Growing Up the Military Way (1981-1992): An Autoethnography

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Jennifer Gwen Thacker

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Dedication

To my family for their never-ending love and support.

Acknowledgements

I must begin by thanking God and my family for providing me with the strength to complete this research project. My family has inspired me through all my educational endeavors, and I am blessed each day for their love and support. Thank you to my father for his service to our country and for dragging us all over the world. I am grateful for my mother who is the embodiment of strength and resiliency as a Marine Corps wife. She is always teaching me that we can learn and grow no matter our age. Thank you to my brother, Warren, who walked beside me and faced each challenge with me. Thank you for being my partner in crime.

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Abstract

The purpose of this autoethnographic dissertation is to examine the experiences of one child growing up in a military family. The research depicts the experience of power and gender as communicated through my own narrative as the daughter of a United States Marine. My father served in the United States Marine Corps for 27 years, although my experiences depicted in this study are specific to his years of active duty service during my childhood (1981-1992). I maintained a reflexive journal through the data collection process to ensure optimal personal data collection. Examples of the personal data collected includes family photographs, journals, and writing prompts; additionally, I used field notes and data collected through interviewing my immediate family to create an evocative story of my personal experiences as a military child. A thematic analysis revealed three overarching themes throughout the narrative: family, structure, and silence.

As cultural studies research, this exploration offers a glimpse into military culture from the perspective on one military child. My stories give voice to my experiences transitioning to new schools and new communities while managing the challenges of varying cultural norms and familial expectations. This study is written for readers to engage with the stories and understand the complexities of one military child's experiences.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There are a number of phrases and slang that we grew up hearing in my home. *Leatherneck - jarhead* – or the forbidden phrase *ex-Marine*. My father will tell anyone who asks without hesitation, *once a Marine, always a Marine.* I was born into a United States Marine Corps family, so I thought it was normal for a child to know how to use a compass, read a map, and practice self-defense with a parent before the age of five years old. It was much later in life that I learned how different my family was compared to civilian families. It is no wonder that many of my childhood memories stem from my life as a military dependent.

In the spring of 2017 for a cultural studies course, I wrote a paper exploring care theory and how it relates to the familial dynamics of a military household. At the time, I had another focus for my dissertation, so I thought this paper would be a pleasant diversion from that focus to follow the introspective path the class discussions carved out for me. The class readings and discussions explored a plethora of subjects beyond those of voice, gender roles and norms, and oppression/dominance environments, but I found myself relating the majority of these topics back to my experiences growing up as a child of a military family. Looking back through my journals over the course of this doctoral program, I found that many of the social justice examples and stories I had offered were based on my childhood experiences moving around the world and being surrounded by such a male dominated system.

Still I hesitated to change my dissertation focus and take on a research project that is so intensely personal to me; yet, as I pursued the topic of military children further, I learned that in the United States there are almost two million children who have one or more parent serving in the military (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). My

personal experience felt more solitary and lonely, so I was surprised by such a remarkable statistic – which made me want to further research this population.

Military families are different from civilian families in several ways. In my experience, we speak a different language from the basic terminology to the many acronyms that describe our reality. We can uproot our lives and move across the country or overseas with only two weeks' notice, and we have been known to celebrate Christmas in April. Military families live with the underlying danger associated with the job performed by the service member. Their jobs are directly linked to wars and the defense of national security and, in many cases, require the service member to place their lives in danger. These are just a few of the differences that exist for military families which forces many of them, especially the children, to forge and strengthen their own identity.

Military families view their life in the military as a lifestyle and everything revolves around the service member fulfilling their orders while at the same time having to justify this lifestyle to family and friends who do not understand the family commitment (Hall, 2008). In my experience, "orders" in the military can range from the broad to the specific. For example, when my father received a Temporary Assignment of Duty (TAD) order, he would often be sent to a temporary duty station for six to eight months before returning to his primary duty station. The remainder of the family always remained at the primary duty station. These orders often placed him all over the world with very little access to his family. I recall many of my friends or classmates shaming our family for "allowing" my father to "just leave". I have overheard many women, wives of civilian families, tell my mother that they could not understand how she did it – why she would choose to be a single parent the majority of her marriage. Not once did I hear my mother say a negative word about my father nor the military; even though, with the angst of a

young girl, I felt my own anger toward the situation. Nevertheless, our family had an unspoken rule: no whining. The words of outsiders did not matter to my family because our commitment was to each other. My family was the anchor through the heavy current of numerous moves and service member deployments; and, without that commitment and the security it represents, each family member likely would be swept away in differing directions.

The military culture and lifestyle demands complete commitment of the active-duty member no matter the personal cost, which indirectly affects the behaviors of the military family (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003). The regimented rules and regulations common to military jobs can spill over to the home (Rodriguez, 1984; Hall, 2008). Rules and regulations are essential to the function for the military hierarchy to maintain order and respect while serving to simplify directives in life and death situations - making the structure a necessity. In our home, my father expected order and respect at all times, and my mother maintained those expectations in his absence. This did not mean that laughter and fun were prohibited. I had a very happy childhood with very clear, strict boundaries in place.

When I first began my exploration of the available research related to military children and their experiences, I was disappointment and surprised. Though my search continues, the majority of the literature that I have found relates to the counseling and medical fields while emphasizing the various stressors (e.g. moving, deployment, abuse) or deficits (e.g. anxiety, mental health, and behavioral problems) military children must overcome (Boberine & Hornback, 2014; Cozza & Lerner, 2013; Davis, Blaschke, & Stafford, 2012; Hall, 2008; Johnson & Ling, 2013; Kudler & Porter, 2013; Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). The education related research focuses predominantly on offering advice for educators to better manage the emotional and developmental issues that arise as a result of relocations or parental deployments

(Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Faran et al., 2004; Ohye, Kelly, Chen, Zakarian, Simon, & Bui, 2016); Russo & Fallon, 2015; Williamson & Yates, 2016). These are all valid concerns. Despite the blatant negativity of the literature, the research offers more insight on cultivating resiliency in military children (Cozza & Lerner, 2013; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013).

For families and children who are constantly moving (Hall, 2008) and do not have access to a larger shared community, it is essential for that caring relation to grow and adapt within the family unit. The family relationship becomes the sole source of familiarity amidst change and uncertainty. When attempting to build relationships outside of the family unit, there is little opportunity for them to find commonalities below the surface. In my case, the transition into civilian life served as my seventh school change upon entering sixth grade. Due to the frequency of relocation, I learned at an early age that friendships were painful, so I put up walls around myself. Once I lowered my walls and began to make friends in a new school, my father received new orders requiring us to relocate again; so, I intentionally kept my friendships superficial and made no effort to cultivate any deep relationships outside of the family unit. Friendships, to me, became disposable and shallow.

How do military-connected children seek out commonalities with other non-military children and develop understanding of themselves? How do they find their stability? Having been removed from the military life for twenty years, I was so pleased to learn through my research of all the resources now available for military families and their children all over the United States. There are more transition programs (e.g. School liaison programs, Operation Military Kids, Military Child Education Coalition) available to military families, and I can see how my family would have benefitted from those services; however, there is a large gap in the literature as it relates specifically to the needs of military children. Children appear to be the

invisible causalities that need to learn better coping techniques or are labeled as behavioral problems in public schools. I hope there is more research in the future shedding light on this population and possibly increasing the resources to military families and children. My dissertation is an effort to contribute to filling that need.

There also appears to be a lack of research on military children after their parents return to civilian life. Where is the research on military children when they reach adulthood? What becomes of them? I have not been able to find much research on this topic. It reads much like my own experience when my father left the Marine Corps. I remember the day I was asked to surrender my military identification card. It felt like a part of my identity had been stripped away that day. I do not recall any conversation about resources or transitioning back into the civilian world, but I do remember feeling discarded much like that silly plastic identification card. In that moment, I knew the U.S. Military was finished with me. My dissertation will help bridge this gap in the research too.

Ender (2005) describes military children as "an invisible minority" (p. 25). There is a need for "unbiased, basic information about what typically characterizes children's development in our diverse military-connected families" (Cozza & Lerner, 2013, p. 4). Cozza and Lerner (2013) claim that without more detailed and accurate knowledge about this population's strengths, "conjecture and overgeneralization will inappropriately frame decisions about meeting their needs and supporting their health" (p. 7). In order to better serve military children, Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, and Lerner (2013) argue that researchers must understand military children's foundation of strength that helps them overcome the aforementioned challenges and cope and thrive in the military environment (p. 99). Clever and Segal (2013) claim that more "good and timely data" and discussion is needed to better understand who military families are,

what they face and overcome, what strengths they have and can bring to the community, and how all of these factors can change over time (p. 14). The authors assert that there is very little research on the role and function of infants and young children in military families (Clever and Segal, 2013, p.14).

Due to my experiences growing up as a military-connected child, I take issue with the deficit approach that colors much of the literature. Rather than focusing solely on the uphill battle, I expected to read more about the long-term impact of military culture. Specifically, I hoped for literature praising the cultural insights military children can offer in the classroom, their propensity towards recklessness or fearlessness, or perhaps their nomad tendencies as adults. With my study, I would like to paint a fuller picture of military children while focusing on their strengths, how those strengths weave into the strengths of military families, and how their adversities teach valuable lessons that benefit them as they grow up and into adulthood.

In my experience, my brother and I, as adults, are avid explorers. We crave new experiences, new places, new foods, and new cultures. It's true that I experienced the stress and anxiety that challenge each military child; I often appear to be emotionally aloof or distant; making friends is still a difficult concept; however, I do not believe that my childhood in the military should be viewed negatively or as something I had to overcome. My experiences serve as a "badge of honor" (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 104) rather than an affliction to rise above.

This study examined the experience of children from military families and presents an autoethnographic narrative from my point-of-view as a female researcher and daughter of an enlisted Marine. This exploration will reveal the experience of gender, identity, and power as

told through my own stories. My hope is for readers to engage with the stories and understand the complexities of one military child's experiences, its challenges and privileges.

This perspective and exploration of the experiences of military children, the marginalized and often overlooked population in this study will lend itself well to autoethnography. Two goals of autoethnography, according to Ellis (2004), are "giving voice to stories and groups of people traditionally left out of social scientific inquiry" and "improving readers', participants' and authors' lives" (Ellis, 2004, p. 30). In essence, autoethnography is for those who wish to "better understand themselves and the world they live in, and who desire to change it for the better" (Ellis, 2009, p. 374).

Statement of Purpose

This research aimed to understand military[1] culture through the experiences of one military dependent progressing through primary school. As the literature review will point out in chapter 2, the qualitative research on military children is limited (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013), but even more limited are the voices of this overlooked population. An autoethnographic narrative is a wonderful medium to give voice to one of the many stories of military children.

In Hall's (2005) description of positionality, he claims that we all write, speak, and research from a history that is specific to oneself - an individual time and place (p. 443). At the beginning stages of this study, I realized that it would be naive to believe that my experiences as a military child can speak for all military children. When preparing for this study and attempting to learn more about autoethnography, I read a handful of autoethnography dissertations. One dissertation led me to an oral presentation titled "The Danger of a Single Story" in which

[1] Though I will use the term "military" throughout this project, I am speaking from the perspective of a United States Marine Corps dependent.

Adichie (2009) states, “The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity.” Clever and Segal (2013) claim that “no single story can encapsulate who military families are” (p. 16). There are many military children and a multitude of stories to be heard, and I would never give more credence to one over the others, especially my own. In cultural studies and in autoethnography, the significance lies in the “voices of those we study, our collaborators in community agencies, those risking writing their stories for the first time” (Ellis, 2009, p, 373).

In this study, I addressed the research question: What do stories of my life and perceptions as a military child reveal about military culture? Related questions are:

- How have my lived experiences as a child of a military family shaped my identity?
- How have my lived experiences as a child of a military family shaped my perspective of education?

Autoethnography informed by cultural studies. Social justice is a central component of cultural studies. According to Wright (1998), cultural studies involves “overt identity/identification politics and commitment to working for social justice” (p. 45). A social justice approach to educational research must account for “the intersections of race, class, and other identity categories in relationship to gender oppression and heterosexism” (Griffin, 2003, p. 111). Cultural studies scholars must recognize significant cultural differences, “especially across those social relationships where power, dependence and inequality are most at stake” (Johnson, 1986, p.69).

Upon beginning this research, I felt it necessary, as a former military child, to expose my own positionality and my own personal experiences rather than projecting oppression and labels onto others. When I first encountered autoethnography I found it to be a genuine form of research focusing on humanness. Autoethnography’s relative newness as a qualitative research

methodology places it "at the boundaries of disciplinary practices and raises questions as to what constitutes proper research" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21); however, an autoethnographer would claim that a story is valid if "it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is authentic and lifelike, believable and possible, the story's generalizability can be judged by whether it speaks to readers about their experience" (Ellis, 1997, p. 133).

I believe this study adds to cultural studies scholarship by extending the limited dialogue about military children and their experiences as a subculture within the larger military culture. I explore military culture through the experience of gender, identity, and power as told through my own stories. In order to explore this culture, I chronicalize my experiences as a military child, from birth to age 11, detailing all major life events while moving around the world and changing schools. The stories are based on my lived experiences. As this is a social and personal exploration, this research is emotional and messy as opposed to more traditional methodologies, but I believe this only adds to the cultural perspective. The lives of human beings are rarely pristine and tidy. When our personal story deviates from a smooth, linear path is when we experience opportunities for growth and change.

This study gives voice to not only my story but offers solidarity to readers who experienced similarities and differences. My hope is that this personal and social exploration affords an opportunity for current and former military children to strengthen their voices. Perhaps by telling my story, other military children will be encouraged to tell theirs. I believe this will broaden the perspective for military parents, as well. My parents read the drafts of my papers and it has opened up many difficult conversations between us. They were not fully aware of my experiences and viewpoint as a military child. My mother, now living in another state, called almost in tears after reading a draft of one of my papers – which leads me to believe that

military parents, if given the chance, would do more to support and nurture their children through the ever-evolving military climate, as a significant benefit of this research, for me as well as for other military children.

Scope of the study. The experiences included and analyzed in this research project occurred between the year I was born (1981) and the year my father transitioned out of active duty service (1992). To fully engage with this time period, it is essential to briefly note the political climate during that time period. My father has often said that it was a relatively peaceful decade; however, I believe that is a claim from his perspective in the intelligence field of the Marine Corps. There was the end of the Cold War and comparatively smaller military events such as Granada mixed in with the larger scale Persian Gulf War; however, my father's role did not require him to be deployed to the front lines of battle. From my perspective, I did not feel the fear of knowing my father was going to war. He could often receive confidential orders in the middle of the day requiring him to report elsewhere while not being permitted to notify his family. He would simply not come home that day. I felt the anxiety of the unknown as my father was often deployed to remote regions of the world; however, there was comfort knowing that he would be working in a relatively secure structure surrounded by computers.

This research project emphasizes the researcher's personal story, my story. This autoethnographic study of one child's experiences growing up in a military family provides insight into that individual's life but also adds to the slowly growing conversation about this population. "Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural" (Ellis & Bochner 2000, p. 739). This process entails an analysis of my personal narrative that will offer a specific story

that I believe audiences will empathize with and, in the case of other military children, relate to these experiences.

Any research of this kind is limited to the researcher's ability to disseminate an intensely personal story into a finely-honed written form; engage emotionally and critically in self-reflection of one's positionality; "strive to use relational language and styles to create purposeful dialogue between the reader and the author"; and provocatively weave story and theory as opposed to the mere relaying of one's personal tale (Spry, 2000, p. 7). As Richardson (2000) stated, autoethnographies are:

> Highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural. The power of these narratives depends upon their rhetorical staging as "true stories," stories about events that really happened to the writer. In telling the story, the writer calls upon fiction-writing techniques as dramatic recall, strong imagery, fleshed-out characters, unusual phrasings, puns, subtexts, allusions, the flashback, the flashforward, tone shifts, synecdoche, dialogue, and interior monologue. (p. 11)

Through careful introspection via journaling and self-interviewing, I describe and analyze my personal experiences as a child and daughter of a United States Marine Corps family navigating primary school in order to better understand military culture. This exploration of military culture allows this study to fall under the parameters of a cultural studies study. Barker (2012) defines culture as being "concerned with questions of shared social meaning, that is, the various ways we make sense of the world" (p. 7). Hall (1996) narrows the scope more by depicting culture as the "actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages, and customs of any specific society" (p. 439).

I organized and analyzed the personal data (e.g. photographs, journals, and writing prompts), field notes, and data collected through interviewing my immediate family to create an evocative story of my personal experiences as a military child. I, then, performed a thematic analysis to identify any emerging and recurrent themes that presented throughout the narrative. Analysis began with initial or open coding and progressed to in vivo coding were to look for irregularities and common themes.

The reflexive nature of thematic analysis suggests that a text's meaning can originate from its cultural, historical, and literary context (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008); therefore, I moved back and forth between the narratives and the generalizations about them while attempting not to overgeneralize or overanalyze. The purpose is not to look for objective meaning, but meaning for people. Autoethnography allows the reader to "let contradictions and seemingly random events stand, willing to admit, after deep exploration, that no explanatory scheme or pattern was readily apparent and that understanding is never complete" (Ellis, 1997, p. 132) .

Significance. Further qualitative exploration of the experiences of military dependents and the role of military culture on their identity formation and perspective of learning is needed. Since a child's community is predominately centralized in the formal educational setting of schools, this study takes a glimpse into one child's experience transitioning to a multitude of schools (communities) and cultures. While there are statistics related to student academic success and research emphasizing this population's strengths, weaknesses, and the support programs in place, further study into the more personal, individual narratives of military children is needed to better understand their experiences and the military culture.

Richardson et. al. (2011) investigate the academic effects and behavioral health challenges associated with parental deployments to study support programs and identify gaps that exist. Statistical analysis was conducted to determine the correlation between military children's achievement test scores and parental deployments. Interviews were conducted with school staff about challenges these students confront, and experts and key stakeholders were interviewed about psychology and behavioral health services available to this population. Though it is important to learn that there is a correlation between longer parental cumulative deployments and lower achievement scores among elementary and middle school children (Richardson et al, 2011), students were not interviewed about the challenges they faced.

The Deployment Life Study was conducted by the RAND Corporation in 2009 (Meadows, Tanielian, & Karney, 2016) to determine how military families fare across the deployment cycle. For this longitudinal study, interviews were conducted with both the parents (for children) and one child (when available) reporting on their emotional, behavioral, social, and academic well-being. No significant differences were found between the children whose family was deployed and the children whose family was not deployed. However, if the child was under age 11 then the parent was asked the interview questions about the child; and, if the child was age 11 or older, the parent was also asked the questions while giving the "teen" the opportunity to answer. Some teens did not respond thus limiting the voice of the military child in this research. When Meadows, Tanielian, and Karney (2016) compare this study with that of other studies of military families, children are not listed as part of the populations.

I admit that researching children would be no easy feat. I have never tried to take on a research project of that magnitude, so I will not sit back and shake my fist at the researchers who

do not include the voices on military children; however, by raising my voice and telling my story, I want to give more attention to the voices of these children.

Evocative ethnography allows the reader to learn indirectly from the experiences of another to help both the reader and researcher to construct meaningful lived experiences (Ellis, 2004). This type of study is needed to allow readers to learn from the researcher's experience rather than actually going through the experience. The major benefits to the readers of this study is learning more about a child's experiences within military culture, how to avoid particularly painful situations, and support military children through many moves and school transitions.

To further emphasize the need to shed light on the voices of military children, Chapter 2 will delve deeper into the current research.

Definition of Terms

Several of the terms used in this study are commonly understood both academically and publicly; however, in the interest of transparency, I define the terms that are essential to this research project and which over time or in a different culture may be utilized differently. Particularly, military terms/jargon seldom used by the public, such as deployment, need to be explained.

1. Active duty: "full-time duty in the active military service of the United States" [Department of Defense (DoD), 2018]
2. Base: (1) "a locality from which operations are projected or supported; (2) an area or locality containing installations which provide logistic or other support" (DoD, 2018).
3. Deployment: a "long-term assignment, usually to combat or a war zone" (Hall, 2008).

4. Hegemony, hegemonic: the process by which "those in power secure the consent of their 'subordinates' by making their position/power seem natural and normal" (Farrell, 2004, p. 185).
5. Identity: How we think about ourselves and how we think about the environment in which we live (Chryssochoou, 2003).
6. On the economy: "living in the community" rather than within the military installation's housing area (Hall, 2008).
7. Reserves: Military Service members "who are not in active service but who are subject to call to active duty" (DoD, 2018)
8. Station: "any military or naval activity at a fixed land location" (Glossary of Military Terms, 2006).
9. Temporary Assignment of Duty (TAD): an assignment, usually no longer than a year, in which the service member must leave the family behind (Hall, 2008).

This list of terms is not comprehensive but should aid in clarifying the vocabulary used throughout this study.

Organization

This chapter offered justification for the need to do this research, which was the collecting and telling of my story growing up in a Marine Corps military culture. Included is the statement of purpose, the terminology I intend to use throughout the research, and the scope of the study. Chapter 2: The Review of the Literature provides support for the claim that more qualitative research is needed to better understand the experiences of military children. In working to understand and accept themselves, they balance opposing identities in the social and personal realms. Three primary areas of research are reviewed: cultural studies scholarship, the

reoccurring themes in studies regarding military children and education (challenges and opportunities, strengths, support, and education), and identity formation. Chapter 3: Methodology covers the methodology for conducting the study beginning with the theoretical foundations of autoethnography as a research methodology and ending with an outline of the research conducted. Chapter 4: The Military Life presents the narrative of my experiences as a military child and a thematic analysis. Chapter 5: Reflects on the process of writing an autoethnography, discusses implications for education, and future research possibilities.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

I begin this chapter by outlining the cultural studies scholars whom have been influential in my research and I anticipated would aid in my analysis during this study. These scholars have been organized into headings: structure and ideology, care, social emancipation and hope, and freedom. I review the theoretical perspective of Erik Erikson as an introduction to the concepts of cultural and shared identities. Finally, I outline the literature on military children in the form of a brief thematic analysis: challenges and opportunities, strengths, support, and education.

Cultural Studies

Structure and ideology. In "Marx: 100 Years On", Stuart Hall (1983) defines ideology as "the mental frameworks – the languages, the concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and the systems of representation – which different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out and render intelligible the way society works" (p. 59). Marx explains that the ruling class dominates the ideas in each society (Marx & Engels, 2011, p. 169). Every social group organically within itself creates layers of intellectuals, and that structure or hierarchy appears to be perpetuated over the centuries (Gramsci, 2005). Gramsci (2005) claims that "all men are intellectuals" (p. 51), but not all men function in society as intellectuals. In the political structure, Gramsci wants to improve or deepen the quality of thought of the working class in order to raise their social capacity.

I claim that the military functions very much on a structured system in which power dictates its framework and function. Ideologies provide people with "rules of practical conduct" (Barker, 2012, p.67); however, it is essential for those rules to be questioned. In my experience, questioning the established structure can be a catalyst for change. If Marx is correct, people maintain a false awareness of truth due to the power structure that is in place.

Giroux (1983) claims that hegemonies can be fought in schools and that radical pedagogy which must be drawn from a theoretical understanding of power, resistance, and human agency can help us understand those hegemonies. Borrowing the term *transformative intellectuals* from Gramsci, Giroux argues that teachers can act as transformative intellectuals, by describing the synthesis of "critical discourse with political practice" (p. 55-56) that teachers must use to fight for change in schools (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985). Making the classroom a more political space affords students the opportunity to be agents of change, raise dialogue, and make knowledge empowering. This process allows students to find their voices. Gramsci (1971) states:

> Critical understanding of self takes place therefore through a struggle of political 'hegemonies' and of opposing directions, first in the ethical field and then in that of politics proper, in order to arrive at the working out at a higher level of one's own conception of reality. (p. 333)

In the midst of the military's powerful structure, a child from a military family must somehow learn to question the ideologies that are strongly demanded from the surrounding culture. In my own life, my voice had to remain silent. There was a dichotomy in our house in which knowledge was valued, but only knowledge that remained within the structure and ideologies already in place. To deviate or questions the rules or norms that defined our existence was not permitted. So, beginning at the age of eight years old, my exploration of self was contained to my journal where I held my own silent rebellion. According to Rodriguez (1984), the military service member often places parameters on personal expression and hindering "individual freedom of choice" (p. 56). At what point does the child begin to break away and fight for understanding of oneself?

Care. In her book *Caring: A Relational Approach to Ethics & Moral Education*, Nel Noddings (1984/2013) claims that due to our humanity, we enter the world in a relationship with a caregiver. No matter who the caregiver may be, all humans experience *natural caring* which Noddings (1984/2013) describes as "that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination." (p. 4). Noddings further explores the reciprocal relationship between the "one-caring" and the one "cared-for" as both are contributing entities to caring relationships. She writes, "My caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring" (1984/2013, p. 4). Noddings emphasizes the role of the one cared-for by describing his/her reaction to the one-caring. Specifically, she describes the cared-for's reaction to the acceptance and support offered by the one-caring.

The caring relation that Noddings (1984/2013) describes is not restricted by age or gender, though she does use female pronouns to depict the one-caring and male pronouns for the one cared-for as an effort to honor the history of care work as being a role primarily fulfilled by women and girls. The reciprocal nature of the caring relation makes both the role of the one-caring and role of the one cared-for essential to the equation. For example, the caring relation between my brother and I was essential to my well-being. Yes, there was assuredly a caring relation between my parents and us, but my brother was often the one-caring while I was the cared-for during our many relocations. As the younger sibling by two years, I often looked to my big brother as the one constant, my security blanket, on the first day of schools or the first visit to a new church. We would frequently switch caring roles based on the needs of the other, but we both offered the reciprocity necessary in a caring relation.

