

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME: THE LIVED
 EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY BRATS OF COLOR
 IN COLLEGE

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 Leadership

Military children of color live in various cultural contexts, often outside of mainstream U.S. society, leading to questions about their experiences as young people of color in college settings. To this end, this dissertation asks: What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college? This dissertation explores the experiences of seven military children of color in college settings as they navigate leaving their unique military context, encounter identities they did not know they had, and individuate from their families and the military context. The phenomenological questioning of identity coupled with conceptions of home and belonging shine a light on the bittersweet experience of the military brats of color feeling like strangers in their own country. These experiences are uncovered using Gadamerian (1975/2004)

horizons and Heidegger's *dasein* (1927/2008b) in addition to O'Donohue's (1997, 1998) philosophical writings on belonging and home. The thematizing process brought forth experiences of attempting to forge an identity in the midst of preconceived ideas about who and what you should be as a person. The process of forging identity includes the transition from the military community to college; a settling into college; and a choosing of identity. Pedagogical insights include a critique of identity and how it is constructed, specifically because military children of color are never *of* a place, but move *with* and *in* spaces. I also consider concepts of home, and how higher education practitioners can work with military students of color while respecting their lived experience.

THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME: THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF MILITARY
BRATS OF COLOR IN COLLEGE

by

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the University of
Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctorate of Philosophy 2019

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Dedication

For John, Helen, and James

For my father Lieutenant Colonel (Ret) David S. Peralta

and

my grandfather Colonel (Ret) Roberto Peralta

For my *Invisible Tribe*

For my *Doubly Invisible Tribe*, fellow military brats of color

Acknowledgements

For my Committee—Dr. Francine Hultgren, thank you for guiding me on this journey. You were my Virgil, directing my steps through the research and writing process. I am so grateful that you were with me, even in the hardest of times when I struggled.

Dr. Sharon Fries-Britt, thank you for your unfailing support and confidence in my work. It was so many years ago that I showed up in your office with the *Retaining Each Other* article fresh in my mind, knowing you were a military brat of color in the academy!

Dr. Michelle Espino, thank you for your kind words when I needed them the most. Your voice as another military brat of color was so important to me, especially asking hard questions about intersections of rank, race, and class!

Dr. Meredith Kleykamp, thank you for stepping out of the military sociology realm to sit on my committee. Your expertise in military sociology has made my dissertation stronger!

Dr. Kimberly Griffin, thank you for your direct and frank feedback and your curiosity about my topic. I am honored and grateful to have you on my committee given your extensive scholarship on students of color.

For my dissertation participants: you were all so open, kind, and giving of yourselves. I hope I did you each some justice.

For my UMD Family—Thank you to my Graduate Assistantships—Joey DeSanto Jones, Tiki Ayiku, Stephanie Gordon, and Nathan Victoria at NASPA. Thank you for the guidance and opportunity during my first years and your continued support

For Dr. Tracy Chung and Abby Shantzis and all the staff members of the Bioengineering Department at UMD. It was such a privilege to work with you and with the Bioengineering students!

Dr. Cabrera, thank you for giving me the opportunity to TA with you. Your college experience class is still one of my favorite classes ever, and I am so honored to work with such a talented teacher! Your pedagogical skill is unmatched. I am also grateful I got to publish with you. Your writing is so clean and so concise; it was such a privilege to work with you!

Dr. Titus, thank you for teaching applied stats classes and for giving me a chance to learn from my mistakes!

I am grateful to all my classmates who came before and after for all your support: Dr. Dora McAllister, Dr. Belinda Huang, Dr. Paulina Mejia Perez, Dr. Jennifer Johnson, Dr. Rebecca Villareal, Dr. Steve D. Mobley Jr., Dr. Pamela Hernandez, Kelly Cowdery, Jen Eliason, Dr. Nina Daoud, and Candice Staples, Jeanette Snider, and Kristin LaRiviere. Your success is my success! I am so privileged to have you as my colleagues!

I also want to recognize my cohort-mate, Dr. Chrystal George Mwangi, whose practical approach to the world and unfailing support was appreciated more than she will ever realize.

To my Harvard Graduate School of Education Family—Dr. Mandy Savitz-Romer, who suggested I apply to Maryland. And the PSP faculty who cheered me on during my application process.

To the HGSE Admissions Office for the support and cozy office space! Chapters 4 and 5 would be less than without your support: Jourdan Hafen, Emily Mendes Sawyer, Margaret Okada-Scheck, Leah Belcher, Christine Lombardi, James Christensen, Laura Amrein, Ernald Furxhi, Youlim Yai, Julie Deland, Paola Munoz

To my dear soon-to-be Dr. Tycie Coppett, I do not know if I can ever tell you how much you are appreciated. May you always claim your space!

