creates further challenges for mobile children, as this data suggests. If the effect is negative, DoD policy-makers should consider moving families of school aged children during the summer months, or long school breaks, whenever possible.

More research is needed based on these preliminary findings to determine if the same findings are consistent with a larger group of highly mobile military children. A larger quantitative study that surveys highly mobile military children from other nations could provide insight and learning opportunities into ways other cultures support their highly mobile military children and other populations of highly mobile children.

It is important to note that a larger sample of highly mobile military children may reveal that not all highly mobile children have the same experiences or have been able to develop the same level of resilience as the participants in this study. Any differences in findings across a broader sample of children (either in the US or internationally) could potentially give greater insight into the factors that challenge children's experiences with transitions.

Emerging from this study was the importance of highly mobile children having access to culturally competent educators and school structures that support the military child. An

additional finding was the importance in the transition process for the participants if educators had an understanding of military culture. More research is needed to determine if cultural competency training of educators about highly mobile military children and other highly mobile populations will lead to easier transitions for highly mobile children. In 2011 Former First Lady Michelle Obama and Former Second Lady Dr. Jill Biden called for greater educational support of military children (“Joining Forces: Education,” n.d.). This initiative has gained some interest but, to date, the majority of universities that prepare teacher candidates and districts who provide professional development to teachers do little to educate them about the needs of military children.

While this research suggests that support programs can be helpful for some individuals, the majority of the participants in this study were largely unaware of existing informal support organizations. To mitigate the educational gaps that occur with military children, the Military Children’s Education Coalition (MCEC) was started just 10 years ago, along with many other organizations to support military families. These types of support organizations have recently started growing and expanding their work after most of the participants in this study had already started experiencing high mobility. However, their primary focus is on direct education support, not on the social needs of highly mobile military children. More research is needed to see if support programs like MCEC make a difference in overcoming the social challenges as well as educational challenges of highly mobile military children through educational support.

A study which encompasses a focus on leadership development through cultural understanding and the building of resilience in the early years would be useful to the study of leadership and for developing policies supporting children who live a life of continual change and adaptation. In addition, focus on teaching adaptation as a way of building resilience and

cultural understanding can be transmitted to future generations of children through curriculum or skill-building modules that include children from diverse cultures and regions.

Further research entailing a social network analysis<sup>5</sup> of a larger population of highly mobile military children could provide further insight into the strength and importance of various supports that provide the best opportunity for understanding the needs of highly mobile military children, and it could help to lead to the development of a model for resiliency-building, benefiting future generations of military children. Taking action to conduct this kind of research can better inform military families, military leadership, and educators as to what types of support structures work best. The information from this study and the proposed research can help create policy to better support current and future highly mobile military children.

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<sup>5</sup> “The mapping and measuring of relationships and flows between people, groups, organizations, computers, URLs, and other connected information/knowledge entities” (<http://www.orgnet.com/sna.html>)

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## APPENDIX A

Definition of Terms<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The terms and definitions in this appendix are from the Department of Defense website:  
[http://jitc.fhu.disa.mil/jitc\\_dri/pdfs/jp1\\_02.pdf](http://jitc.fhu.disa.mil/jitc_dri/pdfs/jp1_02.pdf)

The following terms are used throughout this paper. For a complete list of military terms and definitions, visit the Department of Defense website at: <http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/jel/doddict>

**Active duty** — Full-time duty in the active military service of the United States. This includes members of the Reserve Components serving on active duty or full-time training duty, but does not include full-time National Guard duty. Also called AD.

**Active Guard and Reserve** — National Guard and Reserve members who are on voluntary active duty providing full-time support to National Guard, Reserve, and Active Component organizations for the purpose of organizing, administering, recruiting, instructing, or training the Reserve Components. Also called AGR. (CJCSM 3150.13)

**Armed forces** — The military forces of a nation or a group of nations.

**Attach/attachment** — 1. The placement of units or personnel in an organization where such placement is relatively temporary. 2. The detailing of individuals to specific functions where such functions are secondary or relatively temporary, e.g., attached for quarters and rations; attached for flying duty.