Luckily, our military family found strength in the family unit. My father would constantly refer to us as a team when accomplishing any task, big or small. Adler-Baeder,

Pittman, and Taylor (2005) describe the family's need for a positive perception of unit culture in order to better prepare for the uncertainty, change, and stress that is ever-present in the United States military. When my father went away on Temporary Assignment of Duty (TAD), my mother became the family leader and all other roles shifted and expanded to accommodate his absence. This diversity and role fluidity allow for others, not just my mother, to step in as the one-caring.

Social Emancipation and Hope for Change.

"We work with people fighting for justice, equality and sustainability, supporting their efforts to take collective action to shape their own destiny" (Highlander Center, n.d.).

In Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he articulates the struggle for humanization and social emancipation. He explains that the struggle for humanization is "possible only because dehumanization is not a given destiny" (p. 28). The knowledge that there is a possibility for "humanization, the emancipation of labor, for the overcoming of alienation, for the affirmation of men as persons" (p. 28) is what keeps people fighting. If one believes that oppression and dehumanization were a foregone conclusion, then one would be reluctant to fight against it.

To overcome one's oppression, one must truly understand its causes, so that one can create a new reality though transformative action. Freire (1970) qualifies this new reality as one which "makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity" (p. 32). How does one become aware of his or her reality? According to Freire's work, one must objectively view one's life and reflect upon one's circumstance. This can be accomplished through dialogue and critical reflection. bell hooks (2003) emphasizes *conversation* as the process of listening to the ideas of the other. She

explains that we must learn to communicate and share knowledge in a method that "does not reinforce existing structures of dominance" (hooks, 2003, p. 45), thereby creating a partnership by stressing the importance of the exchange of ideas. I believe my research is a way of adding to the current dialogue and continuing the exchange of ideas about military children.

This exchange of knowledge and perspective serves as a mirror to one's reality. Subjectivity clouds one's capacity to objectively perceive one's situation, and often leads to the perpetuation of oppression. For example, horizontal violence is linked with oppressed groups who are in unequal power relations where one group's autonomy and self-expression is controlled by an entity with more power and/or higher standing than themselves. So, essentially, one oppressed individual or group will bully, harass, or even harm another oppressed individual or group as a way to release some built up tension. The tension is the result of the aggressor's own state of oppression. According to Freire (1970), this is the point at which the subject of the oppression becomes the object.

How does one break the cycle? Critical reflection through dialogue allows alternate insights; and, through shared identities, strength in solidarity will aid in sparking hope for change. One stumbling block, the oppressed tend to fear their own freedom from oppression. As with most humans, they wish to be emancipated, but fear the concept of change. Humans become so immersed in their oppressed reality that they no longer see it as an oppressive state, but rather it is simply their reality. "Oppression is domesticating" (Freire, 1970, p.36). To open up one's eyes and understand one's reality is only half of the battle. Action must be taken to change one's oppressive reality into a more humanized state.

As a child growing up in the military, I did not fully understand the oppression that surrounded everyday life. There is pressure on the service member, but the demand to conform

trickles down to the family members as their actions reflect on that service member (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010). I recall conversations with my parents about the multitude of expectations, and I felt that pressure daily. It was my reality. When we left the military, I began to fully understand the demands and pressure to conform as I tried to follow my own path and understand myself for the first time. I still fight the expectation to conform to my parents' demands – to fight the instincts that are so deeply ingrained into my psyche.

The power of hope is a critical component of change. Humans do not strive for something that they view as unattainable. One does not compete with the intention of losing, it is the hope of winning that drives us to practice and improve. For the oppressed, hope for the day that they are free is what opens the door to transformation if one is willing to take action.

Myles Horton's (1998) *The Long Haul* describes his process of creating an environment conducive to transformation. He believes that it is his job to provide a space that nurtures what he refers to as "islands of decency," where people can learn how to work together to solve their own problems and continue to grow (Horton, 1998, pp.132-133). Recognizing one's potential feeds into the hope for change. With his work at Highlander, Horton claims to have built educational programs with two factors in mind: what is and what should be (goals). It is necessary to understand peoples' capacity and potential for growth; Horton states that "people have a potential for growth, it's inside, it's in the seeds" (1998, p.131). As it is with humans and all interactions in life, we must trust in the potential to grow, learn, and change. Horton refers to this as a seed that is present though it doesn't ensure a specific outcome; it does give us a base.

In *We Make the Road by Walking* Freire and Horton (1990) discuss the process of helping people reach a democratic goal. Through a learning process of their own, they understood that they cannot swoop in with the knowledge they have accumulated throughout their travels.

Highlander is about "people learning from each other" (Horton & Freire, 1990, p. 55). This study will serve as an exploration of self and what I have learned through my experiences growing up as a military dependent. Not only will I be adding to the conversation, but I will be learning, growing, and changing as I research.

Freedom. In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks (1994) wants students to see education as a source of freedom by making people aware, educating them in regards to social injustices that they may face, and thus giving people the freedom to act. As Maxine Greene (1988) points out in *The Dialectic of Freedom*, the assumption that Americans are born free "seems to many to be the American dream" (p. 1). Building upon a long list of freedoms many American citizens feel are being infringed upon, should we not ask why we want freedom? Freedom from, as opposed to the more positive "freedom to"? Oppression in order to do what? Flourish, reach one's potential, grow, and seek empowerment? Greene quotes Isiah Berlin who states that we are often in a prison of our own making, encased by our "institutions or beliefs or neuroses" (1988, p. 4). Greene (1988) explains that "when people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged, even as they proudly assert their autonomy" (p. 9).

To shed light on the keys to our own prisons, *critical understanding* through self-reflection is essential; however, the imperative of action remains (Greene, 1988). *Wide-awakeness* is the term Maxine Greene (1995) refers to, defined as the moment when we see the truth of our reality and believe that something can be done to change it. According to Greene, this awaking is the result of one's imagination which spurs us to strive and reach beyond our current reality. Opening our eyes to the reality and imagining the possibilities allows us to change and grow.

To that end, hooks' (1994) stresses the importance of being actively engaged in the process of self-actualization. The emphasis is placed on a more holistic perspective by uniting the mind, body, and spirit in order to first help oneself before helping others (hooks, 1994, pp. 14-15). If one grows up in a society that has the white, male dominated norms, and one doesn't fit those norms, one is positioned in a way that is marginalized due to having grown up in that society. How does one learn and grow from this experience without continuing the cycle of injustice? One must heal oneself - the idea of mindfulness. One must be aware of injustice and be mindful of how it has affected one's life. One cannot teach others social justice if one doesn't heal oneself. Otherwise, the cycle will continue.

As bell hooks (1994) explains, we must heal ourselves or we will pass on our own pain. Experiences make us who we are, every scar and every smile. One scar does not define who we are but rather adds to the whole picture. From my experiences as a child of a military family, I can speak to the struggles military children face and need to overcome. Moreover, I believe myself to be a fairly well-adjusted individual, but the battle still wages inside me more often than I would like to admit. My own self-awareness has allowed me to learn and grow from the experiences in my life, but there is always more work to be done. It would appear that self-actualization is a level for which we will always strive yet never achieve. Freire (1998) tells us that "joy does not come to us only at the moment of finding what we sought. It comes also in the search itself" (p. 125).

Identity

Before focusing on any particular stage theory of identity development, one must define "identity". Identity encompasses how we think about ourselves and how we think about the environment in which we live (Chryssochoou, 2003). Chryssochoou (2003) explains that identity

is a relationship between the individual and the world making identity "fundamentally social" (p. 227) in nature. This relationship encompasses three parts: *cognition* (self-knowledge), *self-action* (claims I make about myself), *other(s) actions* (recognition of my claims from others). This section will begin with a brief overview of Erik Erikson's theoretical perspective on identity development and progress towards cultural identity and shared identity. I will not delve into the many theoretical perspectives on identity development as they are not the focus of this study.

Erikson's psychosocial model of development. As a neo-Freudian, Erik Erikson progressed from Freud's biological approach to consider the impact of society on development (Miller, 1983, p. 158). Erikson's psychosocial model of development offers eight stages of psychosocial development in which an individual quests to understand herself within a social context. As this study relates to my childhood, I will focus primarily on the stages of development prior to adulthood.

The psychosocial model of development focuses on the independence of the physical being from one's sense of self, but acknowledges the interconnectivity of the two into the social context (Erikson, 1950). Through each stage of development, the individual encounters crisis which is characterized as an opportunity to develop and grow rather than Freud's more negative approach (Miller, 1983). Each crisis affords the individual the opportunity to learn "to exist in space and time as he learns to be an organism in the space-time of his culture" (Erikson, 1964, p. 96).

In the eight stages of the Psychosocial Model of Development (Erikson 1950, 1964, 1982), an individual must face a crisis that serves as an opportunity for growth and progression of their identity within the social context. Through one's progression, Erikson (1982) explains that an individual develops *hope*, *fidelity*, and *care*. As I stated, I will focus on the first four

stages which are concentrated in childhood and relate to the development of hope, will, purpose, and competence.

Basic trust vs. basic mistrust is the first stage of development in which hope is learned. An infant's trust grows and develops as a result of the acts of feeding, changing, and basic comfort. "Trust born of care is, in fact, the touchstone of actuality of a given religion" (Erikson, 1964, p. 250). As one progresses in this stage, the infant begins to understand to differentiate between internal and external trust: individual and relational. After hope is learned in infancy, the early childhood crisis phase is characterized by *autonomy vs. shame, doubt.* A society encourages children to be autonomous; however, when this autonomy of free choice is limited, the child will attempt to exert her will. This stage requires a delicate balance between *freedom of self-expression and its suppression* to prevent a lasting inclination for doubt and shame (Erikson, 1964, p.254).

Initiative vs. guilt is the next transitional point occurring in what Erikson (1950, 1964, 1982) refers to as *play age* where people find purpose. The key component of this stage builds upon autonomy by planning and acting on a task; however, the crisis during this stage is the guilt that accompanies some of the individual's plans, actions, and/or goals by externals means (care giver). In most cases, the child begins to learn how to set self-imposed boundaries. The child begins to identify with the same-sex parent grounding the child in the tangible (Erikson, 1964). The final stage before progressing into adolescence is *industry vs. inferiority,* where one develops confidence upon entering the school setting. School is a separate culture or community with its own expectations and boundaries, so the child learns to earn praise through completion or production of things. The crisis lies in the potential for a child to feel inadequate or inferior in this environment which can derive from skill/knowledge or societal hindrances (class, race, etc.).

The final four stages begin in adolescence and directly relate to the development of fidelity, love, care, and wisdom: *identity vs. identity confusion, intimacy vs. isolation, generativity vs. stagnation,* and *integrity vs. despair, disgust*. No matter the stage, Erikson (1964) explains that one's true identity hinges on the support one receives from the "collective sense of identity characterizing the social groups significant to him: his class, his nation, his culture" (p. 93).

Cultural and shared identity. Hall (2005) claims that cultural identity can be thought of in two different ways. First, cultural identity can be defined as "one, shared culture" (p. 443). This perspective goes deeper than ancestry and history to the sharing of experiences. If I am reading Hall correctly, the second meaning of cultural identity shifts from the similarities to the differences. Cultural identities are not set in stone; they transform and evolve over time and are often at the mercy of history and power. Specifically, when people of power place us in the position of "other", our differences become more pronounced. (pp. 446-447).

As a military child who repeatedly changed schools and started over in new communities, I became very familiar with seeing and experiencing myself as "other". Since my parents chose to live out on the economy instead of living on base at most of our duty stations, my brother and I were the perpetual "new kids", and often we were the only Americans or the only military children in that neighborhood or school. Those differences set us apart from the other children, and forced us to seek refuge in each other and our shared culture. Perhaps it is not one's racial or ethnic identity, but rather a religious or subcultural identity in which one shares the same viewpoint or belief system. Within that culture and its traditions, a population can find strength in its shared identity.

From my own experience, I can attest to the necessity of shared identity for a military child. For families and children who are constantly moving and do not have access to a larger shared community, it is essential for that caring relation to grow and adapt within the family unit as it can become the sole source of identity. I just stated that shared identities are about more than race, ethnicity, religion, etc.; however, with the frequency of relocation and the walls these children put up around themselves, there is little opportunity for them to find commonalities below the surface. It was my experience that by the time I lowered my walls and began to make friends, it was time to move on to the next duty station.

Military children are a unique population and fall into a category some refer to as *third culture kids* (*TCKs*). TCKs all have one thing in common: "they are spending, or have spent, at least part of their childhood in at least one country and culture other than their own" (Pollock, Van Reken, & Pollock, 2017, p. 3). These children are raised in a cultural limbo in that they fully belong to neither their parents' culture nor the culture in which they live and interact. Navarette and Jenkins (2011) describe this lack of belonging as *cultural homelessness* – feelings of being an outsider and repeatedly facing the multiple, sometimes contradictory, demands of multiple cultures. In my opinion, that term holds too many negative connotations.

Moore and Barker (2012) examined the cultural identity of TCKs by interviewing 19 participants from six different countries with diverse intercultural experiences. The purpose was to explore their "perceptions of identity, sense of belonging, multiculturalism, intercultural communication competence, as well as positive and negative factors" (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553) attributed to their highly mobile lives. The study reveals that rather than being confused about their cultural identity, TCKs more readily have multiple cultural identities or a multicultural identity. The results suggest that while TCKs identify their experiences as

predominately positive and are competent intercultural communicators, “they lack a clear sense of belonging” (Moore & Barker, 2012, p. 553).

Pollock, Van Reken, and Pollock (2017) claim that although the TCK’s life experiences include aspects from each culture, “the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background” (p. 19). TCKs’ first culture is in their home, and the second culture is the *host culture* in which they live. The third culture is “created, shared, and carried” (Unseem & Downie, 2011, p. 18) by people of similar circumstances. Figure 2.1 indicates the relationship between the three cultures.

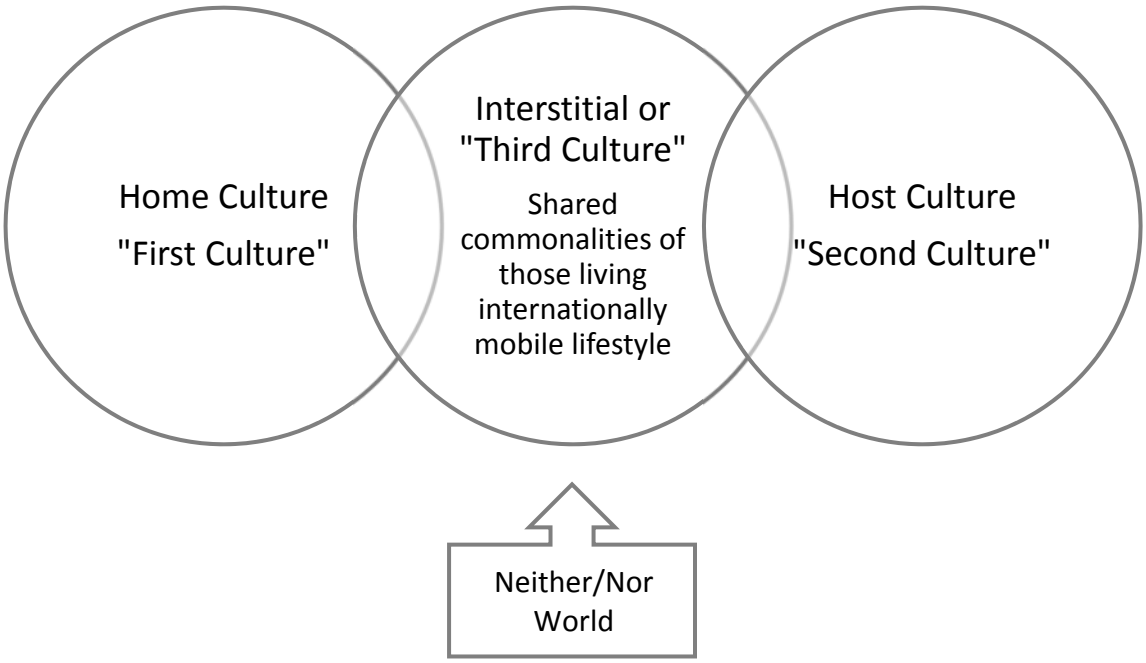

Figure 2.1: The Third Culture Model

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When adapting to a new culture, adults usually already have a clearer understanding of where they fit in the world and who they are (Moore & Barker, 2012); however, TCKs often have their identity formation disrupted and they must direct their attention of adapting to new cultures rather than developing a sense of self (Walters & Auton-Cuff, 2009). Cultural identity, as defined by Casmir (1984), is "the image of the self and the culture intertwined in the individual's total conception of reality" (p. 2); so, when the reality changes or is repeatedly disrupted, one develops multiple cultural identities or a multicultural identity.

In *Beyond Liberal Democracy in Schools*, Thayer-Bacon (2008) describes her experiences with children in a Native American school. During her research she observed these children reading books written by Euro-Americans while never truly understanding their meaning. Some of the context and phrases are not used by Native American's living on the reservation, and rarely do these books portray people of their culture. The author explains that through shared identity the Native American children are able to "develop healthy individual identities" (p. 103). It is in their understanding of their shared identity, founded in their cultural roots and traditions, that they form a strong sense of self (p. 103). Similarly, my shared identity was based on the military community and culture and in the absence of that group, my family became a lifeline to understanding myself and offering continuity.

This progression of understanding oneself can offer strength in uncertainty and clarity amidst chaos. I am intrigued to further explore how the concept of shared identity can be cultivated and nurtured as a tool to support military children. As a former military dependent, I have access to a plethora of individuals currently in the military, former dependents and parents, who have expressed an interest in this topic.

Military Children

Many themes presented themselves while performing this thematic analysis; however, due to the nature of this research, I have chosen to focus on the four most prevalent: challenges and opportunities, strengths, support, and education as it relates to military dependents. The challenges were the main focus of the literature along with the need for further research on this demographic. The strengths presented reinforce how military children constantly overcome adversity; and, finally, many of the authors note that even though resources are now available for this population, there has not been enough research to determine how to use these services for the positive development of the children (Clever & Segal, 2013; Cozza & Lerner, 2013). The final theme outlines how educators address the challenges of military children.

When reading this section, the reader will notice one glaring absence – the voices of these military children. I began writing this section prior to submitting my dissertation proposal. I hadn't determined my research question yet. I simply knew the population on which I wanted to focus my research, so I sought to find any and everything I could on military children. I had to dig. It was after my thematic analysis that I realized that there was something missing. Where are the children's voices?

Challenges and opportunities. The nature of involvement in the military is drastically different for children. In my case, my father volunteered to serve in the Marine Corps, and my mother married him with the knowledge that he was a Marine. At age eighteen, I am sure she did not fully understand what military life would involve, but she entered into it by choice. My brother and I had no choice – we were essentially drafted (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 213); so, the life of a military child has the potential to begin on a negative note. Similarly, as I previously stated, a large portion of the literature appears to have taken a negative,

deficit approach (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013) in which the research paints a picture of a constant uphill battle for military children.

Military families do not live in certain cities or countries, they are stationed there. When a parent goes away for work, it is not on a business trip – they are deployed (CNN, n.d). In *Coping with Stress: Supporting the Needs of Military Families and Their Children*, Russo and Fallon (2015) describe the military lifestyle as problematic due to the stressors and need for resiliency and adaptive coping skills. The authors explain that families and children learn to strengthen their skills over time (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 407); however, when military children and the remaining parent are left behind in civilian communities, they lack the support and resources that are readily available on military bases (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; De Pedro et al, 2011).

Through each stage of the deployment cycle there are many feelings and emotions experienced by all parties, but not all families face deployments and the reintegration phase in the same ways. Many factors, along with personal characteristics and social support can play a heavy role in the reunion (Faber et al., 2008). When faced with a parent's extended or frequent deployments, younger children typically experience "confusion, loss, and grief…and look to the remaining parent for support and care" (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 30). According to a study performed by Lester et al. (2010), of the study participants, "approximately one-third of the children affected by parental deployments demonstrated clinically significant symptoms of self-reported (MASC) anxiety compared with community norms" (p. 317); moreover, in comparison to civilians, military-connected children tend to develop maladaptive behaviors at higher rates (De Pedro et al., 2011, p. 570).

Clever and Segal (2013) explain that teenagers have a clearer understanding of the potential dangers a deployed parent may face as well as the hardships the remaining parent must overcome on the home front, so behavioral problems correlate with the length of time a parent is deployed (p. 30). For those families who are able to overcome and adapt, stress becomes normative in this lifestyle (Russo & Fallon, 2015, p. 407). This "new normal" (Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, & Richardson, 2010, p. 221) is only true of some children. According to Chandra et al (2010), those who adopt maladaptive behaviors become less engaged in schools and take on avoidant tendencies and become more apathetic towards the idea of another parental deployment.

In *Military Children, Families, and Communities: Supporting Those Who Serve*, Davis, Blaschke, and Stafford (2012) list a few additional challenges military families face: "frequent geographic locations, forced adaptions to new communities and schools, living in foreign countries" (p. S4), etc. As a result of these challenges, children must say goodbye to the familiarity of their friends and schools and are forced to build new relationships (Faran et al., 2004, p. 234). Knobloch et al. (2017) explains that this turbulence creates relational uncertainty in military children. The authors define relational uncertainty as "the degree of confidence (or lack of confidence) people have in their perceptions of involvement in a relationship" (p. 3).

Some challenges remain static for military families: frequent and long separations, repeated moves, and lack of social relations (Aroson & Perkins, 2013, Hall, 2008, Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss 2008); however, the literature indicates that the major challenge for military families and children are the lengthy separations of deployment (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Guzman, 2014; Louie & Cromer, 2014) which results in loss of that close family unit relationship (Faber et al., 2008; Hall, 2008; Neven, 2006). Due to the frequent changes in family dynamics over the course

of long separations, some family members may find reintegration more challenging than others (Aronson & Perkins, 2013; Boberiene & Hornback, 2014). Research suggests that adolescents find reintegration more problematic than younger children, perhaps due to more regular changes in their roles at home. Boberiene and Hornback (2014) explain that avoidance, fear, and confusion are common reaction in young children when reuniting with a deployed parent (p. 441). In my experience, this diversity and role fluidity is not just a struggle for military children, but also for the parents (Hall, 2008).

In the midst of these changes, military children must face the perception of military personnel and families. One cannot study how military families are portrayed without exploring Hollywood. Ender (2005) analyzes forty-six films between 1935 to 2002 that depict children and adults of all ages from military-connected families. Ender claims that "military films highlight a struggle in the negotiation between self-conceptions and self-images of children from military families" (Ender, 2005, p. 24) which helps shape the self-ideal of the military personnel and families but also the attitudes of American viewers. How do military children negotiate their identity between constructed self-concept and self-images?

In "Building Communities of Care for Military Children and Families", Kudler and Porter (2013) explain that the family's attempts to adapt and protect themselves can often backfire. For example, military children may learn to be aloof and quiet in the face of stressful situations (p.167) which presents issues with expressing one's emotions. All military families are intimately acquainted with the terms *sacrifice*, *resilience*, and *service*; however, there has been very little research on the effects of military service on children. "Military children and families constitute one of the largest American subcultures, but they are also one of the least visible" (Kudler & Porter, 2013, p. 182).

Growing up in a military family, we moved or changed schools at least once a year, resulting in at least one school transition, which included a wide range of stressors (Hall, 2008). With each move, my brother and I had to start a new school and hope that our previous school curriculum was on pace or ahead of the new one, attend a multitude of churches and Sunday schools, and attempt to make friends. Other than his duty station in Scotland, my father would often be given a Temporary Assignment of Duty during which he was away from the family for approximately 6-8 months at a time. Due to his role in Intelligence, his job assignment, these would occur about once a year. With each of these assignments, we were forced to shift our role in the household to accommodate his absence and shift again upon his return. Every member of the family left at home adds new roles and jobs to their already existing duties in order to make life at home run as smoothly as possible (Faber et al., 2012; Gusman, 2014).

These may not sound like difficult accomplishments, but to do it at least once a year can lead to anxiety and a feeling of isolation. My family's standard relocation procedure was to immediately enroll the children in a public school. We were not enrolled in the Department of Defense schools like the majority of military children overseas. Even when we lived in the United States my father was transferred so often that getting comfortable was impossible. In essence, we were persistently the outsiders whether living at home or abroad, and the anxiety was a commonality for us all; however, I do not want to paint a completely negative picture of growing up in military culture. Military life can offer "excitement and adventure" (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 29) especially for those families who are afforded the opportunity to experience new languages and cultures in foreign countries. This unrelenting theme of focusing on the challenges for military children tends to overshadow the opportunity each challenge affords them.

Strengths. The majority of the themes presented in the research focus on the challenges and need for resources; however, I feel it is necessary to mention an extremely strong theme throughout all of the literature, specifically, how the military culture and lifestyle strengthens children's resilience and coping skills. As a juxtaposition to the aforementioned challenges, resilience and coping skills are a happy byproduct of the aforementioned challenges; moreover, these skills are strengthened by the adversity as is the relationships within the family unit. Resilience is not a skill with which one is born; it is birthed from the relationships one has with one's environment (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 100). The family unit and a strong child-caregiver relationship is associated with resilience in military children (Johnson & Ling, 2013, p. 196). Family relationships provide a security and stability through the many transitions military families face, and these relationships can help military dependents find strength and meaning in the struggles (Cozza, 2014, p. 2). "Resilience makes military families exceptional, but they are still vulnerable" (Johnson & Ling, 2013, p. 196).