Also, for Helen Vendler, whose words I have always remembered: “You walked into my office, and I knew you could do anything.”

To my Military family—especially Jessica Fry, William Oldham, Kristina Kerchief, and Amanda Hrubrik Gruenthal. You were there from the beginning!

To my Family—My parents Jane and David Peralta, sister Teresa Tomlinson, and the revelations about the wonderful work of those who have come before me. Mom and Dad: I have no words. I love you! And you can call me Doctor.

For my amazing chosen family: Captain (Ret) Robert Bornmann, Kris and Allan; Jenn, Beth, Karin, and all the Bornmann clan.

Dr. Sergeant John Bornmann, may we always walk together: “wither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge; thy people *shall* be my people” (Ruth 1:16: King James Version)

Helen and James—Mommy finally finished her book!

A special thank you to Nancy Schimmel, who kindly granted permission for use of Dr. Malvina Reynold’s song lyrics *Little Boxes*.

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CHAPTER 1: WHAT MILITARY BRATS CARRY: TURNING TO THE PHENOMENON

The Life and Homes of the Military Child

According to Bachelard (1994), “The chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters day-dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace” (p. 6). Military children, or brats¹ as we are called, have multiple houses, multiple schools, multiple cities, and multiple countries in which to dream. As a military child, I sometimes open my mouth and say: “I once lived in a house with lots of fruit trees; a goat lived next door.” The essence of the house is the fruit trees and the neighborly goat, for whom I supplied apples. I dreamed in that house. That house is not my childhood home. That house only saw part of my dreams, the dreams of a 12-15 year old girl who read too much while perched on her marble windowsill—goat, dog, accordion-player next door, and the sky for company.

These multiple houses are never homes, but they give the military brats pieces of themselves. They are remade in our dreams, and integrate themselves into dreams. The houses are living creatures, like Bachelard’s (1994) wardrobes with lavender, linen, and moonbeams, gifting a splinter of their souls, which military children carry with them.

Are military brats homeless? No, they are not homeless. Military children are like kangaroos or tortoises rather than the domiciled dependent beaver. They carry homes within themselves, the splinters of those houses tucked in the pouches of our memories. The descriptive word “brat” is particularly suited to these pouches,

¹ Brat is an affectionate term for a military child. According to Ender’s (2002) front matter the term “brat” is an acronym of “British Regiment Attached Traveler.”

because, at one time, it was used to refer to a “pinafore,” a child’s apron (Oxford English Dictionary [OED], n.d.). These aprons, in my mind’s eye, have a pocket in front, deep, like a kangaroo’s pouch, to carry the fragments from houses and other souvenirs. In these aprons military children also carry a host of identities: some they can pull out and examine such as what it means to be American while others may be important but not at the forefront of their minds all the time—race, ethnicity, and gender. Then there are identities they do not know they had or have had to grow into as a child grows into an older siblings’ hand-me-down jacket. In all these things carried, I want to reach into the pouch and pull out identity, examining in the sunlight, that intersection of *being* of color, the *being* at home, and the *being* of a military child. In this dissertation I render the lived experience of military children of color in college settings, using home as a metaphor to interpret and re-interpret this phenomenon. To access this phenomenon, I first use my own experience to uncover my biases. I bracket my own thoughts and ideas to render fully the diversity of experiences of military brats of color in college settings.

In the midst of these houses in different countries and cities, the brat, as a child, is a term “nearly always implying insignificance” (OED, n.d.). The military child is somewhat of an after-thought. She is a visitor in civilian schools, the passer-through in a neighborhood, and a guest in many houses. She does not serve in the military like her uniformed parent, nor does she organize base life like her non-uniformed parent. Rather, she is a bystander of history: watching her parent being deployed, kissing Jim Morrison’s grave as a teen, playing in old mine fields. Pat Conroy (2006), a military brat and author, calls brats “an invisible, unorganized tribe”

(p. xix). They are unseen—chameleons on sidewalks—and their lived experiences over-looked.

What is this vagabond brat experience, and why is the experience important? Why is the formation of houseless military children important when they leave their families and attend college? What does it mean for military brats to arrive on a college campus, carrying the souls of houses, from all over the country and all over the world? How do those houses make them resilient in the college campus setting?