**Attrition** — The reduction of the effectiveness of a force caused by loss of personnel and materiel.

**Augmentation forces** — Forces to be transferred from a supporting combatant commander to the combatant command (command authority) or operational control of a supported combatant commander during the execution of an operation order approved by the President and Secretary of Defense.

**Base/Post** — 1. A locality from which operations are projected or supported. 2. An area or locality containing installations which provide logistic or other support. See also establishment. 3. Home airfield or home carrier.

**Department of Defense civilian** — A Federal civilian employee of the Department of Defense directly hired and paid from appropriated or nonappropriated funds, under permanent or temporary appointment. Specifically excluded are contractors and foreign host nationals as well as third country civilians. (JP 1-0)

**Department of Defense components** — The Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Military Departments, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the combatant commands, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Department of Defense agencies, field activities, and all other organizational entities in the Department of Defense.

**Department of the Air Force** — The executive part of the Department of the Air Force at the seat of government and all field headquarters, forces, Reserve Components, installations, activities, and functions under the control or supervision of the Secretary of the Air Force. Also called DAF. See also Military Department.

**Department of the Army** — The executive part of the Department of the Army at the seat of government and all field headquarters, forces, Reserve Components, installations, activities, and functions under the control or supervision of the Secretary of the Army. Also called DA. See also Military Department.

**Department of the Navy** — The executive part of the Department of the Navy at the seat of government; the headquarters, US Marine Corps; the entire operating forces of the United States Navy and of the US Marine Corps, including the Reserve Components of such forces; all field activities, headquarters, forces, bases, installations, activities, and functions under the control or supervision of the Secretary of the Navy; and the US Coast Guard when operating as a part of the Navy pursuant to law. Also called DON. See also Military Department.

**Dependents/immediate family** — An employee's spouse; children who are unmarried and under age 21 years or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self-support; dependent parents, including step and legally adoptive parents of the employee's spouse; and dependent brothers and sisters, including step and legally adoptive brothers and sisters of the employee's spouse who are unmarried and under 21 years of age or who, regardless of age, are physically or mentally incapable of self-support.

**Deployment** — 1. In naval usage, the change from a cruising approach or contact disposition to a disposition for battle. 2. The movement of forces within operational areas. 3. The positioning of forces into a formation for battle. 4. The relocation of forces and materiel to desired operational areas. Deployment encompasses all activities from origin or home station through destination, specifically including intra-continental United States, intertheater, and intratheater movement legs, staging, and holding areas. See also deployment order; deployment planning; prepare to deploy order. (JP 4-0)

**Family Support Services** – Each branch of the military has a component that is directly responsible for services with direct support to military families

**Home station or duty station** — The permanent location of active duty units and Reserve Component units

**Pack Out** – the process of moving household goods out of your current home to deliver to your next duty station.

**Permanent Change of Station (PCS)** – When a service member is assigned a new set of orders necessitating a permanent (more than 6 months) change of duty station.

**Relief Societies** – Each branch of the service (Navy and Marines are combined) is supported by a relief society that provides emergency loans, new baby classes, deployment support, and scholarships to active duty military families

**AER**- Army Emergency Relief

**AFAS** – Air Force Aid Society

**NMCRS**- Navy and Marine Corp Relief Society

**Reserve** — 1. Portion of a body of troops that is kept to the rear, or withheld from action at the beginning of an engagement, in order to be available for a decisive movement. 2. Members of the Military Services who are not in active service but who are subject to call to active duty. 3. Portion of an appropriation or contract authorization held or set aside for future operations or contingencies and, in respect to which, administrative authorization to incur commitments or obligations has been withheld.