Clever and Segal (2013) explain that Reserve members are more geographically dispersed which isolates their families from the military resources that are available to families who live closer to larger military bases (p. 29). Those privileged children who have the opportunity to live near or on a base are often immersed in military culture and have greater access to other children who can identify with their unique culture (Johnson & Ling, 2013, p. 196). In my experience, the lack of access to other military children strengthened the bond within my family unit. When my father was stationed in Europe, my parents preferred to live off based and place us in public schools. We lacked the ability to meet other children from military families, and we rarely visited the base; so, my dependence on my family unit grew. Today, my

friends often question my complete devotion to my family; but, to me my family's love is the one truth I know and understand without question.

In the majority of the research, I have found that the continuous relocations and school transitions are depicted in a negative light, but I would argue that while difficult, it afforded me incredible opportunities. I was repeatedly given a clean slate with the option to reinvent myself. Granted, I did not always take advantage of this opportunity's full potential, but these moments of reinvention allowed me to learn more about personal interactions and relationship building.

Professor Child (2014) performed a video recorded interview, entitled "Children Teaching Children about Military Families", with several military children in which they discuss many aspects of military life. When asked what made them proud, the majority of children remark on how proud they are of their parents and family. They are proud of their parents' service to their country, proud of the strength of their family when that parent is away, and proud of themselves in their ability to adjust upon their parents' return.

Personally, I wish this theme of strength emphasized more than military children's resilience and coping skills. The literature reads as though military children are predominately defined by their challenges while only being granted two redeeming qualities. Many researchers simply give a cursory glance towards the more positive aspects of military life for a child. In regards to families, Chandra et al. (2010) note the financial benefits increased and family pride accompanying deployments (p.218); however, the authors claim that military children are a "unique and vulnerable population about whom we know very little" (p. 219).

Support. Taking the military factor out of the equation, "children who encounter adversity need supportive and sensitive adults who are available physically, mentally, and emotionally" (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 104). Research indicates that parents

can help their children adjust to the deployment through education and prevention programs that are offered through summer camp experiences (Chandra, 2010) and private counseling (Gusman, 2014). Schools can get involved by offering targeted school based programs to build resilience and coping abilities (Gusman, 2014) and parents can utilize the programs and services offered through the base family advocacy programs (Gusman, 2014). Together we can help our children be strong and encourage families to be flexible and patient during this readjustment period when the military member returns (Creech, et al., 2014; Faber, et al., 2008; Gusman, 2014).

Kudler and Porter (2013) describe the community of care as a moral imperative for military families and children. Their goal is to extend care and support on a broader scale than simply the family unit. As I previously mentioned, strength and self-reliance within the military family entity is essential, but the authors stress the needs of the children as they tend to be overlooked by the Department of Defense. Kudler and Porter (2013) list a myriad of mental health issues that military children predominantly face and potential services, within a community of care, that would help children and families build or maintain "a healthy balance despite the stress of deployment" (p. 167). In order for young children to maintain a sense of security and trust, secure attachment relationships need be cultivated through "consistent, responsive, and nurturing environments" (Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015, p. 674).

Cozza and Lerner (2013) claim that current research suggests that to strengthen resilience among military children, social support resources need to be improved and, in some cases, made available. The authors interject that more research in needed to better understand how military children become more resilient and flourish; despite the current military and civilian programs designed to foster resilience, there is too little information on this demographic (p. 8). Stepka and Callahan (2016) explain that despite the few support resources available to military families, the

frequent moves and other stressors often prevent or disrupt access (p. 19). In order to combat this issue, Chandra and London (2013) claim that further research in this field can strengthen our understanding of how military service affects peoples' lives. The authors recommend longitudinal studies that follow military children into adulthood in order to better understand the long-term effects (Chandra & London, 2013, p.197). Policy makers need to understand who military family members are, their realities and adversities, the many strengths they bring to the military community, and how these variables may change and grow overtime (Clever and Segal, 2013, p. 14).

In regards to the support military children receive in education, the military has developed School Liaison Programs (SLPs) in hopes of cultivating local partnerships to promote academic success (Aronson & Perkins, 2013, p. 516). Boberiene and Hornback (2014) describe some of the programs implemented by Operation Military Kids (OMK). OMK serves as an advocate for military children and works to inform and nurture "communication between the military and civilian youth" (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014, p. 444). The authors also make note of the Military Child Education Coalition (MCEC) which advocates for military children on a national level to help schools support military children cope with the many challenges they face (p. 444). One initiative developed by MCEC is called *Student 2 Student* which is student led to offer peer support to military children who are transitioning into new high schools (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014, p. 444; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 111).

Speaking to the support offered to military families as a whole, Families Overcoming Under Stress (FOCUS) is more family focused. This initiative intends to cultivate the resiliency of the family through various sessions involving the family and the individuals (Boberiene & Hornback, 2014, pp. 445-446). Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner (2013) make note of the

National Military Family Association (NMFA) and its resources such as education scholarships specific to military spouses, family workshops and camps, and general military life navigation. Specifically, Operation Purple Camp serves children of wounded warriors and strives to build and strengthen resiliency by teaching positive coping techniques (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 112).

There are many more programs available to this population, but I think it is important to stress two things. First, the resources are only as good as their accessibility. As I mentioned in the Challenges and Opportunities section, many military families do not have access to the resources available on base. Boberiene and Hornback (2014) make reference to the OMK's attempts to communicate with the community rather than simply listing the organizations and initiatives offered by each branch of the military. Since the military does not exist in a bubble, I believe that engagement with the community is essential to supporting military children. Second, is there enough data on this population to ensure that the resources effectively meet their needs? There is little research that examines the strengths that will help military children thrive (Cozza, 2014, p. 2; Cozza & Lerner, 2013, p. 4; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013, p. 113; Park, 2011, p. 66).

Differences based on branches of service. Clever and Segal (2013) claim that military families and their needs are extremely diverse and "cannot be neatly pigeonholed" (p. 13). Though their article describes several trends, they purport that there are nuanced differences between demographic groups and service branches. In regards to age demographics of children with one or more active-duty parent, families in the Marine Corps are the youngest with 47 percent of children of preschool age and only 11 percent of high school age or older. The other military branches ranged from 41 to 42 percent with preschool age children and 16 percent of

high school age or older. Children tend to be older in Guard and Reserve families: children of preschool age only make up 28 percent while primary school age ranges from 44 to 45 percent. The authors attribute these differences to the organizational culture of each military branch. The Marine Corps emphasizes the youth of its members while the Air Force and Navy prioritize experience and advanced training (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 21).

Referring to the aforementioned research by Clever and Segal (2013) pertaining to how children of different ages cope with the stress of military life, I would claim that due to the varying ages described above, there are some slight differences in how children of different branches experience the military. However, based on Clever and Segal's (2013) article "The Demographics of Military Children and Families", the most significant difference can be found between active duty military personnel and the Guard and Reserve population. The article describes a multitude of variables that must be considered when investigating military children and families, and they claim that it is not as simple as exploring the differences in each branch of the military, "we must understand the context of their parents' life-course transitions, service branch, and rank" (Clever & Segal, 2013, p. 22).

Education. The education section builds upon the aforementioned themes, specifically programs and resources designed to support military children through the many challenges they face – some of which focus on academic support. The majority of research relating to education explores the effects of the stressors military families face, predominately parental separation/deployment, on a child's success in schools. The research is geared towards teachers, school counselors, and mental health professionals in hopes of better serving these children; however, I paint a picture of how the voices of these children are not addressed.

Engle, Gallagher, and Lyle (2010) performed a quantitative study to explore the effects of military personnel's deployment on their children's academic achievement. The researchers combined soldiers' personnel data with standardized test scores of their children enrolled in Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. The sample consisted of 55,116 observations across 223 DoDEA schools. The results indicate that short-term *household disruptions* (deployments) had minimal effect on military children's academic achievement and tend to dwindle upon the parent's return; however, long-term disruptions appear to have a cumulative effect on academic achievement.

The Effects of Soldiers' Deployment on Children's Academic Performance and Behavioral Health was a study conducted by the RAND Corporation (Richardson et al., 2011) and supports Engle, Gallagher, and Lyle's (2010) findings. A statistical analysis was performed to explore the correlation between parental deployment and their dependent's achievement test scores in Washington and North Carolina public schools. The researchers explain that children experiencing long-term parental deployment of 19 months or more score significantly lower on achievement tests compared to those experiencing short-term parental deployment (Richardson et al., 2011, p. 18). The researchers interviewed teachers and counselors to outline the academic challenges military children face while coping with deployment: homework completion, school attendance, role shifts at home, and academic performance falls down the priority list.

Ruff and Keim (2014) outline the stressors that impact military families and offer school counselors suggestions for addressing each of them. Specifically, school counselors should implement staff trainings specific to military culture and the needs of military children (p. 110); moreover, the researchers stress the importance of advocating for military children to ease the school transitions. Military children need an ally while facing the slow transfer of records, the

differences in curricula, adapting to a new school environment, making friends, limited access to extracurricular activities, public school's lack of understanding of military culture, tension at home, and parental deployment (Ruff & Keim, 2014).

As educators, student success is the primary goal. Williamson and Yates (2016) emphasize the importance of teachers proactively "fostering a positive relationship" (p. 78) with military children. Building an emotionally warm environment for the child creates a sense of safety at school and offers comfort. The authors suggest the following ways to cultivate a positive, comforting relationship with military children: establish routines; create a welcome committee and buddy system; train teachers, nurses, and counselors; and adopt systems or best practices used by other schools (Williamson & Yates, 2016).

One area that needs further exploration is needs and experiences of military children attending schools operated by civilians (Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012). Research has shown that civilian educators may be unprepared to appropriately handle and support military children during times of loss/grief or fear of loss or injury of a deployed parent (DePedro et. al, 2011; Esqueda, Astor, & De Pedro, 2012). Stites (2016) explored how early childhood educators perceive the educational needs of military dependent children. The survey focused on three main areas as perceived by the teachers: geographic mobility, parental separation, and socioemotional factors. Sixty-three military- and civilian-connected teachers responded to the survey. The researcher found no significant differences between military dependents and civilian dependents in regards to the socioemotional impact on geographic mobility; however, significant differences were found in socioemotional impact of parental separation. In regards to academics, early childhood "teachers observe a negative impact from both parental separation and geographic mobility" (Stites, 2016, p. 107).

In order to better prepare civilian schools, Ohye, Kelly, Chen, Zakarian, Simon, and Bui (2016) created a civilian school-based intervention to promote resilience in military-connected children. The intervention, Staying Strong With Schools (SSWS), delivers training to school professions to better understand the challenges related to parental deployment, and training school counselors to better provide psychosocial support to military children. The intervention was piloted at two civilian elementary schools, and the results were positive. The researchers hope that further implementation and research is conducted to explore the long-term effects of this intervention.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, the majority of the research on military children focuses on mental and physical health; however, the education research is limited. From the mental health perspective, Moeller, Culler, Hamilton, Aronson, and Perkins (2015) completed a literature review on the effects of military-connected parental absences on children. Two authors independently coded each of the 26 articles based on three variables: internalizing behaviors (sadness, depression, thoughts of suicide, etc.), externalizing behaviors (drug use, sexual promiscuity, non-suicidal self-injury, etc.), and academic outcomes. Though the focus was on mental health, 11 of the 26 studies used self-reported data from children, and only three noted the implications for education (academic outcomes).

Why bring a mental health article into the education conversation? I want to emphasize the lack of education specific research focusing on military children, but also to reiterate the lack of research giving military children a voice. The articles in this section predominately focus on the experiences of military children from the perspective of the teacher or parent; moreover, there is research that focuses on student academic performance from a quantitative analysis perspective. Specifically, in Chapter One, I noted two military commissioned studies performed

by the RAND Corporation. Richardson et al. (2011) interviewed school staff about the challenges students face, but no student was interviewed. Meadows, Tanielian, and Karney (2016) conducted interviews about how military families fare across the deployment cycle. For children under the age of 11, only parents were given the opportunity to respond; and, for older children, parents were asked to respond while giving the child the opportunity to respond. Some teens did not respond thus limiting the voice of the military child in this research.

Summary

This literature review supports the claim that military children are an often overlooked group who face negative perceptions from society. In working to understand and accept themselves, they balance opposing identities in the public and private realms. The cultural studies scholarship offers the social foundations for this study while reviewing the reoccurring themes in studies regarding military children and education (challenges and opportunities, strengths, and support) help the reader to better understand this population. Chapter Three describes the methodology for conducting the study, beginning with the theoretical foundations of autoethnography within a critical focus, and ending with an outline of the methods I intend to use for collecting and analyzing data.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In Chapter 1, I established the need for additional qualitative research specific to military children as it is significant not only to parents and family but to educators. In Chapter 2, I provided a review of the literature as it relates to this study: cultural studies, identity, and military children. In this chapter, I will describe my methodology by first detailing how autoethnography fits into the foundational elements that inform one another in this research project (see Figure 1.1) and serves as an appropriate tool for cultural studies research. Next, I explain the application of autoethnography as a methodology and the methods for collecting data. Crotty (1998/2015) emphasizes the required cohesion of one's research goals and process, so I begin this chapter by situating this autoethnography within cultural studies.

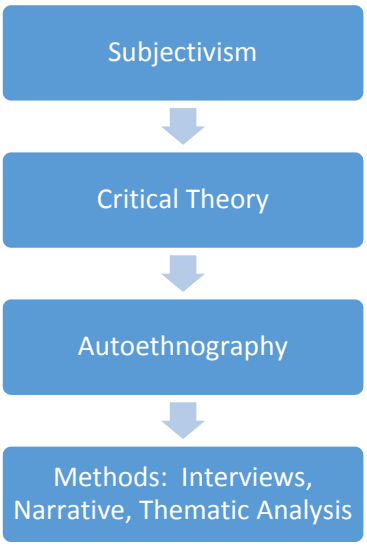

Figure 1.1: Foundational elements of this research project

Autoethnography

> You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view--until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.
>
> -Atticus Finch, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, (Lee, 1960)

An autoethnography's intensely personal nature emphasizes "the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding" (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21). Autoethnography tells a story in the first person (Ellis & Bochner, 2000) which places this methodology in the realm of a subjectivist epistemology. Grounded in personal experience, autoethnography lends itself well to cultural studies. Though Johnson (1986) describes cultural studies as interdisciplinary and anti-disciplinary, Wright (1998) depicts it as a research paradigm, "a tool that accomplishes certain sociopolitical ends" (p. 37) both within academics and society. Wright's concern is that by pigeonholing cultural studies as a discipline, there would be less activism in education and communities. Cultural Studies theorists, for all intents and purposes, are critical theorists as they offer an "effective critique of society" in an approach that is "both socially scientific and oriented toward human emancipation" (Arnold, 2015, p. 294). As critical theorists explore normative, socially dominate groups, so do cultural studies theorist.

Stepping away from more traditional, well-known methodologies, which can come across as rigid, autoethnography can offer important and much needed conclusions (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ellis (1997) speaks to the validity of this lesser known methodology by explaining that a story is valid if the reader feels that the articulated experience is "authentic and lifelike, believable and possible" (p. 133).

Jones, Adams, and Ellis (2013) describe the evolution of autoethnography by outlining the four trends that have presented themselves over time:

> (1) A recognition of the limits of scientific knowledge and a growing appreciation for qualitative research; (2) a heightened concern about the ethics and politics of research; (3) a greater recognition of and appreciation for narrative, the literary and aesthetic, emotions and the body; and (4) the increased importance of social identities and identity politics. (pp. 25-26)

Ellis (2009) explains that autoethnography is for those who wish to "better understand themselves and the world they live in, and who desire to change it for the better" (p. 374). Hughes and Pennington (2017) describe autoethnography as "contemporary critical social research" (p. 5) because it is used by authors who strive to give voice to once silenced stories. To that end, autoethnographers "use their identities as epistemologies, or as ways of knowing" (Hughes & Pennington, 2017, p. 12). Naturally, autoethnography can be used as a method of bringing oneself into the research inquiry; however, the overall goals of autoethnography are:

> One, evoking emotional experience in readers; two, giving voice to stories and groups of people traditionally left out of social scientific inquiry; three, producing writing of high literary/artistic quality; and four, improving readers', participants' and authors' lives. (Ellis, 2004, p. 30)

An autoethnography is a research approach that "seeks to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) in order to understand cultural experience (ethno)" (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 1). This process requires the individual to take part in both cultural analysis and interpretation (Starr, 2010, p. 1) while Chang (2008) broadens that description by combining "cultural analysis and interpretation with narrative details" (p. 46). She claims that autoethnography "follows the anthropological and social scientific inquiry approach rather than descriptive or performative storytelling" (Chang, 2008, p. 46). The autoethnography

research methodology offers meaningful and useful research which helps society understand how who we are or claim to be influences our areas of research, the methodology, and how we speak to our topic (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 3).

As discussed earlier, this methodology holds to the subjectivism epistemology; however, the options for underlying theoretical perspectives are far greater. Due to the critical and social nature of autoethnography, theoretical perspectives such as critical, feminist, and queer would align well with the methodology. Critical theory evaluates social constructs and challenges truth while seeking freedom from oppression (Merriam & Bierema, 2014, p. 214). Most common of these are issues related to race and social class. Critical theory is also described as "the process by which people learn to recognize how unjust dominant ideologies are embedded in everyday situations and practices. These ideologies shape behavior and keep an unequal system intact by making it appear normal" (Brookfield, 2012, p. 48).

Feminist and queer theories also critique power and privilege in their respective research areas. Feminist work examines the "role of gender within our cultural interactions and the reproduction of gender inequality" (Krane, 2001, p. 406). Hatch (2003) acknowledges that critical feminist research is one qualitative research focus for which narrative research is beneficial. Within critical feminist research, a narratives approach usually finds its foundation in the stories of the oppressed (Hatch, 2003). The researcher seeks to "expose structures that ensure the maintenance of control by those in power, to reveal the kinds and extent of oppression being experienced by participants, and to call for awareness, resistance, solidarity, and transformation" (Hatch, 2003, p. 18).

Breaking away from feminist theory, queer theorists also understand the importance of gender in their work; however, queer theory research examines heteronormativity. "'Normal'

and ‘heterosexual’ are understood as synonymous” (Sumara & Davis, 1999, p. 202), so queer theorists critique these norms that work to “maintain the dominance of heterosexuality” (Valocchi, 2005, p. 756). Autoethnography is a methodology that would offer a personal perspective to the power differentials being explored in each of these theories. What better way to give voice to an overlooked or misrepresented population than to shed light on one’s personal story?

Data Collection

Autoethnography can utilize a range of methods that span “from research about personal experiences of a research process to parallel exploration of the researcher's and the participants' experiences and about the experience of the researcher while conducting a specific piece of research” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Autoethnographers must use personal experience to depict aspects of cultural experience that may make the culture of their topic relevant for insiders and outsiders (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Ellingson (2006) proposes that the researcher address “our fears of illness, death, and bodies out of control instead of staying detached and ignoring our bodies (and others’ bodies)” (p. 308). The purpose is to help both insiders and outsiders to better understand culture; through their experiences within the culture, as an interviewer, and while taking field notes, the researcher becomes a participant observer (Goodall, 2001). I believe that my personal story is one means by which to analyze and interpret military culture that will thereby add to this body of literature.

According to Adams (2005) and Wood (2009), the autoethnography research methodology offers meaningful and useful research which also helps society understand about the kinds of people we claim to be and what we say about our topic. Through careful

introspection, I described and analyzed my personal experiences as a child of a military family in order to better understand military culture.

Due to the subjective, personal nature of autoethnography, this study required the use of personal documents including diaries, photo albums, personal blogs, and any other first-person narrative materials to chronicle the past (Chang, 2008, p. 66) and present. Qualitative research, not just autoethnography, requires the researcher(s) to reflect during the planning stages and during the research process in order to provide "context and understanding for readers" (Sutton & Austin, 2015, p. 226). For autoethnography, it is twofold. The researcher is fulfilling the role of both the researcher and subject. Ellis (2009) describes the role of autoethnographer as:

> The author and focus of the story, the one who tells and the one who experiences, the observer and the observed…I am the person at the intersection of the personal and the cultural, thinking and observing as an ethnographer and writing and describing as a storyteller. (p.13)

For an autoethnography, personal memory is an essential source of data due to how the past lends context to the present and "memory opens a door to the richness of the past" (Chang, 2008, p. 71). This data can be collected by chronicling the past in field notes (Ellis, 2004, p. 113). I created a timeline of major life events that relate to my experiences as a military child (Appendix A). This document outlines the many moves (in and out of the United States), school changes, social events and experiences, etc. In my mind, I do not chronicle my life based on years but rather locations where we lived; so, this timeline serves as a starting point for developing my writing prompts (Appendix B) to delve into self-reflection.

As a part of the self-reflection process, I began going through and organizing my family photos based on our location. As I chronicled my past as a military child, I feel the photographs

aided in eliciting "latent memories" (Paulus, Lester, & Dempster, 2014, p. 87) by triggering one's memories as well as the social context surrounding the images (Chang, 2008 p. 109). Creswell (2012) identifies this approach as photo elicitation (p. 224); and, in the context of this study, photos were a way of documenting my experiences as a military child and some aspects of military culture. I scanned these photographs and saved them for future use when interviewing participants: myself and immediate family members.

Hughes and Pennington (2017) suggest the technique of critical auto-interviewing as a way for researchers to collect internal data and "seek gaps in their self-awareness" (p. 65). This method of data collection requires the autoethnographer to engage in critical reflexivity in order to discover assumptions that give meaning to their views and beliefs (Hughes & Pennington, 2017). In my experience, journaling is the best way to embark on critical reflection, and I used OneNote to reflect not only on the writing prompts but the research process.

I began journaling and reflecting on the research process during the early stages of preparing my research proposal, and I have found it helpful in determining what I hope are the most efficient and effect processes and methods of collecting data. Specifically, I was attempting to create the interview protocol (Appendix C) too early in the writing process. Granted, I knew that the interview questions and procedure would evolve and solidify as I continued to collect data from my own memories and experiences. Even two months later, having reflected, journaled, and researched other autoethnographic studies, I still struggled – until I took a writing break. The realization finally struck me. I must complete the majority of the personal data collection prior to embarking on the participant interview process. As the primary participant, the other participant interviews are intended to either offer context or authenticity to my story; therefore, I must first tell my story before attempting to validate.

Culture is a delicately woven tapestry of the individual and others, so autoethnography must study more than oneself. In order to broaden the scope, the autoethnographer must look beyond herself to include others that are either personally connected to the researcher or connected through common experiences (Chang, 2008); therefore, in order to offer more depth to the study, a researcher may perform interviews to aid in learning more about the human experience (Paulus, Lester, & Dempster, 2014, p. 82). When interviewing participants, myself included, I employed stimulated recall interviews (SRI) which invites participants to recall with the use of prompts: video/audio recordings or photographs (Lyle, 2003). This technique is used to stimulate participants' memory of how his/her activities and interactions interconnect with "broader cultural phenomena" (Dempsy, 2010, p. 364). When audio-recording an interview, I took handwritten notes to comment on environmental factors, nonverbal cues, or behaviors that may not be captured via audio-recording (Sutton & Austin, 2015).

Finally, I mined data from documents and artifacts specific to the United States military. I believe that adding documents such as "records, organizational promotional materials, letters, newspaper accounts, poems, songs…autobiographies, blogs, and websites" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 163) lends credibility and supports an accurate depiction of military culture, in particular, the Marine Corps. For example, the United States Marine Corps Hymn, which was a regular part of my childhood, offers insight into the pride that we felt as a Marine Corps family; moreover, it supports the mentality that I often witnessed and heard expressed by my father and his fellow Marines. They believe that serving in the Marine Corps, which they claimed to be the best of all branches of the military, was an honor and privilege. The first verse of the hymn embodies the pride of a Marine: "First to fight for right and freedom and to keep our honor clean; We are proud to claim the title of United States Marine" (The Marine Band, n.d.).

Participants. Due to the nature of an autoethnography, the primary participant in this study is me, the researcher. In addition to interviewing myself, I interviewed three individuals, my immediate family members, to collect varying perspectives of my life experiences. Prior to beginning this process, I received approval from the University of Tennessee's Institutional Review Board (UTK IRB-18-04779-XP). The interview inclusion criterion is that the interviewee must either offer context (e.g. military culture, socio-economic background, the military climate, and military family dynamics) to my experiences or lend authenticity to my story. These interviews lend credibility to my stories and also offer context in regards to topics such as military culture, socio-economic background, the military climate (war and peace time), and military family dynamics.

- Father: 27-year veteran of the United States Marine Corps; White; age 67
- Mother: White; age 61; 16 years as a Marine wife
- Brother: White; age 39; 13 years as a military dependent; 6 years Marine Corps reservist
- Researcher: White; female; age 37; 11 years as a military dependent; 0 years of military service

I interviewed each participant at a location of their choice. My parents chose to meet at my office while my brother chose to meet at his home to ensure privacy. Each interview lasted no longer than one hour with follow-up questions occurring via telephone, as needed. I provided each participant an informed consent (Appendix D) to ensure his/her full understanding of their rights in the research process and to meet Institutional Review Board requirements. The informed consent and release form explains his/her right to confidentiality and to withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. To ensure transparency, the form also explains how their interviews would be used. Though participating in these interviews offers no inherent harm,

psychological distress is possible anytime a sensitive subject is introduced. My family has expressed support and excitement for this research venture.