To go further, what does it mean to be a military brat of a race or ethnicity other than European American in the numerous homes of military life? What does it mean to be “of color” in the military community? The impact on What might it mean for military brats of color to conceive their identity as a young adult while calling a university “home?” All of these questions relate to the broader question that I am compelled by: **What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college?**

Experience, Identity, and Social Expectations of the Military Child in U.S. and Military Contexts

These above questions are like needles left over from new clothes. You forget they are there and then stick yourself. They are needles stuck in dry cleaning; those always stick me too. I forget on a daily basis that my life was an oddity, a morbid curiosity for some. I say “was an oddity” intentionally because the life of my childhood is so divorced from me now. My past and present do not match up neatly, but are as if someone ran out of solid blue paper while wrapping a present and so used the left over red plaid paper to finish. There are two clashing colors and patterns. Even before that divorce from the military way of life, I always struggled with the gap in what people expect of me as a middle-class Latina, because I forget

that is what label the dominant United States culture gives me. People ask me if I am the first in my family to go to college. They ask if I can help them communicate in Spanish. I am expected to come from a low-socio-economic status family. I am expected to have a relative who is not a citizen. The expectations are almost always negative, as if nothing good could come from a Latina. I confuse people who inquire. I do not meet their expectations, and I resent they even try to lay their mangled images of what it means to be Latina upon me.

There are parts of my identity that are sometimes in flux, and I bend my identity according to whom I am speaking (Pollock, 2004). Sometimes being a military brat is protective; it makes being “Alicia Peralta” more normal, more White. Most times I am working within multiple identities, which are constantly in flux, living on the borderlands of my nowhere consciousness (Anzaldúa, 2012). These identities are much like hermeneutic phenomenology; there is no one interpretation as there is no one phenomenology (van Manen, 1997). There is nothing simple about phenomenological interpretation or identity. When there is one interpretation, there is an equal interpretation or equal infinite interpretations. In this line of thought, I am not simply a Latina; I am a military child.

My mother told me she did not teach me Spanish for many reasons: I was slow cognitively; she did not want me to be tracked into special education because we moved so much; I had to earn the privilege of speaking Spanish; and that I am from the United States—“people speak English in this country,” she would say. Her answers always changed; they were never the same, as if there were too many reasons to count. When I was a child, my mother’s Spanish was a beautiful secret language

that I would fall asleep to as I heard her talking to my grandmother on the phone in the living room. Or I would doze to sounds of *novelas* drifting from the living room television. My mother called us *m'ja*. I never knew it was Spanish until I was older; it just meant she loved us.

I did not know bilingualism was looked down upon in some ways. I knew there was something wrong with it when I lived in the all-white suburb in Vienna, Virginia. I knew it was wrong when I lived in Sierra Vista, Arizona. Being bilingual was a double-edged sword. I could not win. I remember my Spanish teacher leaning over me and asking: “Don’t you speak Spanish at home?” I would push back: “My mother has a minor in Spanish to go with her major in Latin American studies; is that what you are asking me?” I did not know I was *ahora, no habla Español; no me preguntapor-que. puedo, comprado presque tutto....* and that is what happens when I try to speak Spanish: it becomes Spanish, French, and Italian—all words I carry, tucked in my pouch. I understand almost every word they say, but I cannot talk back. It is like being mute when all the words are inside you. But why do people from the United States want me so badly to speak Spanish?

People live in a divided world: have vs. have not, black vs. white, suburb vs. city, public vs. private. In the United States, the mantra “pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps” is seen as classless. In these dichotomies, however, are nuanced hierarchies—one class is better than the other, not all public schools are equal, and not all cities and suburbs are equal. These hierarchies are not to be “wrecked” (Abram, 1996); they are megalithic in the United States, monsters of our own making. The U.S. conveniently ignores those disenfranchised in the hierarchies—the privilege

of education, health care, and home ownership. American dreams are about moving up the hierarchy. My houses did not have such dreams despite the fact they were all entrenched in a unique military hierarchy. In military communities, housing is assigned or subsidized; education is high in quality according to test scores (Booth et al., 2007); our schools are integrated racially, ethnically, and socio-economically; children are judged more by merits than by the color of their skin (Smrekar, Guthrie, Owens, & Sims, 2001); and all military brats receive baseline healthcare. I did not understand these American dreams, because I grew up with different types of hierarchies with a different conception of poverty. As a brat and Army wife friend said to me: “Military families are poor, but they know where their next meal is coming from.” Poverty is not the same as in civilian homes. Military children have access to subsidized food, health care, and community wellness programs in an unprecedented way in American society. The American hierarchies, in some ways, were altogether foreign to me.