**Reserve Components** — Reserve Components of the Armed Forces of the United States are: a. the Army National Guard of the United States; b. the Army Reserve; c. the Naval Reserve; d. the Marine Corps Reserve; e. the Air National Guard of the United States; f. the Air Force Reserve; and g. the Coast Guard Reserve. Also called RCs.

**Retired Reserve** — All Reserve members who receive retirement pay on the basis of their active duty and/or Reserve service; those members who are otherwise eligible for retirement pay but have not reached age 60 and who have not elected discharge and are not voluntary members of the Ready or Standby Reserve. See also active duty; Ready Reserve; Standby Reserve.

**Station** — 1. A general term meaning any military or naval activity at a fixed land location. 2. A particular kind of activity to which other activities or individuals may come for a specific service, often of a technical nature, e.g., aid station. 3. An assigned or prescribed position in a naval formation or cruising disposition; or an assigned area in an approach, contact, or battle disposition. 4. Any place of duty or post or position in the field to which an individual, group of individuals, or a unit may be assigned. 5. One or more transmitters or receivers or a combination of transmitters and receivers, including the accessory equipment necessary at one location, for carrying on radio communication service. Each station will be classified by the service in which it operates permanently or temporarily.

APPENDIX B

Participants and Demographics

Table B1

*Participants and Demographics*

Participant <sup>7</sup>	Age	Branch	Rank of parent	# Moves PK-12 <sup>*</sup>	# Schools PK-12	Home-school	DOD School	Private school	# Total Moves	Highest Level of Education <sup>8</sup>	Overseas <sup>9</sup>	Deploy <sup>10</sup>	Gender	Sibling	Joined Military	Parent is Mill Brat
RY1.2	24	Navy	O5	8	12	N	3	Int'l	7	B	3	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY1	27	Navy	O5	12	13	N	3	Int'l	8	M	3	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY2	27	Navy	O4 <sup>*11</sup>	5	8	N	1	N	5	B	2	Y	M	Y	Y	N
RP2	P	Navy	O4*							M			F			
RY3.2	22	Coast Guard	O6	6	6	N	N	N	7	B	1	N	F	Y	N	N
RY3	25	Coast Guard	O6	7	5	N	N	N	7	B	1	N	F	Y	N	N
RP3	P	Coast Guard	O6							B			F			
RY4	20	Navy	O6	7	3	Y	1	N	7	B (IP)	1	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY5	21	Navy	O6	4	4	N	1	N	5	B	2	N	M	N	N	N
RY6	31	Air Force	O6	5	8	N	Y	N	7	B	0	Y	M	Y	N	N
RY7	26	Navy	O6	8	8	N	1	Y	10	B	3	Y	F	Y	N	N
RP7	P	Navy	O6							B			F			
RY7.2	21	Navy	O6	7	7	N	1	Y	9	B	2	Y	M	Y	N	N
RY8	27	Air Force	O6	6	8	N	3	N	9	M	1	N	F	Y	N	Y
RP8	P	Air Force	O6							M			F			
RY9	28	Marine	O5	4	5	N	2	N	5	M	2	Y	F	Y	N	N
RP9	P	Marine	O5							B			F			
RY10	25	Navy	O4*	4	5	N	N	N	6	AA	0	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY11	28	Army	E9	5	6	N	1	N	6	B	1	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY12	19	Navy	E9	5	5	Y	1	Y	5	B (IP)	3	Y	F	Y	N	N

<sup>7</sup> Parent participants are shaded in blue

<sup>8</sup> B= Bachelor's degree, M=master's degree, IP = In progress

<sup>9</sup> Number of overseas moves in PK-12 grades

<sup>10</sup> Parent deployed at least once in PK-12 grades

<sup>11</sup> \*= prior enlisted (active duty parent came into military as enlisted, earned college degree and then applied for and was accepted to become an officer.