The interview questions were broken up into sections: military culture, socio-economic background, the military climate (war and peace time), and military family dynamics. Despite being my immediate family members, I did not want to make assumptions about their families. The background section allowed me to gather geographic and socio-economic information as well as any prevalent gender norms in their childhood homes. The military section provided me information about the participants' personal military experience, military climate, and how military life shaped the family dynamic. The family section explored the military family dynamic with basic logistical information.

A benefit of using a video-recording of each interview is the speed with which the researcher can transcribe. I created a private YouTube page on which to upload the three interviews. I set each interview to private to ensure security. Once saved, I watched each video-recording and added to the notes I took during the interview making note of the non-verbal cues of the participants.

YouTube offers free captioning with time stamps for each uploaded video. Once the timestamped transcription (rough draft) was downloaded onto my computer, I was then able to clean up the documents while following along with the audio-recording. I was able to transcribe each interview in half the time it normally would have taken without this technology shortcut.

Prior to data analysis, all data collected was uploaded to a Qualitative Research Analysis Software, Nvivo. This software allows the researcher to annotate and code, "assign a descriptive notation" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 200), the data; moreover, within a document, Nvivo displays annotations as footnotes while highlighting the corresponding text (Paulus, Lester, &

Dempster, 2014, p. 123). I began by importing the narratives/journal entries, interview transcripts, and field notes pertaining to the data gathered from my experiences.

Thematic Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define data analysis as "making sense out of the data" by using "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting" in order to give meaning to what has been said (p. 202). In conducting autoethnography research, my goal was to reveal the experience of culture, gender, identity, and power as told through the stories of one military child. Autoethnography, unlike positivist qualitative analysis, allows the exploration to evolve as the research progresses. While I went into the research to address the question of how stories of my life and perceptions as a military child may reveal a greater understanding about military culture, I continued to remain open to the possibility that the stories could lead me in another direction.

In order to establish a solid foundation and direction for the story, I positioned the personal and interview data with the field notes to analyze prior to writing the narrative. My primary concern throughout this research process was creating an authentic story without overanalyzing the data for the reader. When developing an autoethnography, which I will discuss in more detail in the next section, the researcher is continually negotiating with oneself. There were questions of boundaries: How much of my life and myself do I include? How much is appropriate to omit from the story? I am flawed with unconscious biases, so it was important to capture my own part in each situation – my emotions or childish naivety, for example, can create a more engaging and real experience in the story (Bochner, 2001; Ellis, 2004). Autoethnography allows the reader to be an active participant by interpreting the story and finding meaning (Ellis, 1997; Ellis, 2009; Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

Once I finished writing the narrative, a thematic analysis was conducted. Data analysis occurred in three stages. Throughout each stage, I looked for cultural themes, identified exceptional occurrences, and looked for omissions and inclusions in the data (Chang, 2008, p. 132-133). First, the narrative was reviewed, coded, and assigned to a thematic category. The initial coding process, often referred to as open coding (Saldaña, 2013, p.100), allows for broad categories to be identified. The second stage of data analysis involved a review of the themes presented in order to refine the themes identified/developed in the stage one. During the refinement process, in vivo coding was utilized to ensure that the participants' voices are honored and prioritized (Saldaña, 2013, p. 91). In vivo uses direct quotes from the participants which provided deeper insight into the participants. I created a thematic coding map (Appendix E) to better illustrate the relationships between the themes and quotations. During the final stage of analysis, the themes identified during the previous two stages were organized as they related to the research questions.

Developing the Autoethnography

An autoethnography is essentially a story by which one can learn more about a culture. Autoethnographers must "think of the life being expressed not merely as data to be analyzed and categorized but as a story to be represented and engaged…we shouldn't prematurely brush aside the particulars to get to the general" (Bochner, 2001, p. 132). Therefore, there is a shared responsibility between the reader and the author of an autoethnography. The author cannot speak from an outsider's perspective, and the reader cannot sit idly by and wait for the conclusions to be outlined for her. Each party must actively engage in interpreting the meaning of the text. The autoethnographer's responsibility is to inspire the reader's imagination and "create a meaningful story as we interact with one another" (Ellis, 2004, p. 66).

The stories I have shared offer a glimpse into my life growing up as a military-connected child. I have shared the context, revealed emotions and feelings through expressions and physical movements, and let the reader in on my thoughts (Ellis, 2004). Though it is a natural inclination, I resisted the urge to make generalizations or simplifications for all military children. Mine is just one life and one story.

Even from my own life, there are a multitude of stories from the many schools I have attended and cities in which I have lived; but, after narrowing down those stories collected through self-reflection and journaling, I must engage in the creative process to depict an authentic story of one child from a military family.

As to the reader's responsibility, "autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to do something, to act" (Ellis & Bochner, 2006, p. 433). As the reader engages and follows the author's account, he or she must then participate in the interpretation and understanding of the stories. As Tsang (2000) suggested,

> These are also the readers' stories, for through reading, readers construct their own meanings and identify with or resist certain elements of the story. How they do so not only reflects back on them and their own values and notions of themselves, but also implicates them as collaborators in the creation of the meaning of the text. (p. 47)

Trustworthiness

As one of the most notable researchers in the field of autoethnography, Carolyn Ellis (2004) defends her use of this methodology by stating:

> There is nothing more theoretical or analytical than a good story…I would argue that a story's generalizability is always being tested – not in the traditional way through random

samples of respondents, but by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know. (p. 194-195)

Trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility are terms more readily used in qualitative research while quantitative research prefers terms such as validity and reliability. Tracy (2010) describes credibility as the "trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings" (p. 842). In this study, I establish trustworthiness, rigor, and credibility with my readers and my research participants through the criteria noted by Lincoln and Guba (1985): prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation of data, peer debriefing, referential adequacy, and member checks (p. 301).

- *Prolonged engagement*: With the purpose of gaining trust with the participants, the researcher must invest time in learning the culture and to ensure that she is no longer deemed an outsider (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This level of comfort is necessary for the participants to feel relaxed enough to genuinely share about their lives and culture. The eleven years I lived as the child a United States Marine offered me the adequate prolonged engagement with the culture and the research participants. The longer the researcher spends with the data, the more likely she is to notice the cultural complexities and values (Tracy, 2010).
- *Persistent observation*: Building upon prolonged engagement, the researcher must be actively engaged in the data to ensure more than a superficial understanding. "If prolonged engagement provides scope, persistent observation provides depth" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 304). The researcher must offer *thick descriptions* by providing detailed, concrete descriptions to illustrate the context and complexity of the data (Tracy, 2010).

- *Triangulation of data*: Tracy (2010) describes high-quality qualitative research as being "marked by a rich complexity of abundance" (p. 841), and this richness is produced by a variety of data sources. For the purpose of this study, I utilized two or more different data collection methods making the conclusion more credible (Tracy, 2010). Specifically, I kept a researcher's journal in which I recorded my observations of and experiences throughout the research process. The majority of this study originates from journals (writing prompts), self- and participant-interviews; however, I supplement and support that data with the collection of documents and artifacts to ensure triangulation of data.
- *Peer debriefing*: I conducted peer debriefing throughout the data collection process. I worked together with a colleague to glean an impartial view of my study. This was not only beneficial in exploring meanings and methodological questions, but the process was cathartic. Writing a dissertation is a frustrating and lonely venture, so the debriefer listened and offered support. I made notations of each meeting in my researcher's journal (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- *Referential adequacy*: I utilized a variety of materials to document my findings to ensure records were adequately secured for future reference. For a more holistic approach, I collected data from multiple sources including my researcher's journal, interviews (self and participant), photographs, and documents and archives. The participant interviews were both audio- and video-recorded and my journals and interview transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo.
- *Member checks*: By going back to the data sources (interview participants), I was able to confirm both the data and my interpretation of the data. I conducted formal and informal member checks with the interview participants throughout the data collection period and

while creating the narrative. As I wrote about my life and therefore my family, I have communicated with each family member to confirm the validity of my data; moreover, participants were given the opportunity to express concerns, correct discrepancies, and/or request omissions (Ellis, 2009).

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research is transferable rather than generalizable (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability refers to how well a study's findings may be applied across a range of contexts. Tracy (2010) offers methods of ensuring transferability: "gathering direct testimony, providing rich description, and writing accessibly and invitationally" (p. 845). In regards to this study, transferability can also relate to "evocative storytelling" (Ellis, 1995) – inducing an emotional experience in readers. Through this study I offer the reader an opportunity to vicariously experience the context of growing up in a military family.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I detailed my justification for conducting an autoethnography to answer my primary research question: *What do stories of my life and perceptions as a military child reveal about military culture?* I outline how data was collected, organized, and analyzed. Lastly, I explain approaches used to guarantee trustworthiness of findings. Chapter Four includes two sections: one entitled "Military Brat" which includes my narrative and another with an analysis of the themes presenting themselves in the data. I conclude in Chapter Five by offering insight into the process of performing this type of research, discuss the implications for education, and future research possibilities.

Chapter 4: The Military Life

Two purposes for this chapter are to present my story and to discuss emergent themes. In the first segment, I compose an evocative story developed from multiple data sources. These data sources include interview transcripts/notes for both parents and one sibling, field notes, and the reflections of the researcher based on self-interviews, writing prompts, and journal entries. As the primary participant, I tell my stories in the context of a conversation with each of my family members. Though I have written a story meant to be generalizable to the reader while evoking the readers emotions, the conversations are real and true to my life.

In the second section of this chapter, I analyze three central themes that emerged during the research process: family, structure, and silence. The element of family is foundational to my childhood while structure is unavoidable for anyone involved in military culture. The final theme of silence is described in the most literal sense as well as the result of the structure in our home and the demands placed on a military family. I provide evidence of each theme from the narrative while attempting to withhold further anecdotes to the analysis.

Military Brat

The following narrative is based on Ellis' (1997) idea of evocative writing. She stresses the necessity of determining a way to "open up spaces for others to tell about their lives, but at least this method – storytelling about life epiphanies – is a strategy that most people employ in their everyday lives. It's a familiar form" (Ellis, 1997, p. 134). As I tell my story, I want to emphasize that I can only speak to my experiences as a child of a United States Marine in the 1980s.

My story is one of millions. I have never considered it to be a particularly special story. I grew up in a loving home surrounded by a supportive family. My parents both come from very

poor families in rural Southwest Virginia where I am told many people, like my father, enlisted in the military to escape poverty. And, my parents were definitely poor. Neither of my parents had indoor plumbing for much of their childhoods, and my mother often tells stories of using old refrigerator boxes covered by handmade quilts to insulate their home each winter.

Being Baby Boomers in the South, my parents grew up in a traditional, Southern Baptist home in which strong gender norms prevailed, and many of those gender norms were later transferred to the dynamic in my childhood home. My father worked full-time and was often away from the home due to his position in the Marine Corps, and my mother was a stay-at-home mom. My mother cooked, cleaned, and raised the children while my father worked and performed outdoor or home repair tasks when he was home. In my early life, he rarely involved himself in the comings and goings of his children. I used to believe his lack of involvement was due to disinterest, but I now understand that my father was simply perpetuating some of the parenting techniques employed in his childhood home. I am happy to note that later in my life he improved and learned how to engage more in my life.

When our family visited my paternal grandparents during the holidays, there was an order to things. Specifically, children were to be seen and not heard in the house; children were fed first, then the men, and the women ate last; the men sat down and discussed money and politics while the women filled their glasses, fetched them snacks, and ensured that the children did not make a disruption. This patriarchal dynamic proved difficult for my mother and me. My mother was often judged based on her ability to control the behavior of her children and how well she doted on my dad in front of his brothers and father.

Being a military brat meant that we didn't have the opportunity to visit extended family often. Depending on our duty station, we were lucky to visit once a year, so being subjected to

the expectations of my grandparent's home was rare. Which was a blessing because my family did not fit in with the rest of the brood. My maternal grandparents passed when I was less than one year old, so I have no memory of them. None of my mother's brother and sisters were military connected, so my mother was the only one to have moved away from their hometown. We tried to visit my mother's seven sisters and one brother as often as possible, but my brother and I simply did not fit in with our cousins. My interests and experiences were foreign to our extended family, but thankfully every child can relate on one basic level – play. Our differences only became glaring when we reached adolescence.

Despite my desire to rebel against the gender norms in my family, I truly believe that my childhood was blessed. I knew the power dynamic in our home. My father was the leader, my mother was his voice and the disciplinarian, and my brother and I were expected to obey without complaint. There was a hierarchy and a structure in our home, but there was endless amounts of love enveloping the order. I have never heard my father speak to my mother with anything but love and respect. I have never heard my parents argue, and I have never heard one undermine the other. There was always order, structure, and respect in our home. My father would attribute that to having love and respect for each other. He constantly reminds me – even today - that we are a team, each serving a different role for the group, and each one vitally important.

When I approached my parents about potentially participating in this study, my father asked, "The military is very traditional. How will you separate the traditional principles I learned from my parents – and brought into our home - from those that were the result of the military environment?" My only response is to admit that the two cannot be separated. My father is a retired United States Marine, and his father was in the United States Navy in World War II. I

would be naïve to think that the principles shaped by his generation and those molded by the military could be untangled.

Again, it is just one story of one military brat…

The Learning Curve

My brother is two years, one month, and three days older than me. As a little girl, I thought that number held great significance. When I was three years old, we first moved to Point Mugu, California, and my parents immediately got involved with the activities on base. Our time in California was the only period, during my life, that we lived on the military base for a significant amount of time. My parents immediately signed up for activities on base, intermural sports mostly. My brother joined the tee ball and soccer teams, but I was too young. I was already a better athlete than my brother, but there were minimum age requirements that I never seemed to meet. He was only two years, one month, and three days older than me, and I could already out run him, and out swim him. Nevertheless, I sat on the sidelines while my brother and all our friends played tee ball and soccer. I believe that our sibling rivalry began at this stage in our lives, but I'm sure my brother would say differently.

This entire dissertation process has me feeling raw and nostalgic. I began keeping a journal of this process, hoping it serves as a cathartic outlet as I traipse through my personal history and emotions. Driving to meet my brother, hoping to discuss his potential involvement in my dissertation research, I cross my fingers. Warren isn't the most forthcoming of my family members, so I want to make sure he knows that this isn't mandatory. There is no pressure to be involved, but I am hopeful.

I walk in the backdoor without knocking. He purchased my childhood home from my parents when he got married, and it always has this warm familiarity when I visit. He hasn't made

many changes or updates, much to his wife's irritation. I know that my high school basketball number is still displayed in the garage. That boy doesn't throw anything away!

"Hey, man," Warren tosses over his shoulder in greeting. He doesn't look up or stop what he's doing.

"New records?" I ask when I finally get a glance at what he's hunched over.

"Yeah, we went to Asheville yesterday and stopped by a couple stores. Check it out." He excitedly pulls out two new albums and begins explaining the band and the significance of the find. Our love of records is something we share, but my brother's musical preferences differ greatly from mine. I listen and hum encouragingly while he begins playing one of the records. He offers me a seat on the couch before choosing to sit in his favorite chair.

"So, what's up, punk?"

I smile at the nickname. "So, I'm in the dissertation phase of my doctoral program, and I wanted to know your thoughts on participating in my study."

His brow wrinkles in confusion as he questions, "What do you mean participate? What are you researching?"

I can hear the hesitancy in his voice, so I launch into the speech I prepared.

"My study is on military brats…well, *my* story more specifically. I would just be interviewing you, mom, and dad for some context. You won't be the focus of the study."

"I don't know, Jen. Are you going to ask about my…feelings and stuff?" His face crinkles in disgust as he says the word feelings. Yes, definitely not the most forthcoming member of my family. I chuckle softly at his opinion of sharing his feelings. When my father retired from the Marine Corps he began a career as a licensed clinical social worker and my mother pursued her degrees in counseling and education. There were many conversations about *feelings* in our family

– an odd juxtaposition to our family's preference of not being emotional. We were expected to articulate our emotions with words rather than with actions or outbursts.

"Not yours," I reassured him. "This study is all about me. I'm going to tell the story of growing up in a military home, changing schools constantly, moving around the world…from my perspective."

Warren nods in understanding. "Then I'm cool with it," he agrees.

"Great! And thank you." I hesitate and begin drumming my fingers on my thigh in thought. I continue, "I need something else, too. Do you still have the family picture albums you put together and captioned?"

"Yeah," he nods while getting up. "They're in my office," his voice trails off as he walks down the hall. When he returns, he has two large photo albums and one significantly smaller one. I snatch the little one off the top and start flipping through the pages.

"What's this one?"

He blushes lightly as he explains that it was a small album of his favorite pictures. I shook my head and say under my breath, "Sap." My brother, the tough guy.

Warren rolls his eyes and shoves me over so he can sit next to me on the couch. He places the albums on the coffee table, and I pick up the pink and white quilted album that screams 1980s. He tugs the album more towards him so we can share. The album begins before we were born. My dad is so young and surrounded by other Marines in almost every picture. We chat a little about the comradery. He's never alone…not even at the beach. Warren continues to turn the pages and we progress to our time in California – his tee ball and soccer pictures. I didn't realize that my dad coached the tee ball team. He points at the soccer team picture.

"Hey, there's Sam and Sarah." He smiles fondly remembering our early friendship with the brother and sister duo.

"Yeah, yeah, yeah…everyone got to play but me," I whine.

"Oh, come on. We were horrible," he laughs. "And you got to go to the concession stand during the games. Sarah would run off and leave the field when she saw you go to the concession stand, hoping for some candy."

"Whatever," I sigh in resignation. I turn the page to see Warren holding my hand while we stood on an extremely large rock.

"Do you remember where we were here?" I point to the picture. There were a series from the same location, but I was too young to remember exactly where we were.

"I'm not sure. Somewhere in California, I think. Maybe Nevada?"

"Gross! Look at this one!" I point to the Scottish school picture. "Why was I wearing a teal polo under my red school jumper?" I shake my head at the fashion tragedy that I presented in my youth.

"So, are you going to focus on our time in Scotland? I know you're in a Cultural Studies program, so Scotland would be the most significant cultural change we experienced."

"Some. I will explore some of the dynamics of our family. Specifically, the dynamic between you and me."

"Why me? We were just normal kids. I picked on you because you are my annoying little sister, but that's just…normal kids' stuff."

"You *picked* on me?" I can hear the incredulous tone seep into my voice, and I watch his mouth twitch as he attempts to keep a straight face.

"Yeah, you're my baby sis. I'm supposed to pick on you."

"You took pleasure in tormenting me…" A long standing argument, so I let the accusation hang in the air.

"You have no proof." He narrowed his eyes in challenge.

"The scars on my body are proof enough," I declared.

He huffs as he turns his attention back to the album and softly asks, "You won't include all the bad stuff, will you?"

"No," I answer just as softly, trying to reassure him. "I don't plan to include all of our petty sibling squabbles. I mean, seriously, no one cares how many times we fought over the remote control or a toy. But I will include how you were my security blanket when we started a new school or visited a new church. Do you remember how annoyed you would get with me?" I smile at the memory. "I was so nervous and wanted you in all of my classes and Sunday school groups."

He nodded his head. "I was nervous, too."

"Shut up. No, you weren't. You were never nervous." I shook my head as I remember being that scared little girl with a fearless older brother. Always the new kid. Always trying to fit in. Afraid of not being accepted. I can still feel the anxiety creep in when I remember being introduced to the class on my first day at a new school. "I remember, in Scotland, the first time we were no longer in the same Sunday school group at whatever church we were visiting. I wanted to cry, but we didn't show those kinds of emotions in our family; so, I made up every excuse I could think of to get you to at least walk me to my classroom door."

He leans back into the couch cushions and just listens to my perspective. I can tell that he wants to interrupt or jump in, but he lets me finish.

"You did that kind of stuff for me a lot. You took care of me."

"No, I didn't," Warren resolutely contradicts me. "You were always taking care of me – even from an early age. I was selfish. Do you remember how you would always try to keep me out of trouble or even try to take my punishments for me?"

I nod my head, but I knew that was only part of the story. I always gave in to his whims because I loved him. I expressed my love by caring and doing things for him. I still love my brother, but I have learned a better, healthier way of expressing it.

"Do you remember the school in Menmuir, Scotland?" I ask him. He nods in answer. "Do you remember the white and red custard they served for dessert?"

He chuckles softly and clarifies, "It was pink, but yes I remember."

"I hated the white custard. I tried it one day, but I couldn't finish it. The lunch lady saw me throw it away and fussed at me for wasting it." I still remember feeling confused. It was my first experience in a Scottish school and in a Scottish lunchroom. I wasn't familiar with some of the foods. At first, I asked some questions to determine what each dish was, but eventually I just made my selections to prevent holding up the line anymore. When offered pudding, I naturally accepted. It looked funny…much like a soup, and it was warm.

I didn't like everything on my plate; but, I was hungry, so I ate the majority of the savory bits while leaving the pudding, which another student called custard, for last. I tried two or three bites and quickly pushed it aside. When I took it to the bin, I was reprimanded for wasting food.

"Anyway, I knew never to get that again, and I think they had it almost every day," I explain. "Until one day they had the pink custard." I huff as I recall my naivety. "Since it was a different color, I thought it *had* to have a different taste, right?" It didn't.

MENMUIR, SCOTLAND - 1986

After eating the rest of my lunch, I tried to dispose of the foul dessert, but the lunch lady refused – I had been marked as a repeat offender. She made me remain seated in the lunchroom until the pudding was finished. My tablemates laughed at my predicament while heading back to class.

My face felt hot with embarrassment.
I kept my head down and my eyes locked on my uneaten dessert.
A couple other kids snickered as they passed me.

It was our first week in a Scottish school, and I felt embarrassed and scared to be sitting alone in the lunchroom after everyone else went back to class. I struggled to eat even the smallest portion of the custard because it made me gag. I tried holding my nose for a couple bites then I would take a small break. Eventually, they turned the lights off in the main dining room while the staff cleaned up the kitchen area. As I sat there alone in that vast dark room, I started to softly cry. Occasionally, the lunch lady would come back in and check on me, but I still wasn't permitted to go to class until I had finished the custard.

After one particularly large and disgusting bite, I looked up to find Warren hiding outside the doorway, waiting for the lunch lady to go back into the kitchen. When the coast was clear, he discreetly made his way to me and kneeled down next to me.

I immediately felt relief.
My brother will help me.
I sat up a little straighter and started wiping away my tears.

"Why aren't you in class?" He asked in concern.

I started to tear up again as I explained, "She said that I have to finish this stuff before I can go back to class." I pointed at the offending dessert and wrinkled my nose with distain.

"Well, hurry up before you get in trouble," he orders. By the wrinkle in his brow, it's obvious that he doesn't understand why I'm not eating.

"It's so gross, Warren. I can't eat it."

"Here," Warren huffed and started shoveling the custard into his mouth. He was able to swallow over half of the custard before we heard the lunch lady's approach. He ducked down and started to waddle towards the exit, letting the other tables keep him hidden.

When the lunch lady inspected my progress, she nodded in some vague semblance of approval and motioned for me to go.

PRESENT

"I've never eaten custard again," I explain. "I don't know if I ever thanked you for that day."

Warren shrugs his shoulders in ambivalence. "I'm your brother," he explains before turning back to the photo album. "You took care of me far more than I took care of you. I started calling you my big sister when we were still in elementary school."

"That's only because I was the responsible one, and Mom tasked me with taking care of you."

"Yeah, so I let you.

"Just having you near me was the support I needed," I explain. "I remember feeling this sense of calm and belonging so long as we experienced it together. You were my support."

"It helped having you there, for sure. We were lucky to be in the same schools most of the time. Even in Scotland, they had multiple grades in one large room – kind of sectioned off," Warren describes while drawing a picture of the room with his finger in the air.

“We finally got separated when we moved back to the States – in Virginia. You were in Middle School, and I was still in Elementary.”

“That transition was difficult for many reasons,” Warren explained. “We were the new kids, again, but we were used to that.”

“Awww, did you miss me?” I playfully asked him.

“Hardly,” he deadpanned. “The Scottish curriculum was drastically ahead of the curriculum we were introduced to in the United States, but we struggled in Language Arts.”

“YES! I remember I did poorly on the first couple homework assignments. I was always a good students, so I couldn’t figure it out.”

“Plurals and conjugations,” Warren simplifies.

“Learning the difference between British English and American English took some time.”

“Everything else was social. We were different.”

“I got bullied a little in Virginia,” I mumble under my breath remembering the group of girls who would follow me on my walk home from school. It rarely became physical, but I still remember the awful names they called me.

“We got bullied a little in Scotland.” His placid, matter-of-fact tone forces me to meet his eyes. Yes, we got bullied in Scotland by kids who were much older than us.

“But we got bullied together!” I offer in solidarity with a small grin. “And only until we learned the accent, and things improved on that front. Most people didn’t know that we were Americans.”

“True. We learned how to blend in quickly.” Warren got up to flip the record over before returning to the couch. He places the photo album back on the coffee table and turns his body more towards me. He reminisces, “I’m glad we moved to Edzell. That was the third school we attended

in Scotland, and it gave us a clean slate. It was like the first two were a chance for us to fail and learn."