As military children, we were judged on our father’s rank, our athletic ability, and our intelligence. We ask each other where we lived; make connections—“You lived in Germany? Do you remember shrunks?” We discover that we lived in Panama at the same time but went to different schools. We have hierarchies, but they are not solely based on race or socio-economic status. Those factors may come into play, stereotypes of our own military sub-culture—an officer (traditionally college educated) child may be thought to be spoiled, while an enlisted or non-commissioned officer (traditionally not college educated) child might get into trouble more. The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) defines officer as “A person holding a position of

authority, especially one with a commission, in the army, navy, or air force,” while a non-commissioned officer (NCO) is not committed to a lifetime of duty that is expected of officers. Before becoming an NCO, soldiers “enlist,” which means to enroll (OED, n.d.). The terms of duty of enlisting go hand in hand with the contractual nature of the NCO’s service. Education historically has been the great divide between enlisted or NCO and officer status. The officer almost always is required to have a college degree to do his job; now he most often has a master’s degree at the upper-ranks. However, the enlisted person may join the military straight out of high school and receive vocational or other training. The NCOs are medics, drivers, and those who operate nuclear reactors on submarines and carriers. The non-commissioned officer makes less money and stereotypically tends to have less in the way of cultural capital outside the military hierarchy. Despite the stereotypes, our father’s or mother’s rank does not generally dictate the school we go to or the quality of education we receive, particularly when attending Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. We all go on field trips to Venice and to Kandinsky exhibits. We are not denied opportunities in the same way as civilian children who live in neighborhoods based on the color of their skin and attend schools based on their parents’ education level.

In many ways brats are falsely the same. We, military brats that is, live in different countries and we speak, at least, a little of the language of our host nation. We celebrate their holidays. We eat their food. However, we are all from the United States; we are all Americans. Our identities are country-based when abroad, which can render race less important to us. We are all on the same side; we live in similar

quarters, wear the same clothes from the post-exchange store, and we all stop for Retreat at 5pm. We are sentimental for our country. Skin color is there, racial tensions are not dead, but they cannot be welcomed and accepted because of the larger mission of the military: to defend a home-space (Hawkins, 2001; Williams & Mariglia, 2002). In the United States Military, it is illegal to discriminate against anyone based on to skin color or ethnicity; brats are taught what the parents must practice by law (Department of the Army, 2012).

Military Brats in Military and Civilian Contexts

What happens when military children are raised in homes and attend schools in communities where skin color is not synonymous with intelligence or ability? There is some evidence that the integrated military culture produces positive educational outcomes for military children. However, the evidence from such studies seems conveniently ignored when forming national educational policy because the experience of military children and military subculture are too different from mainstream U.S. society. In 2001, a study commissioned by Congress found little to no achievement gap in DoDEA (Smrekar et al., 2001). The absence of an achievement gap was attributed to the unique military culture where a soldier could be ordered to attend a parent-teacher conference if need be (Smreker et al., 2001). In the civilian world, parents are not necessarily afforded time off for school functions; instead, parent-teacher conferences are a luxury of white-collar, middle and upper-middle class individuals who do not work during the evening or are able to take time off. Given these cultural differences, it seemed no one followed up on the phenomenon until recently when the New York Times reported on a study by the

National Assessment of Educational Progress which corroborated the 2001 results (Winerip, 2011). If we are seeing more than 10 years of a stable phenomenon—that is the success of all military children in K-12 settings—why have we not asked real questions about what this means for the military and civilian communities?

I felt somehow disconnected when I lived among groups of middle-class civilian children. Their houses were homes, where they nested for their entire childhood. They have one or two cities. They have a sphere that they live in, one they never have to or want to leave. Their dreams are frequently bound by one or two things, and those things are never outside their homes. So when we meet, military children tell fairy-tales and civilian children call them such—I sound like a liar, spinning tales about countries many cannot locate on maps. I am still like the civilian child: if I have lived in a country or region, I cannot pinpoint necessarily a non-related location on a map. The location of your home is a lived experience.

As a military child, I was of two minds about these civilians and their homes. While I was jealous of them and their homes—their singular souls—I reveled in the pieces of houses I carried with me. My sphere was different, broader, encompassing multiple cities and countries. I had greater purview, free to go where I pleased, see without the burden of local history. However, I was envious of their ostensible stability, that hearth-space which was always theirs. Theirs was a home with roots, a pure Bachelardian (1994) house with a basement, embedded in the soil, connected intimately in the earth. As I got older, I saw that sometimes even “roots” came with their own burdens.