Table B1, *cont.*

Participant	Age	Branch	Rank of parent	# Moves PK-12*	# Schools PK-12	Home-school	DOD School	Private school	# Total Moves	Highest Level of Education	Overseas	Deploy	Gender	Sibling	Joined Military	Parent is Mil Brat
RP12	P	Navy	E9							some college			F			
RY13	28	Marine	O5	5	8	N	2	N	8	M	1	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY14.2	30	Army	O4	4	4	N	N	N	6	Some college	1	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY14.2	32	Army	O4	4	4	N	N	N	6	Some college	1	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY15	22	Navy	O5	5	5	N	1	Y	6	B	1	Y	M	Y	N	Y
RP15	P	Navy	O5							Some college			F			
RY16	27	Army	O5	6	6	N	2	N	7	M	3	Y	F	Y	Y	Y
RP16	P	Army	O5							B			F			
RY17	24	Marine	O4	4	4	N	N	N	5	B	0	Y	M	N	N	N
RY18	22	Nat'l Guard	O7	5	8	N	1	Y	6	B	0	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY18.2	20	Nat'l Guard	O7	5	5	N	1	Y	5	B	0	Y	F	Y	N	N
RY19	30	Marine	O4	5	6	N	1	N	5	M	0	Y	M	Y	N	N
RY20	27	Army	O6	9	7	N	3	Y Int'l and parochial	9	M	4	Y	F	Y	N	N

APPENDIX C

Parent Interview Guide

## Interview Guide for Parents of Highly Mobile Military Children

### **Background: (Only fill in blanks from parents if kids don't give me info-refer to kids' interview protocol for missing information)**

1. How would you describe each of the multiple moves in terms of disruption to school/life? Easy? extremely difficult? Why? What makes you say that?
2. Were there any particular life events, in addition to moves, that happened around the same time as PCS moves experienced during your child(ren)'s PK-12 years? (birth of new baby, illness or death in family or close friends, divorce, etc...?)

### **Advantages/Challenges:**

3. Do you think your kids would see advantages to moving so often during their PK-12 years? If so, what would they be? What advantages did you feel your child(ren) gained from experiencing a highly mobile life during their PK-12 years?
4. What challenges, if any, are you aware of that your child(ren) experienced during these moves? -Probe (provide examples if needed)
5. What educational challenges, if any, did your child(ren) experience during these moves? – Probe here
6. What social challenges, if any, did your child(ren) face during these moves? –Probe here - about friends, joining sports or clubs...

### **Strategies:**

1. Did you find any particular strategies your child(ren) developed that helped ease the many transitions during their PK-12 experience? Education? Social settings? – Probe -
2. Did you find these strategies worked for other children (if more than one child probe for differences/similarities among the siblings) you knew? What strategies did they develop that you believed were particularly helpful? (Give examples such as role playing, or extracurricular activities that others have mentioned if they aren't sure)
3. Did a move shape or change your child(ren)'s extracurricular activities or extracurricular life?
4. Did any of these strategies change with different moves? Explain? Did they evolve over time and if so, why?

5. What role, if any, do you think your family life played in helping your child(ren) develop transitioning strategies?
6. Did you grow up in a military family?
7. If #13 is yes:
  - a. What age were you while your parent was on active duty? Same service as your spouse or you?
  - b. Did you have to move during your PK-12 years? If so, how many times?
  - c. How, if at all, did your experience help you guide your child(ren) in their multiple moves?
8. What role, if any, do you think their extended family (grandparents, cousins, etc...) played in transitioning strategies?
9. What role, if any, do you think their friends/peers played in transitioning strategies?
10. What role, if any, do you believe these strategies played in helping your child(ren) achieve or work towards their goals?

### **Existing Support Organizations**

11. Were you aware of any support organizations/services that existed to help military children/families transition to new duty stations? -Probe – provide examples if needed.
12. If #6 is yes:
  - a. What support organizations/services were you aware of? –Probe-
  - b. Did you or your family make use of these organizations/services? If yes, which ones and how did you use them? In what ways did they meet/or not meet your needs? Probe

### **Culture**

13. We often hear about references to “military culture”. In sociology, culture refers to the ways of life of the members of society, or of groups within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs, language and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits (Giddens, 2005). Culture plays an important role in perpetuating the values and norms of a society; however, it also offers significant opportunities for resourcefulness and change. Every culture has its own unique patterns of behavior, which seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds.