"God, yes. Do you remember how many times I got in trouble when we started at the school in Menmuir? The lunchroom incident aside, I think I was sent to the principal's office twice in one week."

Warren's deep laugh rumbles in his chest. "I don't remember that."

"I blame soccer and everyone's fascination with Americans," I begin.

MENMUIR, SCOTLAND - 1986

The school in Menmuir was surrounded by asphalt with a stone wall outlining the parameter. I learned that there were stonewalls of varying shapes and sizes all over Scotland. There were small, waist high stone walls separating different areas of the asphalt play area outside of the school. In the largest space, one of my classmates invited me to play soccer for the first time, and I turned out to be pretty good once I learned the rules. Nevertheless, playing soccer on asphalt wasn't the safest idea and we were often falling and scraping one appendage or another. One day, a classmate took a nasty fall skinning his knee badly. We rushed the crying boy over to a small bench to assess the damage. I hadn't ever seen one that bad before.

A little girl ran off to get a teacher.

"That's a really bloody knee," I lament with a frown.

I hear a collective gasp around me, and I look up from my inspection of the knee to find everyone looking at me with wide-eyed shock.

"What?" I ask in confusion.

The little girl next to me whispered, "You said…"

"What?" I looked around. "His bloody knee?" I ask while pointing to the knee in question.

Another round of gasps were heard, and a boy ran off in the direction of the approaching teacher. I couldn't hear their conversation, but the little boy was pointing at me. The teacher met my gaze with a troubled look.

"Alright, what have you done to yourself, laddie. Can you walk?" The teacher asked as he knelt down to look the boy in the eye. The boy wiped at his tearstained face and gave a single head nod.

"What a brave, wee lad. Let's get you to the nurse," the teacher instructed before turning to me. "And you, lass, will you come with us?"

Unsure of why I had to see the nurse, I followed mutely behind. Once we dropped the boy off with the nurse, I was walked directly to the principal's office. As it turns out, the word "bloody" is a very serious curse word in Britain. I got away with a strong lecture and was eventually forgiven due to my foreign origins with the assurance that I would never use that word again.

PRESENT

"Oh, I had forgotten about that one," Warren laughed. "That's not too bad."

"I was still confused when I finally made it back to class. I had to ask someone what it meant." I chuckle at my youthful ignorance.

"At least you didn't get into real trouble."

"That one was fine since it was my first incident, but I found myself back in his office before the week was finished," I admit.

MENMUIR, SCOTLAND - 1986

"Tell me another cool American phrase," my schoolmate Amy prodded.

"I don't know. 'That's rad" is pretty popular, I guess," I suggest as I attempt to eat another Salt & Vinegar crisp. My face puckers up as I listen to Amy chatter on about her dreams of one day visiting California.

Amy grabbed one of my crisps before asking, "Why do you Americans always do this?" she makes a peace sign with her fingers.

"I don't know. It's just something we do." I guess it was common when I thought about it.

From that day forward, Amy made a point to flash a peace sign to me from across the classroom where she sat. One day, I learned the dangers of a lax peace sign. I haphazardly returned the gesture only to hear a gasp from across the room. The girl sitting next to Amy immediately raised her hand to report my indiscretion to the teacher. It all happened so quickly. I was being walked down to the principal's office…again for some unknown reason.

I watched the teacher and principal speak quietly before the teacher frowned at me and left the office. I sat in the big chair, picking at the skirt of my school uniform as my feet swung back and forth. The principal sat down with a large sigh before turning his gaze upon me.

"Do you understand why you are in my office today, wee one?"

"No, sir."

He nodded as he adjusted some of the papers on his desk. He continued, "You made a gesture with your hands in class just now. Do you know what it means?"

"Yes, sir. It's a peace sign," I admit and form the gesture with my small hands.

"Aye, that is a peace sign, but I was informed that the gesture you made in class was different."

I look at him in confusion. My fingers still locked in the gesture, I turn them around to look at them. Nope, my first two fingers were still making a "v" shape. Not sure what he was talking about, I drop my hand into my lap and shrug my shoulders.

He smiled at my obvious ignorance. "It's not often that we have Americans in our school, so I will explain something to you." The principal made a peace sign. "This is a peace sign, yes?"

I agree with a head nod.

"Right, so, in Britain, this is a peace sign, and this is the gesture for the number two." He kept his palm outward towards me and brought his fingers from the "v" shape. His two forefingers were now touching in a version of the scouts honor gesture.

"The peace sign with your palm facing inwards means something very naughty in Britain. Do you understand?"

"Of course," I lied. I had no clue why I was getting lectured.

"You won't make that gesture again, yeah?" He pushed for clarification.

"No, sir," I stated, ready to get back to class. After what felt like a very pointed stare, the principal dismissed me to go back to class. It was during the break that I finally got to speak with Amy about what happened.

"Did you get in trouble?" A concerned Amy tugged me towards the corner of the classroom for a little bit of privacy.

"Not really. He just told me that the peace sign I did was naughty. I'm not to do that again."

"You didn't do a peace sign, you silly bird. When you hold your hand like this," she gestured the peace sign with her palm facing inwards, "it's like you Americans doing the middle finger."

“Seriously?” My eyes went wide. I was definitely not allowed to do that gesture. I would get in so much trouble if my parents found out.

PRESENT

Warren just shook his head at my story.

“We certainly learned a lot,” he concludes.

“We certainly did. We had the accent down perfectly, so we could blend in with the other kids. It was only when they found out that we were Americans that the bullying began.” I shift uncomfortably. Those were unpleasant memories of our childhood. I wasn’t just bullied in Scotland for being an American; I was bullied for being different. My accent was different, my clothes were often quite different, and I looked at the world differently. The bullying was common at every new school I attended.

“We did okay,” Warren offers quietly.

“Yeah,” I agree. We did okay. We were actually quite lucky. The bullying never lasted for very long – a few weeks at most – and the bullies would get bored. On a happier note, “It wasn’t all bad. The thing that got us bullied actually helped us make a few friends at each school.”

“True. Everyone was always so excited about the new kids,” he offers a small smile.

“There were questions about where we had lived and what each place was like,” I recall. The kids at school wanted to know what it was like in different states or in Scotland, and I sometimes used that to make new friends.

“It was easier when we were on base or around other military kids,” he asserts.

“True, they understood. But when did that ever happen?” I ask him.

"Ummmm…" I can see his mental trip down memory lane. "California!" He smiles like this is a pop quiz. Nerd.

"But we moved there when I was about three years old, and we only stayed for three years," I explain. "And that was the *only* time we lived on base…or had military kids to play with."

"I didn't make any deep friendships with the other kids," he confesses.

"Neither did I," I own up with a sad smile. "I always knew we would be leaving soon, so I didn't see the point in developing relationships."

"But we had each other," he admits with a growing smile. "It was always easier with you there with me."

My smile must look ridiculous because those words are laced with gold. My brother has never admitted to benefitting from having his annoying little sister around.

"Be careful," I warn him. "I'm going to remember that you admitted that to me."

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," he says with a grin as he wraps his arm around me. "I'll always be your little brother."

Surviving and Thriving

"Do you think that we are both introverts because of our childhood?" Warren asks me as he drops his hands into his lap ending his air guitar rendition of China Grove. We just finished looking through the picture albums and have been sharing stories, reminiscing about our childhood. The record has been changed from some obscure rock metal band to The Doobie Brothers – a compromise between Dweezil Zappa and The Miracles.

"What do you mean?" I question distractedly while finishing my air drums performance. Realizing that I am now a one-person band, I set my fictitious drumsticks on the coffee table and give my brother my full attention.

"I mean…moving around all the time, starting new schools, making new friends. It was hard. Do you think that's why we aren't as outgoing?"

"I've never really thought about it, but I'm sure it played a part in the equation." I sat back on the couch still drumming my fingers against my thigh to the beat of the song. "I would have paid money to blend into the background."

"Yeah, it was especially difficult when we first started at a new school."

"I think some of my introverted tendencies stem from my learning disability," I mumble.

"Yeah, you had a tough time learning to read."

I slowly nod my head as I recall Primary 1.

MENMUIR, SCOTLAND – 1986

Upon our move from California to Scotland, I began Primary 1. I remember receiving my first book to take home and read. I felt like a big girl. We were assigned passages to read each night, and I was terrified of losing or leaving my book on the bus. My small hand kept a strong grip on the book the entire bus ride home, and I stared at it to ensure I didn't drop it.

The next day at school, when my teacher asked us to pull out our books so we could read aloud, I was proud to raise my hand as one of the students who completed my homework the night before. The teacher explained that we must all follow along and read the next sentence when she called our name.

One little boy struggled through a couple words, and the rest of the class laughed at him. I felt a little sorry for him, but maybe he didn't do his homework. The teacher continued pointing at various students around the room, and then it was my turn. I started off just fine with small words, but then it happened. The words didn't make sense to me. The teacher helped me sound

the word out, but it happened again just a second later. I couldn't finish the sentence, and my classmates began laughing at me. My teacher gave me a cross look like I was disrupting class on purpose.

I knew she would call on me again to read, so I quickly read ahead to ensure that I didn't make the same mistake again. Alas, it was only slightly better.

"Jennifer, may I speak with you?"

"Yes, Mrs. Morgan."

"Jennifer, why didn't you do your reading last night as assigned?" Mrs. Morgan asked in a no nonsense tone.

"I…I forgot," I lie. I didn't want her to know that I read the homework and still performed badly in class.

"See that you dunnae forget again."

"Aye, Mrs. Morgan."

PRESENT

"I was terrified anytime she called on me to read. I learned to always read ahead and practice several times just in case she called on me."

"Mom made you read every night for hours," Warren recollects.

"It wasn't until years later than we found out that I am dyslexic. Not that it would have mattered. In Scotland, at the time, no accommodations were offered. There was a separate school for students with disabilities."

"So it was easier to be invisible and not get called on?" Warren asks in a sympathetic tone.

"It was, but I didn't like any kind of attention…ever. I wouldn't even raise my hand in class. Everyone would be looking at me, waiting for my answer – no, thank you," I confess.

"It was easier to remain on the outside rather than engaging fully."

"For sure," I commiserate. "With each move, it took us some time to transition and not stick out like a sore thumb, so I tried to go unnoticed until I learned enough about the culture to blend in with my classmates."

"It was a difficult balance," Warren adds. "We were the new kids, and there is always attention associated with that; so, in order to prevent getting bullied, we had to pull away and appear aloof and disinterested."

I smack my hand on my thigh to emphasize my agreeing nod. "Yes! I learned to maintain a disinterested expression on my face. No matter the emotions going on inside, I'm cool and calm on the outside."

WASHINGTON, D.C. - 1990

On the first day at my new school in Washington D.C., I pray that the teacher won't make the dreaded introduction. Why do teachers always do that? They always pull me to the front of the class, as if I'm not nervous enough, and introduce me to the class. As I wait outside the principal's office to be taken to my homeroom, I anxiously picked at the frayed seam of the worn reception chair.

I crossed my fingers.
My heart was pounding.
I could feel the sweat bead up on my upper lip.

I was getting angry with myself. What's the big deal? I've done this more times than I could count…but I hate it.

I forced myself to stand up when the receptionist motioned for me to follow her to my new class. I keep my eyes on her shoes, focusing my energy on quieting my anxious mind before we reach the room. We enter the back of the classroom, and it's obvious that the students are already working on an assignment. And then it happens…

I hear a disembodied voice boisterously offer a greeting, "Aaaahhh, there she is!"
I look around in horror as the entire class stops their work and turns to face me. I see their critical eyes appraising my clothes, my hair…my soul.

My new teacher makes her way to the back of the classroom and nods to the receptionist acknowledging that I am now in her care. She leads me to the front of the room.

I cringe internally.
It's going to happen.

All eyes are trained on me…following my progress to the front of the classroom. My teacher turns to face the class.

"Class, we have a new student with us. Please welcome Jennifer to our class."

"Hello, Jennifer," the class sounds off in unison.

I take a deep breath and force a tight smile as I make a quick look around the room seeing a wide range of expressions on my classmates. Some were open and curious – I could work with that. Some were closed and skeptical, and I made a note to avoid those kids. Just when I think my teacher is going to assign me a desk, she continues, "Jennifer, can you tell the class a little about yourself?"

I close my eyes, forcing my emotions back down. I can't start crying. I can already hear the whispers of my classmates, but I can't tell if they are good or bad. I knew I had to say something fast.

"Ummmm…hi." I offer another tight smile as I try to look up. My breath is coming faster, so I try to keep the emotions at bay.

I look to my teacher for direction, so she smiles and offers, "Do you have any brothers or sisters?

"I have one brother. He's two years older than me."

She nods encouragingly and asks, "What about pets?"

I shake my head. "We don't have any pets, but I want a horse."

A few snickers and whispers can be heard around the classroom. I schooled my facial features, so the other kids wouldn't see the emotions play across my face.

"Thank you, Jennifer," my teacher spoke softly before addressing the class. "Please continue with your worksheets while I get Jennifer settled. Raise your hand if you have any questions." Thankfully, the majority of the students returned to their worksheets, but a few sets of eyes remained on me while the teacher quietly asked me questions.

The first hurdle was over.

PRESENT

"I hated the first day introductions!" Warren growls. "It's like teachers have never been kids before. Don't they remember what it's like to be scared?"

I shrug in response. "Probably not. The majority of the kids we met in school had never moved or changed schools. They all grew up in the same town surrounded by the same classmates their entire lives. We were anomalies." A smile slowly grew across my face. Anomalies!

"Warren! Do you have Incubus' Light Grenades?"

Warren laughs and his eyes light up in excitement. “Let me guess. You want to hear *Anna Molly*.”

“That is correct, my good man.” I smile and scrunch my nose at my brother, a face he is incapable of saying no to, as he gets up to retrieve said album. As I wait for Warren to dig through his albums to find my request, I think that we might be on to something. The short-term friendships we made came and went just as quickly as the bullies, so you had to stay on your toes. I refused to let them know that I was rattled. Then I have a thought.

“I had always attributed our introverted tendencies to our home life,” I clarify.

“What does home have to do with it?”

“We weren’t allowed to speak – not truly speak,” I shake my head. “We were expected to do as we were told; and, if we didn’t, we were punished. We weren’t even permitted to cry when we were being punished. There was no whining, quibbling, or protesting.” I remember that my brother was far more vocal during our moves, and the result was a form of punishment. I learned early in life to remain silent. No amount of crying was going to change our circumstances, so why rock the proverbial boat?

“I tried,” Warren huffs. He was always more rebellious than me - constantly testing the limits. “I always had to learn the hard way,” he admits sadly as he places the record on the turntable.

“And I learned from watching you fail miserably,” I laugh. “You rebelled with your smart mouth, and the results were always the same.”

“Hey, I’m a slow learner,” he declares with a shoulder shrug obviously not ashamed of his youthful rebellion.

“Ain’t that the truth,” I tease him.

“Punk,” Warren deadpans.

I laugh at the nickname and he joins in with me. I recall my parents being strict but kind and loving. In our home, it was considered disrespectful to question my parent’s authority. They had the final word, and there was very little wiggle room in that. Sometimes it felt like we were dragged around like luggage, but that’s the nature of the beast. The military doesn’t allow for its service members to say, “No, I don’t think I want to move again. I think I’ll stay here for a while longer.” The notion is laughable.

“We got the hang of it though,” he acknowledges. “We learned to take the good with the bad.”

I hummed in agreement. In my opinion the good things associated with being a military brat far outweigh the bad. I relish the opportunity to travel and explore new cities and countries; I am the first of my friends to try new exotic foods; and I don’t let fear of the unknown stop me from experiencing something new.

“We did, and I think we had fun. I mean, we lived all across the United States and in Europe. Most people can’t say that.”

“Most people don’t understand what that means,” I add proudly.

“And we had each other. My friends think our family dynamic is strange.”

“Mine, too! Most of my friends speak to their parents every couple months,” I shake my head at the foreign thought. “I call or text mom and dad multiple times a week.”

“Gah, we’re weird, huh?” Warren jokes.

“The weirdest,” I agree wholeheartedly.

“Early in our lives, I think we learned what can take many people decades to learn,” he offers sagely.

"And what's that, big brother of mine?"

"The value of family over things."

He has a point. In the military, everything was temporary: our house, our possessions, our location, our friendships, and our school. Our family weathered the chaos together and offered continuity. It was the one constant throughout the ever-changing military experience.

Reintegration

Having my brother's support allowed me to focus on my next step – meeting with my parents. I know that moving forward with this research topic would be challenging, if not impossible, without their approval. *No pressure, Jen!* This FaceTime meeting is designed to discuss their involvement in my research.

As I set up my laptop, my anxiety begins to build. Setting boundaries isn't my strength when my parents are involved. Throughout my life, even into adulthood, my parents' wishes reigned supreme. I rarely fought against their expectations. I was the peacemaker while my brother was the rebel. I watched him fight against the ordered, disciplined environment in which we lived, and I chose the path of least resistance. Looking back, I don't think it was a conscious decision. Watching my brother struggle for traction – often failing - made the fight seem pointless, so I learned from his mistakes. Stay quiet. If I remained compliant, I wouldn't get punished or worse…face my parents' disappointment.

My immediate family was my world, my safe haven. As a military brat, I rarely had close relationships outside of the home, so I relied primarily on the relationships within my home to serve as my lasting friendships. That role fluidity and flexibility, transitioning between family and friend, served us well throughout our many moves and my father's deployments. Specifically, my father's transitions in and out of the home after being gone for several months

proved to be a challenge. My reactions and emotions about those transitions…well, I am better able to rationalize things in adulthood.

I'm getting ahead of myself. Let's just start with their approval of this research.

"Hey, baby," my mother greets when the call connects. I see her huge smile before catching a glimpse of my dad beside her.

"Hey, Ma. Hey, Dad." I greet them with a little wave because, yes, I'm just that awkward. We dip into the standard pleasantries even though I spoke with them on the phone earlier today.

"Okay, let's get to the meat of it." I try to get us on track.

"Yes!" My mother grins as she rubs her hands together. She has been one of my biggest supporters through this doctoral program, and she loves research.

"I wanted to know your thoughts on participating in my dissertation research." I throw the broad statement out into cyberspace and wait for the questions to begin.

"So, that means that you've picked a topic. Tell us!" Mom bounces a little on the screen, encouraging me to talk.

I return her smile, "I'm going to research military brats."

"Excellent choice. Being a military brat will give you a unique perspective. What type of study are we talking about here?"

"An autoethnography," I state hesitantly. Autoethnography isn't a well-known methodology as it is relatively new in qualitative research.

"I'm not familiar with that one," Mom claims with a frown.

"It's a subjective methodology that focuses on my story rather than the story of others."

"Why not just interview other military brats? Will your committee approve a methodology so subjective in nature?" Dad asks.

I could see the concern on both of their faces. I had my own concerns initially. I nod my head and smile at their worrying tendencies.

"Yes, I had to write a brief plan to present to them before my comprehensive exams. They all agreed, so I hope they don't change their minds!" The thought terrified me. As I read more about the methodology, the more I wondered if my committee truly understood how unconventional this type of study can be.

I continue, "My dissertation committee chair actually suggested it. She pointed out that much of my writing and research throughout my doctoral program relates to my experiences as a military dependent."

"Well, I can't wait to read it. Will you be interviewing anyone?"

"I'm glad you brought that up, Mom. I was hoping to interview you, Dad, and Warren. The study will be about my story, but there are many contextual elements that each of you can add."

My mom shrugged, "Your dad and I will volunteer in a heartbeat, and I'm sure your brother will, too. We are all so proud of you." My dad began nodding his approval beside her.

Receiving their approval means the world to me. My best friend often describes me as a golden retriever when it comes to pleasing my parents. I'm not so much of a people pleaser as I am a parent pleaser. It weighs in significantly on my happiness scale.

"Are you sure you're okay with this? This will be *my* story. I'm going to write about *my* experiences and that will include our family from *my* perspective. You know it won't all be rainbows and unicorns."

Their faces both frown in seriousness while they continue to nod reassuringly. I don't see any hesitation in their eyes when mom says, "Military life is hard. There is no sugarcoating that, but we did the best we could. We weren't perfect parents either – we made mistakes, but I trust you to be as objective as possible."

I let out a low laugh. Objective? This is a *subjective* study.

"Mom, this is going to be messy. I will be rehashing and analyzing my childhood experiences, thoughts, and emotions." I hesitate before continuing, meeting both of their eyes in turn. "I promise that this isn't a witch hunt. I have no intentions of spilling all of my childhood angst into my dissertation." I chuckle softly.

"Then what's got you worried, honey?" Dad asks.

"Truth? I don't want to hurt you, and I know that some of the emotions I had as a child weren't always positive. And as I tell my story, I'm inadvertently telling part of yours. I want to be sensitive to that."

"We appreciate that, but we trust you." Mom smiles reassuringly.

"Don't we get to read what you write about us?" Dad inquires softly. I can see a slight hesitancy in his eyes.

"You do."

"Okay, well, what are some of the experiences you want to include?" My dad asks.

I pause a moment to collect my thoughts.

"I want to explore the power dynamic in our family." I grimace as I wait for them to respond. When I focus on their faces again, I see the mental health professionals pop out. My father is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and my mother is a counselor, so I am well aware of *the look*.

"Why are you afraid, Jen?"

“We weren’t big on expressing ourselves when I was little, so you may not be aware of some of my experiences nor the emotions I felt.”

“True, but we are realists.” Dad smiles reassuringly at me.

“So why don’t we hash it out? Let’s talk through the stories…” Mom suggests.

“Let me get my notes.” As I fish through my backpack to find my notebook, my parents begin to tell me about their latest trek along the beach. I need to visit and see all the sea glass and sharks’ teeth they have amounted. I smile as they brag about each other in small ways throughout their story. Their love for each other resonates from each of them. My thoughts were interrupted by my dad’s excited voice.

“Jen, you have to see it!” He jumps up to get the shark’s tooth he found today. My mom smiles indulgently as we both wait for his return.

“Check this bad boy out!” Dad states with pride as he moves the tooth closer to the camera essentially blacking out the screen. I shake my head at his antics.

“Dad, you have to back it up a little from the camera.”

“How’s that?” He asks as he pulls back a bit.

“She’s a beaut!”

“Okay, children, let’s get back on task.” Mom chides us.

Dad begrudgingly places his shark’s tooth on the table with gentle care and gives me his attention. “Okay, baby, whatcha got?”

“In regards to you two, I want to write about the roles in our home and the power dynamic.”

“Like what? Give us an example.” Mom prompts lightly.

“Well, there’s the “let’s hear that hymn’ story…”

CHERRY POINT, NC – 1992

My dad came home yesterday. I'm not sure exactly how long he was gone this time, but it was several months. Mom was so excited waiting for him to get home. In preparation, she made me learn a new song on the piano as a surprise for him. I have had it practically memorized for over a week, but she kept making me practice it until the day dad came home. I roll my eyes.

A hymn!
A boring old hymn.
Maybe I could jazz it up a little…
Ragtime would be fun!

I don't get why Mom was so excited for my Dad to come home. We rarely see him even when he is home, and we always have to be quiet. I shake my head as I walk back over to my baby grand piano - my pride and joy. I love to just sit and feel the keys beneath my fingertips, letting the quiet settle around me before I begin to play. Silence. There will be a lot of that in my future. I mindlessly begin to flow through chord progressions at random. Major chords then minor chords. I love minor keys. My fingers run through an arpeggio in C# minor and linger on the last key in the series of notes, holding and softening them with the pedals. My melancholy leads my fingers and I begin Beethoven's Sonata #14. I memorized it for my first piano competition a few years ago, and I find comfort in the tempo and repetitive arpeggios. There is beauty in its simplicity.

As I play softly, I hear my parents chatting in the kitchen.

Dad hasn't heard the hymn I learned. Well, I've played it a couple times since he got home, but no one noticed. He's been home for over 24 hours, and I've barely seen or talked to him or Mom. Warren usually hides in his room when Dad comes home. I chuckle at that. Warren's probably afraid that Mom will follow through on her threat to tell Dad about our bad behavior. Yeah, right. She wouldn't disrupt the peace to tell him.

It's like a morgue around here.

Be quiet.
No television.

I start to play the notes a little louder in my frustration.

No more playing in the house.
Strict bedtime.

And…always be quiet.

My pedal work became nonexistent and the softness of the sonata became choppy and unpleasant – drawing my mother's attention.

"Dennis, Jennifer has a surprise for you! She learned one of your favorite hymns." My mom says excitedly to my dad, loud enough for me to hear. I look over to find them both looking at me expectantly, my dad standing behind my mom with his arms wrapped tightly around her waist. Mom has the biggest grin on her face while she links her fingers with his. My dad turns her around and there they go again with the kissing.

Gross.

I turn back towards my piano and begin the hymn, praying that this is the last time I ever have to play it. I make it through a verse and a half when I realize that they aren't listening. I let the last notes die before I turn on the bench to face them. Still kissing.

The lack of music must have gotten their attention. My dad ends the kiss and smiles sweetly at mom. He meets my eyes over mom's shoulder and says the one thing in that moment that would piss me off.

"Okay, Jen, let's hear that hymn."

I narrow my eyes at him in disbelief when my mom lets out a peal of laughter so loud it shocks him.

"What?" He asks in confusion.

Mom had already warned us to be on our best behavior, so it takes all my self-control to keep seated and play through the first verse of the hymn.

If they ask me to play another verse, I may flip out.

"That was great, Jen!" My dad praises when I begin packing my sheet music away.

My mom quietly asks him something about dinner, and the moment is over.

I spent weeks practicing that song…for nothing.

TODAY

"Yikes, Jen," My mom looks at me in alarm and sadness.

I meet my dad's eyes first. I see the hurt. I know he would never intentionally hurt my feelings.

"Dad?"

"I…I didn't know you felt that way." He clears his throat as he processes the story I just told.

"Mom?"

"We always laugh when we tell the 'let's hear that hymn' joke," her confusion evident in her tone.

"Yes, we do. It's funny…now. It wasn't funny when I was eleven." I maintain eye contact with my dad. He's still processing.

"Now, do you see why I need your support before I start this research project?" I look at them both in turn. "As I tell my experiences from my perspective, I won't always convey your intentions. Does that make sense?" I let that resonate for a bit.

"As I tell the story, I'm trying to remember and articulate the experience of that eleven-year-old girl…without my more rational thirty-seven-year-old mind taking the reins." I continue to explain.

My words are met with silence. After what felt like five minutes, my dad begins with some hesitancy.

"I'm sorry that we essentially ignored you and Warren when I got home. Your mom and I were just so excited to see each other and catch up." My father offers softly. "I had been gone for six months…"

I chuckle softly at his explanation.

"I get it, Dad." And I really did.

"Reintegrating your dad back into the mix was never easy for any of us." My mom admits. "I had to remind myself to include him in the decisions. I mean…long distance calls were so expensive, so we relied on snail mail. I couldn't consult him for every decision when he was away, but I had to remind myself to wait and discuss it with your dad."

I nod in agreement. We all felt a shift in our roles and the dynamic at home. I designated them as two realities. There was a reality when Dad was home, and there was a reality when Dad was away. For example, I was used to having my mother's undivided attention when my father was away on TAD. She talked to us, included us. My brother and I were the center of her world…until my dad came home, and the world shifted slightly.

"We all had to adjust." I acknowledge. "The climate in the house changed." Mom was always the disciplinarian no matter where my dad was located; however, when he was home, she deferred to him in regards to decision-making. My young mind didn't understand why his opinion suddenly became more important than hers or ours.

"Your mom and I always discussed everything together. We knew it would be more confusing for you kids if I came home and started barking orders and exerting my dominance. Your mom was the leader when I was away, so we decided to let her take the lead when I was home."

"When you were home, mom was the lead when it came to managing the kids and the house, but that's about it."

"What do you mean?" He asks.

"Mom conceded to you in everything. It just became more apparent when you were home."

"When I was away, your mom made all of the decisions" Dad interjected.

"True, and that's what made the integration process complicated. I was used to this strong, capable woman when Dad was away, and she turned into this meek housewife upon your return."

"Your mother has never been meek," he chuckles softly at my poor choice of adjective.

"In life, no. Mom has never been meek, but it was like a switch was flipped when you walked through the front door. Her world revolved around pleasing you."

"I don't remember it that way." He frowns as he looks at Mom for support.

"I've always worshipped the ground he walks on…I still do." Mom shrugs her shoulders unashamed of her love for my dad.

"Yes, I remember the daily make out sessions I would walk in on when dad got home from work. Even today…you two are disgusting." I shake my head and smile to ensure they know that I'm teasing.

My dad smirks and wiggles his eyebrows at me while he wraps his arms around Mom making her laugh. She smacks his chest and chides, "Stop embarrassing your daughter."

"What?" He asks innocently.

I roll my eyes at his blatant attempt to get a rise out of me. *Gag*.

"Okay, control yourselves, kids." I use my best mom-voice to get them back on task.

"He started it," Mom mock complained as she playfully side-eyed my dad, and he just laughed in delight. Yeah…they really love each other. That love has been the most reassuring – and disgusting – aspect of my childhood.

"I think I understand what you're saying, Jen," Mom chimes in. "What other stories? You mentioned reintegration already…"

"I want to describe the dynamic in our home." I state evasively.

"Honey…" As soon as I heard my mother's tone, I immediately met her eyes to find them narrowed in suspicion. Evasive techniques never worked well with her.

"Okay," I concede with a huff. "Yes, I will be describing the power dynamic and the voice I had as a child. In the most literal sense," I explain. "It's like our dinner conversations…"

WASHINGTON D.C. – 1990

"Jen, come help me set the table," Mom directs as she makes her way back into the kitchen. Every day it's the same: mom cooks, I help, I set the table. I look at my dad and brother sitting on the couch and sigh. I feel a compelling urge to flick Warren in the back of the head.

I leave my brother's head safely unflicked – for now - and follow my mother.

After setting the table, I help bring out the dishes Mom prepared for dinner. It smells so good! I wanted to steal a biscuit in the kitchen earlier, but Mom only lets Dad pinch bites before dinner. When Mom makes fried chicken, sometimes Dad will steal us a thigh to share. He's sneaky, and I love it.

I start moving faster as my tummy growls. Dad gets home so late, but we have to wait to eat.

"Go see what the boys want to drink and tell them dinner is ready," Mom instructs as she arranges the dishes how she wants them at the table.

"Why can't they pour their own drinks?" I petulantly ask. I get a stern look in response and do as I'm told.

After settling down at the dinner table, my dad leads us in a brief prayer to bless the food before he begins making his plate.

The table is completely silent as we tuck into our dinner. After a few minutes, my dad asks, "How was your day?" His eyes appear to dance between the three of us. Mom prompts Warren about a test he had that day, and I focus primarily on shoveling food into my mouth.

"Jennifer Gwen, that is not how we eat at the table," my mother scolds.

I blushingly set my fork down and sit back in my chair to finish chewing the giant chunk of buttermilk biscuit I just shoved in my mouth. Mom makes the best biscuits.

Mom begins to tell us about the little girl she's going to start babysitting throughout the week. Fun! I love little kids, I thought as I continued to eat my dinner - trying to take smaller bites.

"What about you, Jennifer?" My father turns his attention towards me. I shrug noncommittally before looking at my mom for direction. She just smiles reassuringly and prompts, "Did anything happen at school today, baby?"

Nothing that I want to share with my parents. All I can think about are those girls from school who followed me on the walk home. Again. Tripping me from behind and calling me names. I can't think of anything else that happened today. Drawing a blank. Oh, I know!

"We are reading…"

"Can we go to the pool this weekend?" Warren interrupts.

"Uh, that's up to your mother," Dad explains.

"Sure, honey. Sounds good." Mom smiles at my brother before taking a sip of her iced tea.

My dad turns his attention back to me and asks, "What were you saying?"

"Oh, I was just going to tell you about…"

"How about I call Amber's mother, and we can take all the kids to the pool, too," Mom absently states as she mentally makes plans for the weekend.

I frown at her. Mom's eyes finally focus and she immediately realizes that she cut me off. She sheepishly smiles and says, "Go ahead, honey."

"I was just saying that…"

"I won't be here on Saturday," Dad admits in alarm. I sit back and finish my dinner as my parents discuss their schedules.

I made it through dinner without ever uttering one full sentence. It wasn't the first time, and it definitely won't be the last.

TODAY

"That's just one time," my dad defends.

"One time?" I ask incredulously. "Do you remember the dinner when I finally blew up?"

My mom chuckles and nods. I made quite the scene. At one point, I thought it had become a game with my brother. He would constantly interrupt me, never letting me finish a statement or story. For years, I didn't complain. I'd just sit there in silence and listen to the three of them talk. Until I'd had enough.

ELIZABETHTON, TENNESSEE – 1993

"Jen, when is your basketball practice this week?" Mom asks as she makes her plate.

I finish my bite and take a small sip of water before answering. "Just Tuesday and Thur…"

"Mom, Mark wants to come over tomorrow after school. Is that okay?" Warren interrupts. He looks at me with glee when Mom's attention turns to him.

"Sure, honey. What are you guys planning?"

"Nothing. Probably just going to hangout downstairs for a bit," he shrugs and shoves more food into his mouth. I often wonder how he can eat so much so fast.

Mom nods her approval before her and Dad begin discussing their days while occasionally peppering questions at Warren and me. Each time I attempt to answer, Warren answers for me. I am getting angry.

"Oh, Jen, you never told me when you have practice this week." Mom prompts with a smile.

"We have practice on Tuesday and…"

"Warren, can you pass the mashed potatoes?" Dad asks my brother.

"Thursday," I finish quietly. I pushed my plate away wishing I could just leave the table.

"Sure." Warren hands him the dish and offers the pork loin, too. Dad begins to praise Mom on her culinary skills because the pork was perfectly tender.

My face starts to burn with anger. I can feel it in the tips of my ears.

Mom lights up at the kind words, but all I want to do is take a handful of those potatoes and sling it in each of their faces. The realization hit me. I let them do this for years. I just stopped talking. I let them make me feel small, and I want them to know it.

As the thoughts race through my head, I look at each of them – talking, laughing, smiling.

I snarl in disgust as I stare down at my plate of uneaten food.

"Aren't you hungry?" Warren asks as he swipes a forkful of my mashed potatoes off my plate.

"Stop, you…" I began to protest and reach for the fork.

"Warren Harley Thacker, that's not how we behave at the table. If you want more potatoes," Mom left the sentence dangling as she handed Warren the dish with the remaining mashed potatoes.

"What? She's not eating it." Warren shrugs as he shoves the fork into his mouth and smiles at me.

"Why do you even ask me questions?" I pose the question to all three of them, surprising them with the volume and tone of my voice. I focus my intense gaze on each of them in turn.

"What do you mean? We are interested in you and want to know about your day." Mom offers simply as she reaches over and pats my hand.

"No, you don't." I huff in frustration. "You don't care about anything I have to say, so why do you bother asking?"

"We do care." My dad states in confusion.

"What do you mean?" Hurt coloring my mom's response.

"Really?" I hear my voice getting progressively louder. I've never shouted at my parents, but I was teetering close to that point. I see both of my parents frown at me. I can see their bewilderment at my tone and my behavior. I am the agreeable child. I rarely make a fuss.

"Each of you have asked me multiple questions tonight. Did I ever answer one of them?" I look at each of them. Warren just shrugs in indifference while my parents tried to recall the conversation we just had at the dinner table.

"You talk over me or interrupt me almost every time."

The anger and frustration at repeatedly being pushed aside or ignored causes my chest to ache and my eyes to burn. They were going to hear me. Just because I'm the youngest and nicest, doesn't mean they can treat me like I don't matter.

"I…I didn't…" Mom stumbles over her words as she looks to Dad for help.

I wasn't finished.

"Every night I sit here and let you act like I don't matter, and I'm not doing it anymore." I look at my parents with finality. "Don't ask me questions unless you want to hear the answer. Don't ask about my day, if you don't care enough to let me respond."

There.
I said it.

I sat up in my chair and pulled my plate closer to me. That felt good.

I finished my dinner in silence while my family just sat there staring at me. I wait for the reprimand that never comes. I had raised my voice and was disrespectful to my parents – punishable offenses in my family, so I am surprised to hear Dad clear his throat.

I won't show fear.

I raise my head to meet his eyes. They were soft and full of love and understanding.

"We didn't realize that we were treating you that way." Dad explains softly. "That doesn't excuse it," he adds quickly looking to my mom for help.

"Honey, we do love you and care about what you have to say." I see the tears building in her eyes. "Thank you for telling us."

Dad nods in agreement.

TODAY

I sat quietly after finishing the story. That was the day I found my voice. It was the day that I became more than the *baby* of the family; more than Warren's little sister; more than the amiable, compliant child that made peace between all the members of my family; more than the expectations that were set for me.

"I remember that night," Mom admits softly. I can tell that she would be hugging me if we weren't looking through a video lens. She looks like she is itching to reach out to me.

Her smile, like my dad's, is gone. Eyes unfocused as each of them work through the emotions and process the story I just told them.

"We truly didn't realize…we didn't see it until that night," my dad explains.

"You were always so sweet. You never made a fuss." Mom confesses sadly. "The saying 'the squeaky wheel gets the grease' is very true. Warren was the squeaky wheel, so we often assumed that you would just let us know if something was wrong."

"We were expected to behave a certain way. There was an expectation for me, and I thought that extended to my emotions too." I admit. "But I finally figured out how to tell you.

"You certainly did," Dad chuckles.

"I think we improved after that day," Mom states with a slight question in her voice.

"Yes," I acknowledge with a smile. "And I think that I improved, too. I learned to stand up for myself more often."

"It was about time!" Mom exclaimed. I heard Dad's responding snort in affirmation.

"In my defense, you used to tell me to stand up to Warren, not you." I let them ponder that for a second. In my childhood home, there was no questioning my parents' decisions or directives. I was expected to do as I was told. End of story.

"I didn't understand that I could express my displeasure with you. Does that make sense?"

"It does."

"I didn't realize you felt this way. I feel so clueless," Dad claims sadly.

"And it hurts to hear you tell these stories, but I think this will be cathartic for you." Mom admits. "And maybe it will bring us closer together as we remember our past as a family."

"I love you, guys." I smile at my parents feeling the warmth of their smiles like a hug.

"We love you. Keep us posted on when you want an interview and all that good stuff." My dad offers before we say our goodbyes and end the call.

Thematic Analysis

The second segment of this chapter is broken into three pieces based on the most prominent themes: family, structure, and silence. The narrative in the previous section of this chapter is the data source used to provide evidence of each theme. There are multiple occasions when a quotation from the narrative could fall under more than one theme, based on any contextual overlap of these themes; however, supporting examples of each theme are limited. The primary overlap is found between structure and silence as some of the structures in place in my childhood home resulted in literal silence or the silencing of my voice.

Family. As this research focuses on my experiences as a child growing up in a military family, it is natural that my family would be a key component of the narrative. While analyzing the narrative, I found that the love, security, and support provided by each member of my family was strongly emphasized throughout. I write that "my immediate family was my world, my safe haven", and that was evident in the stories I wrote. I describe that my brother and I learned "the value of family over things" very early in life. In my experience, *family* is often interchangeable with *home* due to the transient nature of military life. Rather than home being a location, my

home was and still is my family. I rarely get nostalgic about a location, city or house, but I have very strong attachments to each of my immediate family members. They are the embodiment of security, support, and love in my life, and my relationships with each family member is represented in the narrative.

The love, care, security, and support within my family is strongly depicted in my description of my relationships with my parents and brother. My childhood home was filled with "endless amounts of love". I am blessed to know without question that I am loved by each member of my family. In the narrative, I describe my parents' love and support for me and each other. My parents often use small nicknames like "baby" and "honey" when referring to me, and my brother still lovingly calls me "punk".

A sense of togetherness and care within the family was more strongly experienced with my brother. The narrative describes our relocations and transitions, but it also strongly depicts how my brother and I depended on each other for support. I state, "You took care of me", while my brother contradicts, "No, I didn't. You were always taking care of me". I later admit that he was my support. "Just having you [my brother] near me was the support I needed" to face a new school or Sunday school group. With Warren by my side, I knew that I could accomplish anything. What I didn't realize until conducting and analyzing the interviews was that my brother felt the same way. I always felt like the annoying little sister who constantly wanted her big brother by her side; but, Warren admitted in the interview that he was just as nervous and scared. He admitted that having me by his side provided the security and support he needed to face the next challenge.

Usually those challenges revolved around beginning at a new school or church, but other times we faced bullies together. There were bullies at almost each new school, and we both

admit to facing them alone at times; but, when I explain that we were bullied in Scotland by much older students, Warren declares, “But we got bullied together!”. Which is a statement he has made many times throughout our lives. Looking back, I recall feeling less afraid of those bullies because Warren was standing beside me. “Just having you [my brother] near me” was the boost I needed to be strong.

Warren often referred to me as his “big sister” throughout our childhood…and continued to do so until we were finished with university. I end the section focusing on my brother with him stating, “I’ll always be your little brother”. This statement has so much meaning to me, but it also describes the dynamic of our relationship. It describes my love and support for my brother, but it also describes his love and trust in me; moreover, it applies to the roles we had in the household which I will describe more in the next theme.

Structure. Structure is the second theme throughout the narrative. As one might imagine, structure was a reality during my childhood. As a United States Marine, my dad was very clear as to the expectations of discipline and obedience in my life. The narrative describes the traditional dynamic within the family as “patriarchal” in which “my father worked full-time” and my “mother was a stay-at-home mom”. My father performed “outdoor or home repair tasks” while my mother “cooked, cleaned, and raised the children”. “There was a hierarchy and a structure” to our home. “My father was the leader, my mother was his voice and the disciplinarian, and my brother and I were expected to obey without complaint”.

In the narrative, I describe two typical family dinners. My mother created home-cooked meals, the dinner table was set, and we sat down as a family. If my dad was at home rather than deployed, we had “to wait [until he arrived home] to eat”. Once seated at the table, “my dad leads us in a brief prayer to bless the food before he begins making his plate”. Out of respect, my

family waited for my dad to begin placing food on his plate, and we were expected to behave properly at the dinner table. My mother scolds, “that is not how we eat at the table” or “that’s not how we behave”.

My role in the home was partially based on gender and station. I describe a story in which I, the daughter, am helping my mother in the kitchen while my father and brother are somewhere else in the house. I was expected to work alongside of my mother: “set the table”, “see what the boys want to drink”, and “tell them [the boys] dinner is ready”. These norms were passed down from the homes of my maternal and paternal grandparents, and my parents perpetuated those roles. The expectations for the women in my family were very different than those for the men, and as a young girl those expectations were clearly communicated to me by example. “Mom tasked me with taking care of” my brother…“even from an early age”.

My role as it relates to my position in the family was that of child. When my father was home the “climate in the house changed”. My mother’s attention became solely focused on “pleasing” him, and the dynamic became an *us against them* scenario – the children against the parents. “Children were to be seen and not heard”. There was “no television”, “no more playing in the house”, and always a “strict bedtime”. It was clear that the opinions of me and my brother were outranked by those of my parents. “My parents’ wishes reigned supreme”, and to question a directive from my parents was a punishable offense. My brother and I were “expected to do as we were told” without question. “In our home, it was considered disrespectful to question my parent’s authority”; moreover, “whining, quibbling, or protesting” was not permitted under any circumstances. My mother and father had the “final word, and there was very little wiggle room in that”. Essentially, obedience was the expectation or the result was punishment – a basic example of cause and effect.

Silence. Finally, the theme of silence prevailed throughout the narrative. In my experience, this silence was not only the result of the strict structure within my military family, but also the result of the life of a military child. As I mentioned in the previous section, the structure of our military home demanded silence. “It’s like a morgue around here. Be quiet.

No television...No more playing in the house. Strict bedtime. And…always be quiet”: “No whining, quibbling, or protesting”. The silence was a part of our home…an expectation, but the silence became isolating and lonely.

The isolation I felt as a child, inside and outside the home, played a significant role in my silence. I was “always the new kid” moving from school to school and city to city. With each move, I was the outsider and “simply did not fit in” with the other kids – even with my cousins when we visited – so, I found it “easier to be invisible”. In the narrative, I describe one first day at a new school – wishing and hoping for a short, painless introduction to my new class. Blending in required as little attention placed on me as possible, so I learned to “school my facial features” and force “my emotions back down” in any situation. I was always on guard, never showing my true thoughts and feelings.

My brother and I “were different”, and we were often bullied when we began at a new school. “We learned how to blend in quickly”. In Scotland, we attended three schools in less than a year, so I consider the first two merely educational – “a chance for us to fail and learn”. I describe two early school instances in which my otherness was apparent. Both involved embarrassment, confusion, and ended in a trip to the principal’s office. Blending in became much easier once I picked up on the accent. The local students and parents “didn’t know that we were Americans”.

My primary struggle was my inability to express my frustrations and experiences. We had to "keep the emotions at bay". As I mentioned in the previous section, my parents expected me to "obey without complaint". When we were being punished, "we weren't even permitted to cry" as if the display of emotions exemplified weakness. "We were expected to articulate our emotions with words rather than with actions or outbursts". In the narrative, I describe my desire to cry when I knew my brother wasn't going to be beside me for a new school or Sunday school, but "we didn't show those kinds of emotions in our family". "We weren't allowed to speak – not truly speak".

That perceived expectation of silence cultivated a sense of loneliness and hopelessness. I was too young to truly express myself in a way that was pleasing to my parents, so I chose silence. Watching my brother's attempts at making his voice heard in our home "– often failing – made the fight seem pointless". "If I remained compliant, I wouldn't get punished or worse…face my parents' disappointment". I "never made a fuss". "No amount of crying was going to change our circumstances, so" I chose to "stay quiet".

When my dad arrived home for TAD, he often focused on my mother. My story of learning his favorite hymn was just a typical example of each time he returned home. There was this big build up: preparations, cleaning, creating a present for his homecoming such as learning the hymn. "I don't get why Mom was so excited for my Dad to come home. We rarely see him even when he is home, and we always have to be quiet". This feeling of being alone or left out when my dad came home was common. My mother's focus turned to him, and we, the children, were shut out. "It was like a switch was flipped when you [Dad] walked through the front door. Her [Mom's] world revolved around pleasing you [Dad]". I played the hymn several times after

my dad arrived home, “but no one noticed”. The piano was my one form of self-expression, and I still felt like I wasn’t heard.

The final story I tell is when I decided to let me voice be heard. I no longer wanted to be silenced. My role in the family was not only gender specific, but I was also the youngest child. Until I was dethroned at the age of 19 years old with the surprise birth of my baby cousin, I was my paternal grandparents’ youngest grandchild. I was forever dubbed “the baby” by the majority of my family. As the baby, I had to fight to be heard over the rest of my family’s strong personalities. In this final story, I confront my family.

I describe the moment when I realized that I had given up my voice. I had chosen to remain silent. “I let them do this for years. I just stopped talking. I let them make me feel small, and I want them to know it”. I was afraid of the punishment I would receive for my disobedience and disrespect. Silence was the expectation, and my obedience controlled and oppressed me. “I won’t show fear”. “You talk over me or interrupt me”, I accused. I told my family how they made me feel each time they brushed me aside or ignored my voice. “Don’t ask me questions unless you want to hear the answer. Don’t ask about my day, if you don’t care enough to let me respond”.

> That was the day I found my voice. It was the day that I became more than the *baby* of the family; more than Warren’s little sister; more than the amiable, compliant child that made peace between all the members of my family; more than the expectations that were set for me.

As the baby of the family, I needed to be louder to ensure that my voice was heard. Learning how “to stand up for myself more often” was my next battle, and it took a long time to make the necessary changes; but, this was a good place to start.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I provided my story developed from the evidence gleaned through the data collection process. I provided themes that emerged from the story: family, structure, and silence. In the next chapter, I answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1 and provide a critique of this project's process and product, the implications for education, and future research possibilities.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, and Conclusion

This scholarship brings attention to the story of one military child; moreover, it brings attention to the value of family. My family is just one of the millions of military families – just one example. I was blessed to grow up surrounded by love, in what some may consider to be an ideal family environment. My parents have remained devoted to one another, which is not always the case with many military and civilian families, so my story comes from a specific time (1981-1992) and is surrounded with a specific familial context. Some might claim that my family has a very "Leave it to Beaver"[2] feel to it. There was a homemade, hot meal on the table every night, and the family members made polite dinner conversation about their day. After dinner, the children washed up, my mother cleaned up the remains of dinner, and my dad moved to the couch to watch a little television. Routine. Traditional.

As I address the research questions posed in Chapter 1, I tease out the part military culture plays in my story while not dismissing the role of environment and time period. This section allows me to not only answer the research questions, but I am afforded the opportunity to expound on the narrative. As the chapter progresses, I provide a discussion of the process of writing an autoethnography in which I identify the limitations of this study as well as offer a critique of the project. I then explore the implications this work has on education and future research.

Research Questions

I began this study – this journey – believing that I already had all the answers. I thought that I knew the context surrounding my childhood and exactly how military culture could be seen and felt in my life. After all…I lived it. I believed that the thematic analysis was unnecessary

[2] "Leave it to Beaver" was an iconic American television show in the late 1950's which later represented the ideal suburban family.

because I wrote the narrative about my own experiences. I begrudgingly began the thematic analysis and was surprised by the themes that emerged. In this section, the themes discussed in the previous chapter, as well as data presented in the narrative, are used to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The primary research question: *What do stories of my life and perceptions as a military child reveal about military culture?* The additional two research questions expound upon this overarching question.

What do stories of my life and perceptions as a military child reveal about military culture?

As one might imagine, military culture is rigid and orderly. I mentioned in Chapter 2, the well-ordered rules and regulations common to military culture and jobs can spill over to the home (Hall, 2008; Rodriguez, 1984). The rules of my childhood home were simple: do as you're told and behave yourself. The implication being that I must always honor and respect my parents. "It was considered disrespectful to question my parent's authority", so I tried to be a compliant, well-behaved child.

Naturally, I am now able to more clearly identify how military culture seeped into our family dynamic. When writing about military families, Hall (2008) lists eight characteristics of a warrior:

> a heroic stance; willpower, danger, action, and a heightened awareness that comes from living in the presence of death; identification of action with force; a paranoid worldview; black-and-white thinking; repression of fear, compassion, and guilt; and an obsession with rank and hierarchy because obedience is required if there is a denying of one's freedom; and the degrading of the feminine. (p. 65)

My father exemplified a few of these characteristics, specifically: black-and-white thinking, repression of emotions, and a strong reverence for rank and hierarchy (Hall, 2008, p. 65). I would never claim that he degraded the feminine, but I would assert that he cultivated and valued a strong masculine persona especially around other men. For example, my mother wasn't allowed to call him a term of endearment if other men were around; however, he never hesitated to show affection inside the safety of our home.