Would you agree or disagree that there is a unique military culture? If you agree, why? Can you give an example?

14. If one or more of your moves was overseas: did you experience much interaction with the local culture? Would you say your children adapted or changed due to their interactions with the local culture? Do you think their perceptions or ways of thinking are different from other Americans because of this interaction?

**Goals:**

15. Did your children/child ever talk about college or career goals, did those goals change – when or why? (probe: academic, personal, other?)  
If yes, then ask #'s 9-11
16. Do you feel your child(ren) met those goals? Examples?
17. If not, where are they on the path to these goals today?
18. What personal or social factors would you say account for their ability to meet those goals or not?

**Basic Demographics**

19. Education level?
20. Ethnicity?

**Summing Up:**

21. Have you noticed if any of these strategies carried over into adulthood for your child(ren)? Explain?
22. Recently NPR aired a report about an 8<sup>th</sup> grade group from a DOD school in Italy coming to the US Inauguration. The teacher who arranged the trip said he asked his students what three things about military kids they would like people to know about military kids. How would you answer that question?
23. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand the strategies your child(ren) developed to navigate the multiple moves they experienced as a highly mobile military child?
24. Is there another military child or parent of one who you think might be willing to participate in this study? Could you introduce me to them?

APPENDIX D

Young Adult Interview Guide

## **Interview Guide for Highly Mobile Military Young Adults**

Introduce topic of the research and give interviewee a little background information. Ask them to sign consent form. Ask them a bit about themselves.

### **Background/Family Structure:**

7. Which branch of the military is your family a part of?
8. What years were you a part of an active duty military family? How old were you during the active duty timeframe?
9. Status and most recent rank of military sponsor. Sponsor's specialty –
10. Tell me about your family. How many people? Married or single parent? Step-family?
11. How many siblings do you have?
  - a. If siblings, what are age differences and gender.

### **Basic Demographics**

12. Education level?
13. Ethnicity?
14. Age?
15. Married? Military Spouse

### **Mobility:**

16. How many moves were made when you were in your PK-12 years? (FILTER)
  - a. How many were PCS moves?
  - b. Did these moves involve transferring to another state or country?
17. Can you tell me about these moves in the PK-12 years? Where?
  - a. Probe for types of schools (public, private, DOD, international, etc...)

### **Advantages/Challenges:**

18. What challenges, if any, did you face during these moves? -Probe – (provide examples if needed)
  - a. How would you describe each of the multiple moves in terms of disruption to school/life? Easy? extremely difficult? Why? What makes you say that?
19. What educational challenges, if any, did you face during these moves? –Probe here

20. What social challenges, if any, did you face during these moves? –Probe here

**Strategies:**

21. Did you find any particular strategies that helped ease the many transitions during your PK-12 experience? Education? Social settings? – Probe – (Took kit?)
22. If you found any particular strategies helpful, did these strategies work for other children (siblings) you knew? What strategies did they develop? (Give examples such as role playing, or extracurricular activities that others have mentioned if they aren't sure)
- a. What might you tell a young military child about moving? What advice would you give?
23. Did a move shape or change your extracurricular activities or extracurricular life?
24. Did any of your strategies change with different moves? Explain? Did they evolve over time and if so why?
25. What role, if any, do you think your family life played in helping you develop transitioning strategies?
- a. Sibling role?
26. What role, if any, do you think your extended family played in transitioning strategies?
27. What role, if any, do you think your friends/peers played in transitioning strategies?
28. Do you feel the same connection to military brats who have not moved?
29. Did either of your parents grow up as military brats?
- a. If so, have you ever discussed that together?
  - b. Do you believe that had an impact on how he/she supported you during your multiple moves? If so, how?
30. Did any of these strategies for moving carry over into adulthood for you? Explain?
31. What advantages did you feel you gained from experiencing a highly mobile life during your PK-12 years?
- a. Probe with examples if they are not sure.
  - b. Were these advantages always apparent? If not, when did you realize the advantage of high mobility? In what ways do the advantages affect your choices/outlook/life today?