In my early years, I was a daddy's girl. When he was home, I followed him around incessantly – getting angry when he would choose to take my brother fishing or hiking rather than me. As I describe in the narrative, there were strong gender norms in my home. There were different expectations for Warren than there were for me. I was expected to help with the house more – cooking and cleaning – while Warren was expected to chop wood or help with yard work. These differences progressed into our teenage years with differing curfews and dating rules. Granted, these differences were not always to my detriment. When I turned 17 years old, my parents gifted me a brand new car and cell phone while my brother received an old sport utility vehicle. My father feared that I might get stranded on the side of the road. When my brother asked what he should do if his truck broke down and he was stranded. My father simply told him to keep running shoes in the trunk. Keep in mind, all members of my family were runners, and my brother ran cross country.

My father often described and appreciated the fundamental rules of military chain-of-command. There was no questioning a direct order from one's superior. In the military, to question or, even worse, not carry out a direct order would result in disciplinary action. If in a hostile environment, the result could be death by potentially placing yourself or others' lives in danger. I used to think of it as a blind obedience, but to my father it was a necessity that I

struggled to fully understand. The hierarchy or rank in my childhood home was clear and often discussed to ensure there was no confusion. My father was in the leadership role, my mother supported him in all things, and the children were simply meant to obey. The strict nature of my home, the rules, taught me the consequences of placing a toe out of line.

My behavior outside of the home and in school was a representation of my father and the Marine Corps, so there was an added pressure to comply and obey swiftly. When we first arrived to the military base in Scotland, my brother (7 years old) and I (5 years old) got into a little trouble with the military police for exploring the wrong sections of the base; so, I believe my parents' choice to live in the community rather than remain on base relieved much of that pressure. There was more freedom and less regulations and boundaries when we lived off-base; however, I knew that any significant trouble would be reflected in my father's personnel file, so I was more cautious in my interactions.

I mention disciplinary action above and punishment in the narrative. Specifically, corporal punishment was the consequence in my home for disobedience. Prior to receiving my punishment, I was sent to my room to think about why I was being punished (and give my parents time to cool off and agree upon an appropriate punishment); and, after what could be up to an hour, my mother or father would come and discuss why I was being punished. I was required to articulate what I did, why it was wrong, and how I would change my behavior in the future. Before, during, and after the punishment (usually spanking), I was not permitted to cry or display any emotion other than remorse for my behavior. Crying would result in further punishment.

I believe my father only spanked me once or twice in my life. For a man whose physical fitness was an essential job requirement, my dad trained daily and took pride in his health. He

later explained that he feared that he might truly harm me by not knowing his own strength, if he were the one administering the punishment. Once we reached an age where spanking was no longer effective, my brother received physical challenges by way of punishment. I recall my father telling him to complete so many pull-ups or more commonly push-ups to atone for bad behavior. As I mentioned in the narrative, I was less rebellious and more willing to comply with my parents' expectations, so there was less need for punitive action in my case.

Finally, my experiences depict the demand for all military personnel and families to develop, maintain, and strengthen resiliency skills. After the first couple moves, I no longer became upset about being relocated. I will admit that I detested changing schools and making new friends, but I didn't get sad about leaving behind my old home, school, or friends. "I didn't make any deep friendships with the other kids", I never became attached. Everything was temporary; and, as long as I remembered that, I was a happy child. My family offered the security, structure, and continuity that I needed in my childhood, and I clung to them for all my relationship needs.

How have my lived experiences as a child of a military family shaped my identity?

I am a military brat. It's a statement I have made countless times throughout my life, and I wear the title like a badge of honor. I have had all the stereotypes thrown at me my entire life: aloof, quiet, troublemaker, lacks commitment. The label serves as a suit of armor to this day. For example, as I work with the community, I am often asked, "Where did you grow up?" or "What high school did you attend?" My only response is, "I'm a military brat." It answers all of their questions and potential follow-up questions. I didn't grow up anywhere specific. I don't identify a location as *home*. I didn't go to just one high school. By saying that one sentence, I am claiming my otherness – setting myself apart.

I know that I am different. I knew it each time I stepped into a new civilian school bracing myself for everything that was to come. I knew that I would struggle to make friends. I knew that it would take time to adjust, and I still struggle to form deep relationships outside of my family unit. "The short-term friendships we made came and went", but my family was by my side every step of the way. My family, more so my brother, understands me and why I am different from the norm. We shared the experiences and struggled with the transitions together; moreover, we leaned on each other for support and understanding.

As a military child, a third culture kid (TCK), I found my cultural identity, "one, shared culture" (Hall, 2005, p. 443), in my home or around other military kids who shared similar experiences. Essentially, I found my cultural identity in military culture; and, I believe this shared identity with other military children and my family offered the care and support I needed to successfully navigate the obstacles. They understood that each of us lived in a cultural mélange. As I describe in Chapter 2, TCKs' first culture is in their home, second culture is the host culture in which they live, and the third culture is "created, shared, and carried" (Unseem & Downie, 2011, p. 18) by people of similar circumstances.

I can state without question that I am not, nor have I ever been, confused by my cultural identity. I simply have multiple. I mentioned in Chapter 2, Casmir (1984) defined cultural identity as entanglement of one's image of culture and of the self in one's over-all perception of reality (p. 2); and, due to the repeated disruptions/changes to my reality, I believe I have developed multiple cultural identities. Each culture in which I have learned and lived is now a part of who I am, and I have used my ability to transition between cultural identities as an armor of sorts…allowing my image of self to become lost or protected from the many changes.

The theme of silence is prevalent throughout the narrative. I describe how my blind obedience bred more silence, but I would also attribute my silence to the team mentality that prevailed in my home. The success of the unit far outweighed the successes of the individual, and I let myself get lost in that structure. My parents outlined the expectations in my life, and I didn't deviate from them. I achieved and often excelled, but my motivation wasn't the accomplishment of that expectation but rather my ability to please my parents.

In high school I attended honors classes and played basketball, tennis, and golf while being a member of National Honors Society, Student Government, and Fellowship Christian Athletes. Why? Was I interested in any of these things? Not particularly. Was I planning to attend a specific university? Not at all. I participated based on the expectations of those around me (e.g. family, advisors, and coaches). Blind obedience. Maybe habit? I never considered if I enjoyed any of the activities in which I was involved.

I didn't begin to explore my own interests until I was in my twenties. Even during that period, my family provided me with a list of acceptable and unacceptable interests that I could pursue, and to deviate would be to the displeasure of my family. I had the role of peacemaker in my childhood home, so taking deliberate steps towards separating my voice from the united voice of my family forced me to realize I did not fully know my own thoughts. I had accepted my reality, and I believed that my voice held less importance than the other members of my family; so, I chose not to explore my opinions or desires.

How have my lived experiences as a child of a military family shaped my perspective of education?

Though I was engaged in formal education settings such as primary education during my father's tenure in the Marine Corps, I believe the more influential lessons occurred outside of the

traditional classroom setting. Specifically, the informal education I received from my parents, brother, friends/classmates, and the military community brings attention to the strength on my family unit and the cultural strengths of the military community. Breaking down some of the stereotypes claiming that military children often develop maladaptive behaviors (De Pedro et al., 2011; Chandra et al, 2010) may deepen our understanding of the experiences of military children and their families.

In the narrative, I described the informal education I received during my repeated trips to the principal's office. Each trip taught me the differences between American culture and Scottish culture. If asked, I'm sure my teacher's would claim that I continuously failed to adhere to proper British etiquette, but my behavior and actions were due to ignorance rather than a willful disregard for social convention. As was common in my childhood, I was taught by being directly told what needed to be learned, conversationally or in lecture-style. In Scotland, my brother and I were the only two Americans in the school, so our otherness was quite apparent. As I stated, my brother and I "were different", and we were often bullied when we began at a new school. I tried to pay close attention to the lessons offered by my teachers, principals, and peers in order to lessen the focus on my otherness. I recall the reactions of my classmates with each misstep prior to making a trip to the principal's office. Their gasps or whispered words of shock impressed upon me the necessity of caution. With each school transition, even within the United States, I preferred to gradually engage, giving my classmates and teachers time to teach me the cultural norms in the form of modeling. I watched and learned.

"We learned how to blend in quickly". I began Primary 1 in Scotland, so I had no prior knowledge of the school environment; therefore, I had to adjust to the cultural norms of Scottish children as well as the expectations of a Scottish school. As I mentioned in Chapter 4, we

attended three schools in less than a year, so I considered the first two merely educational – "a chance for us to fail and learn"; and, I did indeed fail. As a result, I became adept at watching and listening, and I could quickly glean the culturally appropriate and acceptable behaviors. More importantly to me at the time, due to bullying, I had to swiftly ascertain which classmates/peers could be a potential threat. In my case, I was more concerned with the attention bullies forced on me rather than their words or actions. Developing strong social awareness skills and the ability to control my facial expressions and emotions, proved essential to my success during school transitions.

In the narrative, I depict my struggles with reading. Though it was later in my life that I was diagnosed with Dyslexia, it was my mother who tuned into my needs in order to ensure I was successful in school. Each night and on the weekends, my mother would sit with me to read. I wish I could claim that these sessions were only required for a couple months, but the reality was that my reading skills were slow to improve. Mom suggested little techniques that helped me progress at a faster pace. With my father often away from the home, I cannot fathom how she found the time to offer me such a large chunk of individualized attention, but that was a gift my mother possessed. Achievements both big and small were celebration worthy in her eyes.

In regards to informal learning within the family, I recall my brother being far more vocal during our moves, and the result was a form of punishment. When I was about six years old, my father first explained, "A wise man learns from the mistakes of others." In adulthood, I have read similar quotes from various businessmen and philosophers, but those words resonated with me from a young age. I made them my mantra as I watched and learned from my brother's mistakes. And there were plenty. In the narrative, I describe Warren's constant need to "learn the hard way" as he was the type of child who rarely listened to my parents rules. Warren preferred to test

the boundaries of each rule without fear of the consequences, and my parents were consistent in all things: structure, rules, the demand for obedience, and punitive action. There were a couple times as a child, after being sent to my room to await my punishment, I thought or hoped that my mom wouldn't spank me. I was slow to figure out that there was always a consequence and my parents always followed through on their punishments.

Experiencing my brother's attitude surrounding our relocations and watching the subsequent punishments taught me that "no amount of crying was going to change our circumstances". I definitely did not want to be punished, so I adapted to the best of my ability. My parents taught me respect for my elders/superiors and obedience. These lessons generally occurred when I was being punished. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, receiving punishments were a lengthy process involving: time to consider what I did wrong and a painfully long discussion/lecture ensuring my understanding of the indiscretion, appropriate behavior, and the punitive action in my near future.

My parents modeled traditional gender norms within the household. As I described in the narrative, my mother was a stay-at-home mom while my father worked. My mother performed all the tasks that were deemed feminine, and I was required to assist while my brother followed my father. When my father was away from the home, my mother modeled a more inclusive philosophy, but that all crumbled when my dad returned. I listened and watched as my father led and my mother followed. I watched my mother place my father's desires above her children's and even her own. This dynamic taught me that my personal interests/desires held little meaning when compared to the family unit. I could have rebelled and fought for what I wanted or felt that I needed, but I chose not to. I chose the path of least resistance – submission; moreover, I enjoyed the calm that flowed through the house when there was no friction.

Respect was a large part of our family dynamic. Respect for my elders/superiors and respect for each other. My parents modeled respect in their relationship with each other. When my father came home from TAD, he didn't usurp my mother and start barking orders. He let her continue to lead. In my 37 years, I have never heard either of my parents undermine or say anything negative about the other - I have never heard them fight. They would take disagreements to their bedroom and work through it without me ever knowing. An extension of that respect is manners. The narrative describes two family dinners during which my mother reiterates appropriate behavior at the dinner table. I was instructed to use "ma'am" and "sir" when responding to an elder, and "please" and "thank you' were never to be forgotten.

The most important lesson that my experiences growing up in a military family has taught me is how every situation, individual, school, community, and culture is unique; and, in order to adapt, I had to understand that my perspective was not the only perspective. My background was often different from those around me, and my reality skewed how I viewed the world. My parents always explained why it is important to listen and attempt to understand before rushing to make judgements; moreover, my experiences with friends, classmates, and the military community taught me to listen and appreciate the differences. Celebrate and relish the differences, and continue to dig deeper to find more.

Limitations of the Study

One primary limitation to this study is me as a researcher. This is my first time conducting an autoethnographic study, and my first attempt at evocative storytelling (Ellis, 1995); moreover, I am still learning and growing my skills as a researcher. Though I am inexperienced, my understanding of qualitative research techniques, specifically autoethnography, has grown exponentially through this research project. My ever-present research journal has not only served

as a tool through this project, but it will offer further insights as I continue as a scholar. I know that I will continue to explore autoethnography and other research methodologies as I progress in higher education administration, and I believe that this study will serve as the first step on an endless journey of personal and academic development.

Implications for Education

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, there are almost two million U.S. children who have one or more parent serving in the military (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014; Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). Much of the research concentrating on military children paints a negative picture of their lives by simply detailing the obstacles they must overcome. My story describes the structure of a military home along with some of the stressors military children face, but I also conveyed the care element within my family unit. When I look back upon my childhood, I recall being happy and thoroughly loved. One cannot overlook the challenges, but one must acknowledge the positive aspects of life for a military child. I believe that educators, military and civilian, could benefit from further understanding of military children in order to better support them through the stressors and celebrate their successes.

As I make recommendations for education, I would like to note that my story occurred between 1981 and 1992. Many of the resources available to military families as described in Chapter 2 were not in existence when my father was in the military. Based on this study, one implication for educators is the need for reducing transitional stress for the military child. In the narrative, I describe my first day of school in Woodbridge, Virginia. My newness was painfully obvious since the school year had already begun, but my teacher made a point to draw more attention to me. I was not the type of kid who enjoyed attention; in fact, I went to great pains to avoid it completely. When beginning at each new school, I experienced an information overload.

On top of transitioning to a new state/city, new home, and new friends, there were all new teachers, all new students, all new classes, all new buildings/classrooms, all new schedules – and endless amounts of questions directed at the new kid.

I would recommend that teachers research ways to make new students feel comfortable. Specific to my story, the teacher could have walked to the back of the classroom and spoke with me briefly to gauge how comfortable I was with the introduction. Perhaps she could have waited until later in the day or the following day to allow me time to acclimate and feel comfortable with my surroundings. Schools could use a peer or buddy system to welcome and support the military child through the transition. One student is far less daunting than facing an entire classroom full of students. I would have found this immensely helpful during my transition to Scottish schools. The narrative describes two examples of when I failed to adhere to cultural norms. I'm not claiming that a peer/buddy would have eliminated those errors, but perhaps that individual could have guided me and served as an example.

Potential issues that may arise when considering a peer/buddy system for new students is the peer/buddy selection process. As I mentioned in the narrative, I was frequently bullied at each new school; so, teachers and administrators would need to create strict selection criteria to ensure the student selected to assist the new military-connected student will uphold the inclusive and welcoming intent. Offering the new student a choice would be a positive introduction to the new school. As a military child, I was offered very few choices, so I would have been thrilled to be brought into the conversation. When I began primary school in Scotland, I would have opted for a peer/buddy to help me acclimate; however, later in primary school, I would have declined. By that point, I was untrusting of teachers and my peers.

As I wrote and relived the struggles I had acclimating to each new school, I realized that rather than supporting me as I adjusted to a new environment and curriculum, my teachers managed me and my behaviors. In Scotland, my struggles with reading were attributed to laziness due to my apparent lack of desire to complete the assigned homework. As a result, my teacher expressed her displeasure and the ramifications of coming to school unprepared rather than offering me any reading assistance. In regards to the behavioral issues upon entering the Scottish schools, I was not offered any guidance by the teachers or administration to ease the transition and place me on a path to success. After being labeled a troublemaker due to my social norm missteps, it was my fellow students who took me under their wings to teach me the dos and don'ts of their culture.

The same could be said for my struggles with curriculum upon re-entering American schools in Virginia. Why was I having such a difficult time acclimated to American Language Arts? There were no conversations about the areas in which the knowledge gaps existed. I was simply left to figure it out or fail for the first time in primary school. I recall my first Language Arts quiz. I was surprised by how easy my first exam in an American school had been. I knew with certainty that I made a perfect score…I was the first one finished. The next day when the teacher returned the graded quizzes, I was confused by the results. I had failed! The student next to me did very well, so I grabbed hers to compare. I remember thinking, *how could this be right? The teacher had to have made a mistake!* Sadly, the teacher made no mistakes, yet no one explained to me that there were differences between British and American English.

I believe a more culturally responsive pedagogy would benefit military children. According to Cunningham (2001), teachers practicing a culturally responsive pedagogy hope to "connect with and incorporate students' cultures, values, languages, and traditions" (p. 86) into

their teaching methods and strategies across content areas. This multicultural perspective calls for the teacher and students to produce various connections and descriptions to serve as a bridge between the content and the learners' background (Cunningham, 2001, p. 87). A more inclusive curriculum would have benefitted not only me, as a military child, but the other cultures represented in each classroom.

Contribution to Cultural Studies

This study answers the call for more research on military children. As I began this research project and reading the current literature available about military children, the lack of research containing the voices of these children became glaring. Many of the recommendations for future research focus primarily of learning more about military children to better meet the needs of military children and their families (Cozza & Lerner, 2013; Chandra & London, 2013; Clever & Segal, 2013; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013). Building upon those recommendations, I believe that gathering data from the source, military children, would be most beneficial when researching this population. This study serves both purposes. It adds to the current conversation about military children, but it also offers a firsthand account from a military child.

As it relates to cultural studies scholarship, I leaned upon scholars such as Giroux (1983) and Gramsci (1971) to guide my exploration into how the military structure seeped into the structure of my childhood home. As I reflected on my own experiences, I was better able to understand the power dynamic in my home and its effect on my voice, but first I had to understand my reality. I had to question the established structure which is something I was not permitted to do as a child. Was I sustaining a false awareness of truth as a result of the power structure in place?

Paulo Freire (1970) claims that in order to become aware of one's reality, one must objectively view and reflect upon one's life and circumstance through dialogue and critical reflection. I continued to take part in both throughout this research project. Critical reflection was essential to autoethnography; however, through dialogue with my committee and family, I was able to receive a more objective glimpse of my life as a military child. Moreover, this glimpse into military life serves as an example of the obstacles military children may face while changing schools.

Freire (1970/2005) and Horton (1998) describe hope as an essential element of change. As an adult with my experiences as a military child behind me, I cannot change the past; however, I can offer hope to other military children. Through this autoethnography I have included implication for education and suggestions for educators. By extension, I believe parents would benefit from the narrative and subsequent analysis as I described the informal education that occurred within my home. The work presented here looks beyond hope as a motivation or catalyst for change to elements of freedom. The hope is for change, but the goal is to be free from oppression. bell hooks (1994) describes education as a gateway to freedom. It is through education, making people aware of the social injustices they may face, that people gain the freedom to act.

I believe the essential part of the freedom equation is action. Awareness without action is meaningless. So – this research project is my action and my journey to wide-awakeness. I reached an understanding of the importance of this study as I read the current research on military children; however, it was through the critical reflection and my personal journey that I truly understood the significance. Wide-awakeness is the moment when one looks into the mirror and sees one's true reality and believes change is possible (Greene, 1995). This autoethnography

depicts my reality, a small piece, growing up in a military family and experiencing military culture. The strong element of silence was a surprise, and I had to acknowledge that my childhood and family dynamic was not as perfect as I often lead people to believe. There was pain and sadness that I chose to bury in order to remain that resilient peacekeeping child my parents adored.

Through this research I became aware of my identity as a third culture kid. I, too, identify my experiences as a military child as positive, and I understand that I have a high level of intercultural competencies; however, this process shed light on my lack of belonging (Moore & Barker, 2012). My sense of belonging centralized around my immediate family or other military children I encountered through our relocations. In support of the research related to TCKs, I am not confused about my cultural identity as I have multiple cultural identities or a multicultural identity.

I would claim that this study was a cultural studies expedition of self-discovery. It was necessary to remain actively engaged in the process and be mindful of myself – mind, body, and spirit. hooks (1994) claims that one must learn and grow from personal experiences, challenges, and achievements. Addressing my own pain was necessary to ensure that pain did not translate into this work.

Future Research

As I mentioned in Chapter 3, the subjective nature of autoethnography is an excellent way to tell a story, but there are several projects that could build upon our understanding of military culture and its effects of military children. A significant amount of information was gleaned through data collection processes, but I believe this topic would benefit from broadening the participant pool. In the future, I would like to explore outside of my own story. For example,

I would like to include the individual experiences of other military children and determine themes that arise from multiple stories.

I am also curious about how the family structure/dynamic plays a role in my story and the stories of other military children. For example, the mutual love and respect my parents offer one another is almost palpable, so how would the experiences of military children from varying (single, divorced, blended, separated, etc.) family units differ from my own? Moreover, would parenting styles play a significant role? In my opinion, my parents utilized a more authoritative parenting style in which they were firm, but loving. They had moments when a more strict and unyielding style, authoritarian, could be seen, but the love and care that shone through was undeniable.

I would like to hone in on the elements of informal education practices by my family. Much of my learning occurred outside of the formal setting through the many transitions and relocations I experienced with my family, so I would like to explore informal education in greater detail as it relates to military families. I am also curious as to how the family structure may play a role in the informal education process. Specifically, due to my father's frequent absences, my mother was the educator in our home. How does the informal education process differ in home of varying structures?

Focusing on care theory (Noddings, 1984/2013), I would like to more thoroughly explore the interpersonal relationships within my family. In the narrative, I describe the shift in the caring dynamic upon my father's return from TAD, but I did not articulate the necessary adjustments required by the repeated entrance and exit of a family member. What has each family member learned from one another? What expectations does the family impose on my

brother and me in adulthood, what expectations do we impose on ourselves, and do these expectations conflict with one another?

From a feminist perspective, I would like to dig deeper into the strong traditional, patriarchal dynamic within the military home. Specifically, I would like to better understand the perspectives of the daughters of military service members. From my experience, military culture is strongly traditional and male dominated; moreover, military culture is slow to evolve. How do the daughters of military families break free and find their own power and voice amidst a culture that reveres masculinity?

What happens to military children after their family transitions to civilian life? Each member of a military family is given a military identification card throughout the service member's tenure in the military. I remember the day I was asked to turn in my ID card. I was approximately 12 years old when my father retired from the Marine Corps, and I recall feeling like someone stripped my identity away. I felt rejected and unwanted, as irrational as that sounds now. The experience was traumatic and significant as a turning point in my young life, and it makes me wonder about research specific to former military children when they reach adulthood? What becomes of them? Does the resiliency persist into adulthood? Do our multicultural identities prove beneficial in the long run?

I wonder if the service member's job or Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) effects the experiences of the service member and his/her family. Luckily, my father was in the intelligence field, so he was not required to be on the front lines in any military confrontation; however, he was given a specific duty rotation. He was required to remain stationed at each base for three years (average); but, Dad was permitted one year at home before leaving for a six-month TAD assignment. This one year, six month rotation continued the majority of his active

duty years in the Marine Corps. It is important to note that during his "one year at home", my father did not actually remain at home. He could be sent away for multiple trainings, some lasting up to three months during that "one year at home". Is this common across all branches? I would like to explore how the experiences of military children differ based on branch of service. I have no basis for comparison as I grew up immersed in the Marine Corps. For example, how do the experiences of a child from a Marine Corps family differ from the experiences of a child from an Air Force family? Furthermore, does rank, social class, play a significant role in these experiences? In the military, one is either enlisted or officer rank. My father was enlisted, so how do my experiences differ from those of children of military officers?

Much of the research I included in Chapter 2 offered more negative than positive perspectives on the lives of military children, and I would like to challenge that in my future research. I would like to perform a study of the current research pertaining to military children using discourse analysis. I would like to explore the presence of deficit thinking throughout the literature or by analyzing participant interviews. Rather than labeling students who are different from the norm as deficient, I would like to challenge educators to bridge the gaps enabling all students to be successful. Military children are often placed at a disadvantage due to the many stressors they face each day, so it is natural for them to fall outside of the "norm".

In regards to my own story, there were eleven years of stories to sift through and prioritize. I would like to narrow the focus to a small portion of the data to expand upon. For example, with each relocation came a new neighborhood, new friends, new church, and new school – a new culture. A cultural studies project focusing on a military child's ability to quickly and efficiently learn and adapt to cultural norms could be beneficial. Would the transition process be more seamless if the child were enrolled in schools operated by the military rather

than civilian schools? Looking toward long term student success, do military children demonstrate greater academic success while attending school on base or civilian schools?

Final Thoughts

I was briefly introduced to autoethnography in my Introduction to Qualitative Research course. As I mentioned in Chapter 1, it is a relatively new qualitative research methodology, and it sounded genuine, ardent, and progressive. Upon further research, I was intrigued by this evocative form of writing; however, I did not fully account for the arduous process and the emotions that the experience of writing an autoethnography would evoke in me. My intention was to evoke emotions and thought in the readers, but autoethnography is not that simple. I did not and could not have anticipated how difficult it would be to expose myself and my story, to make myself vulnerable to myself and to others. My reflections took me down paths surrounded with memories hanging low like the drooping foliage of a willow tree. With each step forward, I was confronted with more leaves and branches tickling at my skin…sometimes simply acknowledging the memories…others forcing me to slow down or find a new direction…often getting lost.