**Existing Support Organizations**

32. Were you aware of any support organizations/services that existed to help military children transition to new duty stations? What was available? -Probe – provide examples if needed.

33. If #21 is yes:

- a. What support organizations/services were you aware of? –Probe-
- b. Did you or your family make use of these organizations/services? If yes, which ones and how did you use them? In what ways did they meet/or not meet your needs? Probe-

### **Culture**

34. We often hear about references to “military culture”. In sociology, culture refers to the ways of life of the members of society, or of groups within a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs, language and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits (Giddens, 2005). Culture plays an important role in perpetuating the values and norms of a society; however, it also offers significant opportunities for resourcefulness and change. Every culture has its own unique patterns of behavior, which seem alien to people from other cultural backgrounds.

Would you agree or disagree that there is a unique military culture? If you agree, how do you think that affected your interactions with other military-connected kids and people? How did it affect your interactions with the non-military connected population? Can you give an example?

35. If one or more of your moves was overseas: did you experience much interaction with the local culture? Would you say you adapted or changed due to your interactions with the local culture? Do you think your perceptions or ways of thinking are different from other Americans because of this interaction? Do you identify with the other culture?

### **Goals:**

36. What were some of the goals you developed for yourself during your k-12 school years? (probe: academic, personal, other?)

37. Do you feel you met those goals? Examples?

38. If not, where are you on your path to these goals today?

39. What role, if any, do you believe the strategies you developed for moving played in helping you achieve or work towards your goals?

### **Summing Up:**

40. Recently NPR aired a report about an 8<sup>th</sup> grade group from a DOD school in Italy coming to the US Inauguration. The teacher who arranged the trip said he asked his students what three things about military kids they would like civilians to know about military kids. How would you answer that question?

41. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand the strategies you developed to navigate the multiple moves you experienced as a highly mobile military child?

42. Is there anyone else you think might be willing to participate in this study who has also moved multiple times as a military child during their PK – 12 years? Could you introduce me to them?

Thank them for their time and ask if you can contact them later.

APPENDIX E

Military Rank<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from  
<http://www.wnymoaa.org/military%20%26%20gs%20rank%20abbreviations%20%26%20equivalents.pdf>

Table E1

*Military Rank*

<b>PAY GRADE</b>	<b>ARMY</b>	<b>MARINE CORPS</b>	<b>NAVY</b>	<b>AIR FORCE</b>	<b>COAST GUARD</b>
<b>ENLISTED</b>					
E-1	PV1	Pvt	SR	AB	SR
E-2	PV2	Pfc	SA	Amn	SA
E-3	PFC	LCpl	SN	A1C	SN
E-4	SPC	Cpl	P03	SrA	P03
E-5	SGT	Sgt	P02	SSgt	P02
E-6	SSG	SSgt	P01	TSgt	P01
E-7	SFC	GySgt	CPO	MSgt	CPO
E-8	MSG 1SG	MSgt 1stSgt	SCPO	SMSgt	SCPO
E-9	SGM CSM	MGySgt SgtMaj	MCPO	CMSgt	MCPO
<b>WARRANT OFFICER</b>					
W-1	W01	WO	--	--	--
W-2	CW2	CWO2	CWO2	--	CWO2
W-3	CW3	CWO3	CWO3	--	CWO3
W-4	CW4	CWO4	CWO4	--	CWO4
W-5	CW5	CWO5	CWO5	--	--
<b>OFFICER</b>					
O-1	2LT	2ndLt	ENS	2d Lt	ENS
O-2	1LT	1stLt	LTJG	1st Lt	LTJG
O-3	CPT	Capt	LT	Capt	LT
O-4	MAJ	Maj	LCDR	Maj	LCDR
O-5	LTC	LtCol	CDR	Lt Col	CDR
O-6	COL	Col	CAPT	Col	CAPT
O-7	BG	BGen	RDML	Brig Gen	RDML
O-8	MG	MajGen	RADM	Maj Gen	RADM
O-9	LTG	LtGen	VADM	Lt Gen	VADM
O-10	GEN	Gen	ADM	Gen	ADM

APPENDIX F

Consent Form

**University of San Diego  
Institutional Review Board**

**Research Participant Consent Form**

For the research study entitled:  
HIGHLY MOBILE CHILDREN: STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT IN PURSUIT OF GOAL  
ATTAINMENT

**I. Purpose of the research study**

You are invited to participate in a research study being conducted by Kim Hunt, M.A., a doctoral student at the University of San Diego. *The purpose of the study is to: 1) better understand the challenges faced by highly mobile military children in education and their social lives; and 2) help identify strategies these children and their parents have used to reach, or attain to reach, their self-identified goals.*

The research team is comprised of Kim Hunt, M.A., a doctoral student at University of San Diego.

**II. What you will be asked to do**

If you decide to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in a personal interview.

Your participation in this study will take a total of 60 - 90 minutes.

**III. Foreseeable risks or discomforts**

This study involves no more risk than the risks you encounter in daily life. However, sometimes when people are asked to think about their feelings, they feel sad or anxious. If you would like to talk to someone about your feelings at any time, you can call toll-free, 24 hours a day: San Diego Mental Health Hotline at 1-800-479-3339 or locate a number or resource in your local area: <http://www.crisistextline.org>

**IV. Benefits**

While there may be no direct benefit to you from participating in this study, the indirect benefit of participating will be knowing that you helped researchers, practitioners, policy makers, funders, and service organizations better understand the needs of highly mobile military children and the strategies involved in successful transitions across multiple moves.

**V. Confidentiality**

Any information provided and/or identifying records will remain confidential and kept in a locked file and/or password-protected computer file in the researcher's office for a minimum of five years. Your name and organization will not be identifiable.

**VI. Compensation**

You will not receive compensation for this research project.

**VII. Voluntary Nature of this Research**

**Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You do not have to do this,** and you can refuse to answer any question or quit at any time. Deciding not to participate or not answering any of the questions will have no effect on any benefits you're entitled to, like your health care, or your employment or grades. **You can withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.**

**VIII. Contact Information**

**If you have any questions about this research, you may contact:**

**Kim Hunt, M.A.**

**Email:** kdhunt@sandiego.edu

**Phone:** 619-792-5459

**I have read and understand this form, and consent to the research it describes to me. I have received a copy of this consent form for my records.**

---

Signature of Participant

Date

---

Name of Participant (**Printed**)

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Signature of Investigator

Date



## Institutional Review Board Project Action Summary

**Action Date:** February 13, 2017      *Note: Approval expires one year after this date.*

**Type:**  New Full Review  New Expedited Review  Continuation Review  New Exempt Review  
 Modification

**Action:**  Approved  Approved Pending Modification  Not Approved

**Project Number:** 2017-02-138

**Researcher(s):** Kim Hunt, M.A. Doc SOLES  
Lea Hubbard, Ph.D. Fac SOLES

**Project Title:** Highly Mobile Children: Strategy Development in Pursuit of Goal Attainment

*Note: We send IRB correspondence regarding student research to the faculty advisor, who bears the ultimate responsibility for the conduct of the research. We request that the faculty advisor share this correspondence with the student researcher.*

### Modifications Required or Reasons for Non-Approval

None

The next deadline for submitting project proposals to the Provost's Office for full review is N/A. You may submit a project proposal for expedited review at any time.

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Dr. Thomas R. Herrinton  
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