I was unprepared for how vulnerable I would feel when exposing my life and my inner thoughts while taking responsibility for the way I framed my story and the people in it. After completing the first draft of my narrative, it took two days for me to work up the nerve to submit it to my Committee Chair. My narrative required multiple drafts in which the layers were peeled back and emotions were exposed. It's my life, so I was surprised by how challenging it was to decide which stories to include and which ones to exclude while being true to myself and the naïve child I once was; moreover, I had to determine how much power my parents had over the direction of my writing. As I readily admit, I have an incessant need to please them, so I had to

make a conscious choice to let my voice be heard over theirs. The process was strenuous, to say the least.

I had to explore and understand the process behind telling a complete story. The good and the bad needed to be represented, so I had to ask myself to take another look…to dig a little deeper into my memories. I planned to only use photographs of my childhood to elicit latent memories, but I also found that music helped with this process. My mother is a singer and I play the piano, so music was a very large part of my childhood. It was unintentional at first. As I was responding to a writing prompt, I recalled a Christian music artist my mother played a lot in our home. I quickly found the album on Apple Music and listened to the entire thing as I slowly progressed through the writing prompts. As intended, the music brought with it the latent memories, but the emotions were not far behind.

For the first time in my life, I had to place self-care as a priority. The memories did not begin and end with those included in the narrative, and I fell down numerous rabbit holes in which one memory led to another. Once the first domino tipped over, I felt helpless to stop the rest. The memories of my first move from North Carolina to California when I had to leave my Papa, and shortly thereafter receiving the news that he passed. Reliving that loss, though irrelevant to this research project, was unavoidable. I was forced to confront the joys and sadness, the ups and downs, of my childhood while striving towards the completion of this study.

I forced myself to take breaks from the writing process in order to focus on my own well-being. The short breaks generally involved calling my parents to talk through a memory or the resulting emotions, and the longer breaks involved two to three day spans in which I purposefully set my writing aside to focus on life. I describe a rather grueling process, but I admit that many positives have come from creating this autoethnography. I found an old love.

Upon leaving the military, my father was left little choice but to get trained in another field; so, we moved to Tennessee where he completed his bachelors and masters in social work. For the first time in my life, my mother became the sole breadwinner in our home while my father devoted himself to finishing school as quickly as possible. Even using the GI Bill, we were living in poverty; and, one day they sat me down to explain that they had sold my baby grand piano. I was heartbroken. Though I didn't make a conscious decision, I never played again. I remember briefly crying in my bedroom, but I quickly buried those feelings away and rarely brought up the piano or music.

While writing the narrative section involving my piano, I pulled out my old sheet music which I stubbornly never threw away. I used the piano we have at the College to slowly work my way through scales and chord progressions, and I realized…I am terrible! As I remembered and confronted why I stopped playing, I found myself coming back to the piano bench each time I needed a writing break. This research project afforded me the opportunity to remember what I once loved about music, and I – and my fingers – have been slowly getting reacquainted with an old passion. I'm still terrible…which only makes me more motivated to continue the journey.

My primary motivation for undertaking this research project was not to tell my story. As I have stated numerous times throughout this paper, I detest having the spotlight pointed directly on me. That being the case, you may wonder why I would spent over a year placing myself, my life, and by extension my family under the microscope. I wanted to provide one story of one military child who was and is – at least I like to think so – well adjusted, and who enjoyed a happy childhood immersed in Marine Corps culture. In the process, I learned that things are rarely that simple. During the extensive periods of self-reflection required for this study, I had to confront the struggles as well as the joys. Perhaps it was a coping mechanism, but my memories

since my father retired from the military had focused on the more pleasant memories of being a military brat. I mean, what is there to complain about when I have the close relationship with and unrelenting love of my family? To this day, that love is the foundation of who I am; however, after completing this study, I realize that the military can be added to that foundation.

Having lived in various differing cultures, I understand that my perspective is just that…mine; therefore, my situatedness is dependent upon the context of my lived experiences. The military contributed to my situatedness and my framework for how I view and interact with the world. However, due to the diverse cultures I have experienced, I believe that I can attribute my enlarged thinking to the military life. In a democratic society, we must rise above subjective circumstances in order to recognize and hear the perspectives of others. As a higher education administration, I am constantly telling my students that democracy requires us to listen and speak. Dialogue. As bell hooks (2003) describes this conversation is the exchange of ideas without supporting the dominant structures already in place.

Growing up in a military home taught me the importance of a team and my role in that team. Though I struggled to find my voice and let it be heard, I understood that my voice was not more important than others. I understand the importance of voice and power in relationships and in society, and I try to bring that understanding into my interactions with my students. I serve as an advocate for my students, faculty, staff, and community which is why I chose this doctoral program. That…and my fascination with travel and exploring cultures throughout the world.

There is a professional development expectation when one is an administrator in higher education. Not one year after beginning with the College, my supervising vice president approached me about my professional development plans and goals. I had just completed my master's degree, and I was in no rush to jump back into school; however, I was required to

develop a plan and timeline. The majority of my colleagues were and are enrolled in a local, online Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) program focusing on higher education leadership and policy. I was already a leader in higher education, so I wanted more – I wanted a challenge and to study an area of education about which I was passionate. This cultural studies program offers that challenge and focuses on social justice issues in education on micro and macro levels.

Conclusion. This dissertation project was an autoethnography focusing on my story as a child growing up in a military home. In Chapter 1, I began by offering a glimpse into my background as a military child and describing how I arrived at the decision to use such an innovative research methodology. I then described this study within the framework of cultural studies and introduced the overall scope and significance of this research project.

In Chapter 2, I presented a comprehensive outline of the cultural studies scholars who influenced my research, specifically in the areas of structure, care, social emancipation and hope, and freedom. I also reviewed the theoretical perspectives of Erik Erikson as a brief introduction to the concepts of cultural and shared identities. Finally, I included a literature review of the current research relative to military children: challenges and opportunities, strengths, support, and education. The scholarship provided in Chapter 2 laid the groundwork for this study as I address the need for more innovative and transformative research, more research on military culture, and qualitative (autoethnographic) research on experiences of military children.

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology, autoethnography, selected for this research project, the data collection process, developing an autoethnography, and the steps for completing the thematic analysis. In Chapter 4, I told selected stories from my childhood growing up in a military home, specifically stories that detailed that family dynamic and the experiences of

relocating, making new friends, and starting at a new school. I then presented the themes that emerged in the story. Three emergent themes were discussed: family, structure, and silence.

In Chapter 5, I provided a discussion of each research question while expanding further into my story. I offered an account of my experience writing an autoethnography as well as including a critique of this project. I also use my story to discuss the implications for education as it relates to military culture and the experiences of military children. Finally, I conclude this chapter with implications for future research and my final thoughts.

Hindsight is 20/20. Isn't that how the saying goes? I learned a tremendous amount about myself and my family through this research project. I have cried, laughed, worried, and gotten angry. Nevertheless, I believe that personal stories are the key to better understanding social injustice, so it is essential to wade through the complexities and emotional turmoil to bring more stories to light. As I progress in my career in education, I plan to continue gathering stories and adding my own to the canvas in hopes of having a more complete picture of the lives and experiences of military children.

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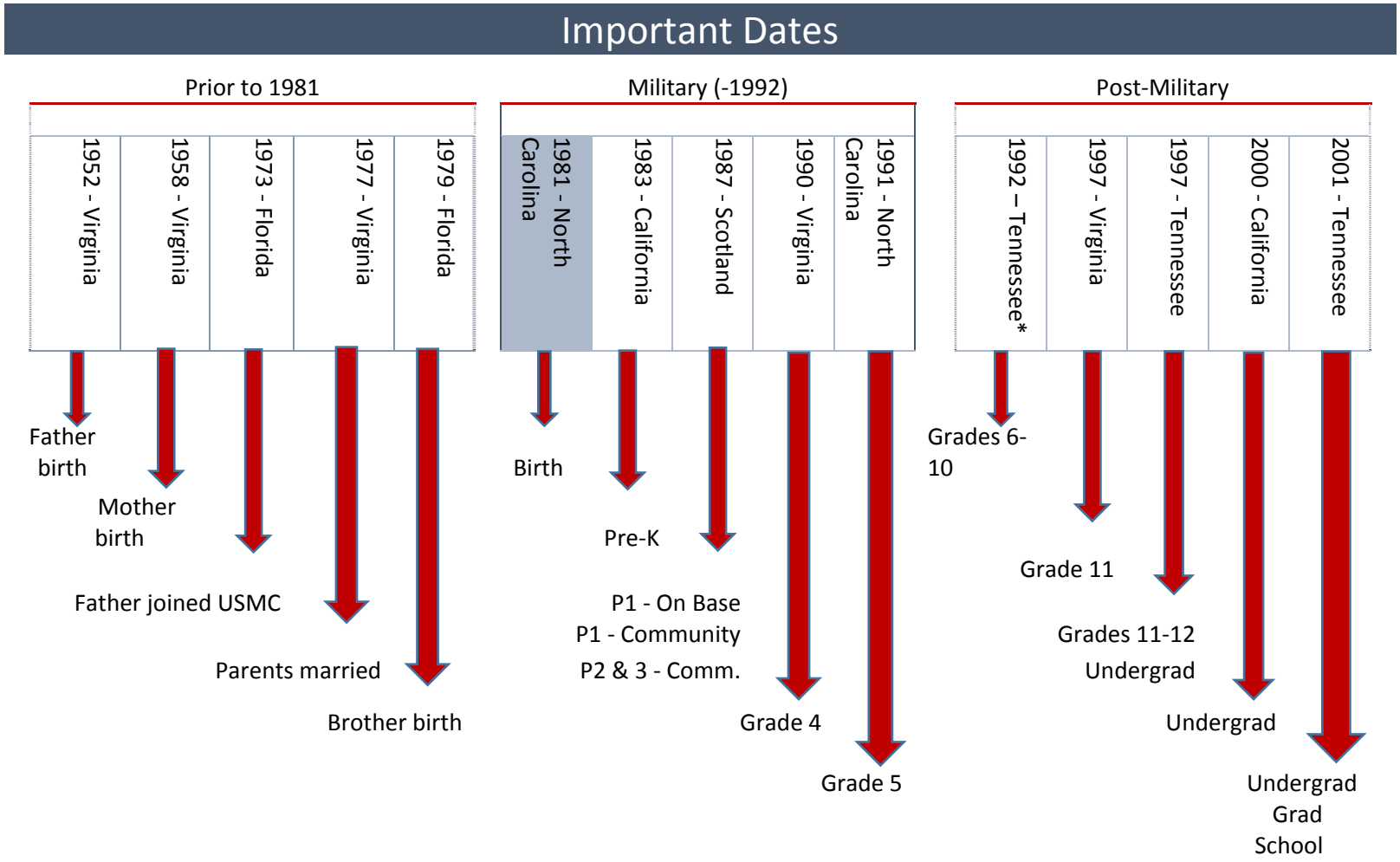
Appendix

Appendix A: Timeline of Important Dates/Events



* Father retired in 1992. North Carolina was his last duty station

Appendix B: Writing Prompts

Using family photographs and memorabilia, while following the timeline in Appendix A, to reflect on your experiences at **each** location. The below writing prompts will assist with a more thorough and critical reflection.

Location	How old were you when you moved here? Did you live on base?
Socio-economic background	What do you recall about the socio-economic status at this time?
Education	Describe your school experience. How many schools did you attend? What grade level(s)? Did you fit in at school? How was your adjustment, in terms of grades, curriculum, teachers, etc.? Describe a school situation when your otherness had a positive or negative outcome? Bullied?
Relationships	Describe your interactions with others. Were you outgoing or fearful of new interactions? Were you able to make friends?
Gender norms	Describe your role in the household. Did your brother have a different role? Did your role change when your father returned home? What are your thoughts on your mother's role in the household? Can you describe ways that society influenced you to conform or rebel to feminine stereotypes? Can you tell me about a time when you deliberately dressed or acted in a certain way to meet expectations?
Cultural norms	With each location, describe your struggle to learn and adhere to the cultural norms of that region? How was it to navigate a new school while learning the cultural norms? Were the other children helpful?
Structure	Describe the structure of military culture and give an example from of how it manifested in the household and at school.
Power	Describe a situation in which you were or weren't considered an equal in your home and/or school life. Did you try to fight against this power dynamic? How? Was there a situation where you were empowered due to your military/moving background?
Voice	Describe a situation in which your voice was silenced. What about a situation where you voice was heard loud and clear?
Identity	How often do you think about your "otherness" in civilian settings? Describe a situation in which you felt confused about your identity. What made you different/similar to your peers?

Self-interview questions:

1. What expectations, if any, did you have upon beginning this writing process? Have they changed? If so, in what ways?
2. Tell me about your successes and challenges so far.
3. How much and in what ways would you say your experience as a military dependent has influenced or changed you?
4. Describe how you feel as a white, female, former military dependent. How do these identities play out for you as an adult?
5. Describe your support system as a child. (who and how) Describe a time when you relied upon these supports.
6. At home, did your family appreciate your opinion? If so, to what degree?

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Background Information (Father)

1. Tell me about your childhood. Where did you grow up? What did you like to do?
2. What was your family's socio-economic status when you were a child?
3. Were either of your parents in the military? If so, what branch? For how long?
4. What was the perception of the military and military personnel when you were growing up?
5. Can you describe some of the gender norms prevalent in your childhood home? Can you tell me about a time when you deliberately adhered to those norms? (Rebel?)
6. Were any other family members in the military? If so, what branches? For how long?

Military

7. What motivated you to join the military? Did your father's history play a role in your decision?
8. How did you connect with other military personnel or military families? What did you do for fun?
9. Tell me about your career in the Marine Corps. How long did you serve? At what rank did you retire?
10. Can you describe the military climate during your service? War or peacetime?
11. How has your career in the military shaped your family dynamic?
12. Can you describe how military culture differs from civilian culture?

Family

13. How long have you been married?
14. Can you describe your spouse and that relationship?
15. How often were you away from your spouse and children due to deployment/TAD?
16. How did you cope? How did the children cope?
17. Did you find the family dynamic changed upon your return? Can you describe the process of transitioning back into the family unit?
18. Did you bring the structure of military life into your home? If so, how did your children respond to that structure?
19. How often did your family live on a military base? If so, for how long?
20. Did your children have other military children with which to socialize?
21. Did your children ever attend school on a military base? If so, for how long?

About Jennifer

From your perspective…

22. Can you describe Jennifer as a child?
23. How did Jennifer feel about starting a new school?
24. How did Jennifer react/behave during a relocation?
25. Can you describe Jennifer's relationships with other family members? To whom was she closest?
26. Did you view Jennifer as a normal/well-adjusted child?

Background Information (Mother)

1. Tell me about your childhood. Where did you grow up? What did you like to do?
2. What was your family's socio-economic status when you were a child?
3. Were either of your parents in the military? If so, what branch? For how long?
4. What was the perception of the military and military personnel when you were growing up?
5. Can you describe some of the gender norms prevalent in your childhood home? Can you tell me about a time when you deliberately adhered to those norms? (Rebel?)
6. Were any other family members in the military? If so, what branches? For how long?

Military

7. What motivated your spouse to join the military?
8. How did you connect with other military personnel? What did you do for fun?
9. Tell me about your life as a Marine Corps wife. What were your responsibilities?
10. Can you describe the military climate during your service? War or peacetime?
11. How has your spouse's career in the military shaped your family dynamic?
12. Can you describe how military culture differs from civilian culture?

Family

13. How long have you been married?
14. Can you describe your spouse and that relationship?
15. How often were you away from your spouse and children due to deployment/TAD?
16. How did you cope? How did the children cope?
17. Did you find the family dynamic changed upon your spouse's return? Can you describe the process of him transitioning back into the family unit?

18. Did you bring the structure of military life into your home? If so, how did your children respond to that structure?
19. How often did your family live on a military base? If so, for how long?
20. Did your children have other military children with which to socialize?
21. Did your children ever attend school on a military base? If so, for how long?

About Jennifer

From your perspective…

22. Can you describe Jennifer as a child?
23. How did Jennifer feel about starting a new school?
24. How did Jennifer react/behave during a relocation?
25. Can you describe Jennifer's relationships with other family members? To whom was she closest?
26. Did you view Jennifer as a normal/well-adjusted child?

Background Information (Brother)

1. Tell me about your childhood. What did you like to do?
2. What was your family's socio-economic status when you were a child?
3. What was the perception of the military when you were growing up?
4. Can you describe some of the gender norms prevalent in your childhood home? Can you tell me about a time when you deliberately adhered to those norms? (Rebel?)
5. Were any other family members in the military? What branches? For how long?

Military

6. How did you connect with other military children? What did you do for fun?
7. How the military shaped your family dynamic?
8. Can you describe the military climate during your father's service? War or peacetime?
9. Can you describe how military culture differs from civilian culture?
10. What motivated you to join the military? Did your father's history play a role in your decision?

Family

11. How did you cope with the repeated relocations?
12. Did you find the family dynamic changed upon your father's return? Can you describe the process of him transitioning back into the family unit?
13. Was the structure of military life brought into your home? If so, how did you respond to that structure?
14. How often did your family live on a military base? If so, for how long?
15. Did you have other military children with which to socialize?
16. Did you ever attend school on a military base? If so, for how long?

About Jennifer

From your perspective…

17. Can you describe Jennifer as a child?
18. How did Jennifer feel about starting a new school?
19. How did Jennifer react/behave during a relocation?
20. Can you describe Jennifer's relationships with other family members? To whom was she closest?
21. Did you view Jennifer as a normal/well-adjusted child?

Appendix D: Informed Consent Statement

Growing Up the Military Way: An Autoethnography

INTRODUCTION

You are invited to participate in a human research study conducted by Jennifer Thacker as a PhD candidate at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville. To fulfill the requirements of the PhD in Cultural Studies in Education, this dissertation explores my personal experiences as a child of a military family in order to better understand military culture. This study presents an autoethnographic narrative from my point-of-view as a female researcher and daughter of an enlisted United States Marine. This exploration will reveal the experience of gender, race, identity, social class, and power as told through my own stories. My hope is for readers to witness and understand the complexity of the military experience for a child, its challenges and privileges. These stories will be published as my dissertation. By signing this agreement, you are giving the researcher the right to include your interview material in the dissertation and as part of journal articles written to share this research with other scholars. It is also possible that this research will be published in book form and made available to the general public.

INFORMATION ABOUT PARTICIPANTS' INVOLVED IN THE STUDY

If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in one or more audio-recorded interviews during which, to add context and validity, we will explore your cultural and socio-economic background and perspective of military culture and our military family dynamic; moreover, we will discuss the experiences of researcher from your point-of-view. The first interview will take 1 – 2 hours. Any follow-up interviews will take no more than two hours. The total number of interview sessions will be determined jointly by the participant and researcher, but are unlikely to exceed 4 hours.

Each interview will be recorded with a digital audio recorder. The researcher will take notes occasionally during the interview to aid her memory. Afterward, the researcher will listen to the audio recordings and transcribe them into a written document.

The transcript will be given to you for review. It may be delivered in person, by U.S. Mail or email, depending on your preference and the proximity of your location. While your name and address must be used for the mailing, your name will not be identified anywhere on the document.

RISKS

Telling personal experiences in a private setting of your own choosing is seldom a risky endeavor; however, anonymity for the researcher's immediate family members in an autoethnographic study is virtually impossible.

_____ Participant's initials

It is possible that broaching a sensitive subject could cause psychological distress. For that reason, at any time during the interview, if you indicate a desire to change the topic because it is painful or are overcome emotionally, the researcher will stop the recorder and allow you to compose yourself. You may terminate the interview and further association at any time. In the case of such termination, written notes and recordings will be destroyed. In addition, if you wish to speak with a mental health professional you may call these toll-free numbers:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration: 24-hour helpline for treatment services near you: 1-800-622-HELP (4357). To locate local mental health clinics, go to http://sotre.samhsa.gov/mhlocator.
- Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), a free, 24-hour hotline available to anyone in suicidal crisis or emotional distress.

BENEFITS

The benefit of participating is that, with an emphasis on the researcher's personal story, an autoethnographic study of one child's experiences growing up in a military family provides insight into that individual's life but also adds to the slowly growing conversation about this population. Your participation adds validity and authenticity to the researcher's story. This study will contribute to the understanding of the experiences, opportunities, and challenges faced by military dependents. Bringing my story to scholars and public audiences has the potential to change perceptions and prejudices through furthering their compassion and understanding. In addition, you will have a copy of the story to keep.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The information in the study records will be kept confidential. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. No reference will be made in oral or written reports, which could link participants to the study.

The signed consent form will be kept in a locked file drawer in Jennifer Thacker's private office in Kingsport, TN.

CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Thacker, at 300 W. Market St, Kingsport, TN 37660 or room 104 Kingsport Center for Higher Education, Northeast State Community College at Kingsport, and 423.354.5151. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research Compliance Officer at (865) 974-3466.

_____ Participant's initials

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

_____ Participant's initials

CONSENT

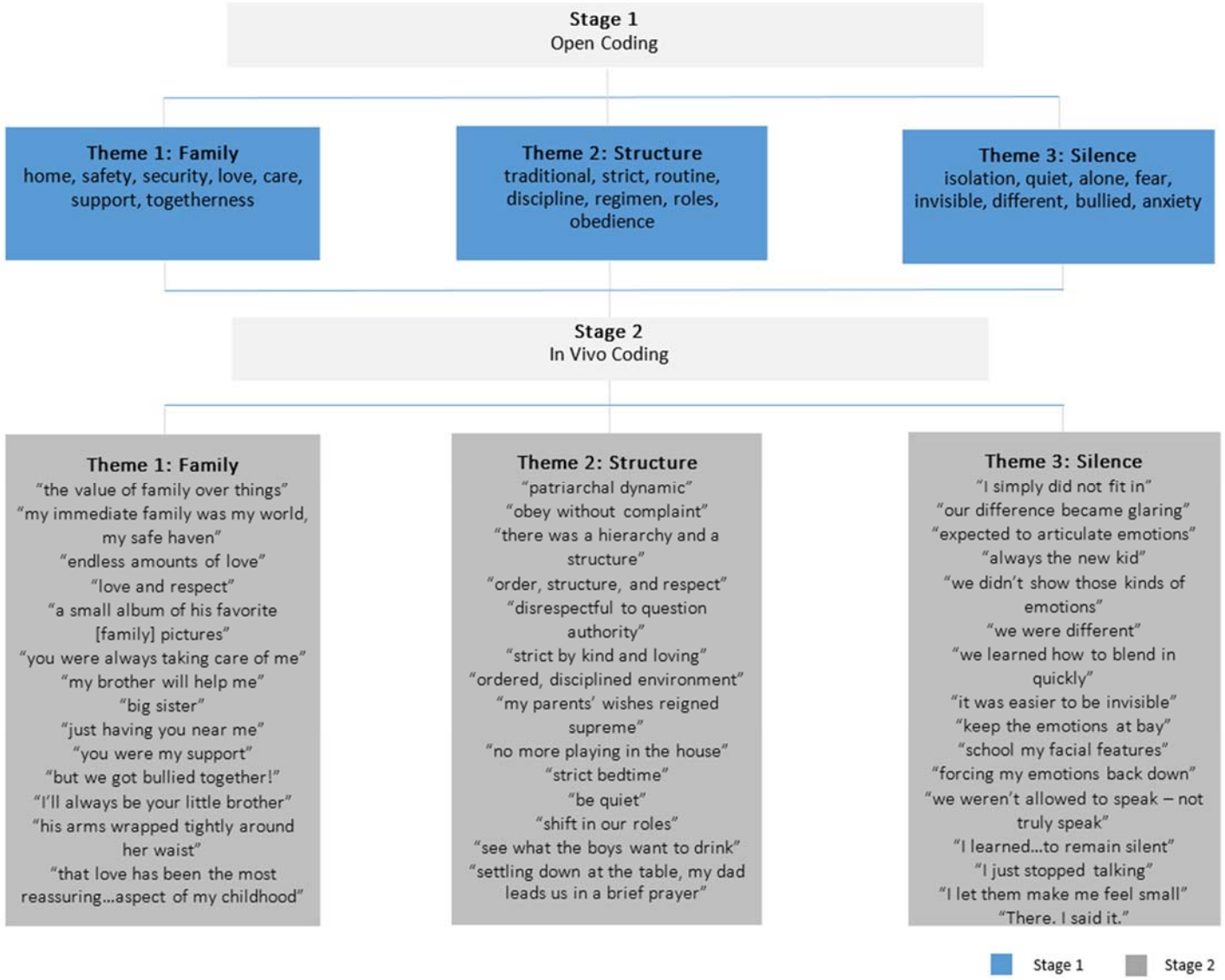
I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date _____
Participant's signature

_____
Participant's name (Print clearly)

_____ Date _____
Investigator's signature

Appendix E: Thematic Coding Map



Vita

Jennifer G. Thacker was born in Cherry Point, North Carolina to Dennis and Kathy Thacker. She obtained her Bachelor of Science degree in Psychology from East Tennessee State University in 2002 and a Master of Education, with a licensure to teach 7-12 English in 2010. She has maintained a career in higher education administration since 2010. In 2013, Jennifer began her doctoral studies in education with a specialization in cultural studies at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.