A house was people for me: my mother and father and sister. I was perhaps closer to my parents than civilian children, talking to my mother daily, sometimes just for fifteen minutes, because she was my hearth-space. My relationship was different, not necessarily dependent, because my parents were in another country when I was in college; they were a source of support, encouragement, and love. I distinctly remember the differences in culture that I perceived between military families and civilian families. They did not travel or move in the same way, and I felt they had no yearning to see new places or learn new things. Many of the negative images I had may have stemmed from the two slurs my mother occasionally used: *gringo* and civilian. Civilians were outsiders, unlike us in their cultural orientation, and unappreciative of the work of the U.S. military.

These prejudices I carried with me through college and into adulthood. It was only when I met someone who was military, who had never moved and who balked at the idea of moving, did I realize that my upbringing privileged certain attitudes toward the world. How did I come by these pre-judgments? Was it my family unit? Was it because my mother (first generation college graduate) adopted as many bourgeois customs as possible: sets of china bought from European manufacturing centers; crystal stemware for holidays; ballet lessons no matter where we moved. In her eyes, we may have been Latino but we were not low-class. We were never allowed to say we were Mexican, but we were always proud of our upper-middle class white-skinned Puerto Rican family (my father's side of the family). How is my understanding of civilians really comprised of odd confluences of military culture,

class privilege, colorism, and ethnicity? To this day separating this is as confusing as the skin whitening cream I would find in my mother's cluster of mysterious jars.

In this confusion of converging identities, I often felt like I was watching Thornton Wilder's (1957) *Our Town*, a piece of Americana, a satisfaction with life that I could not seem to access. The tropes of an American town, American house, growing up to marry the girl or boy next door, attending schools your mother and grandmother attended were not accessible to me, but made me feel alien, a stranger in my own home. Sometimes, the civilian houses felt like false homes to me, and the trinkets in them were meaningless items, Christmas ornaments in boxes, plastic from Hallmark, mass-produced, and without memory or dreams. Things and status were placed before human needs. While not all civilians were like this, I knew this life was not mine; their house was not my house.

In my last semester of college, a Japanese friend gave me a few books from her senior thesis on Third Culture Kids. In this collection, was a book edited by a military sociologist at West Point called *Global Nomads* (Ender, 2002). This book included a statistic which floored me: two thirds of military brats have a college degree and about 29 percent have a post-baccalaureate degree (Cottrell, 2002; Ender, 2002). Even now, this makes me wonder, why are military brats so successful in college? What do we carry with us, those pieces of countries, houses, cultures, language, and family that make us resilient in college settings?

The Military Brat Identity

To civilian kids "brat" is a fighting word, but to army families on the West Coast or the East, in scattered garrisons throughout the Midwest, in posts from Florida to Alaska and the Philippines, kids born in the shadow of the flag flying over their homes are lovingly known as

‘brats’—‘Army Brats,’ and this is the story of one of them. (Wadelton, 1943, p. 3)

Upon opening *Military Brats and Other Global Nomads*, the page before the table of contents gives two definitions of a brat. The first is from Webster’s dictionary—“Child, offspring...an army~ whose father was a colonel” and “B*R*A*T” defined as “British Regiment Attached Traveler” (Ender, 2002). Defining the brat as a colonel’s child has very different connotations than the second definition. The colonel, as an officer, overseeing operations, possesses privilege and is more educated than others in the military, imbuing the word with negative images of a spoiled, unruly child with whom no one wants to associate willingly. The word in this sense becomes individualistic which goes against the communal nature of the military. However, the second definition applies to all children who have a parent in the military. In this case the child is attached to the regiment, the unit, a larger entity other than the parent in the second definition. The military culture is the child’s home and the lived-place in this incidental home. In this way, we see the possibility for a multi-dimensional and complex military brat identity.

Climbing out of the book definitions, what is a military brat identity? Who are military brats and how do we live? How do we know we are different? What sets us apart from our civilian peers beyond our multiple houses and homes? Is birth the only way to have military brat identity? Military brat identities are bestowed, steeped in the absence and the presence of a strict geographic home. We are seemingly a result of never having a hometown, an *Our Town* (1957) existence, as much as we are the result of the places we have lived. Geography is ephemeral to the military brat—three years is as fleeting as it is transformational. We are of the city in which we

currently live as much as we are of our last city or next country. We do not choose this life; our fathers and mothers choose it for us. In this way, as O'Donohue (1997) says, "Identity was not offered for your choosing" (p. 83). We do not choose what color we are, height, the socio-economic status of our families, or the place we were born. These, all parts of identity, are not offered, but given. In some ways, the military brat identity is no different. Our fathers and mothers choose for us.

In what ways is this identity given? In some cases, a brat identity is gifted to children by virtue of being "born under the shadow of the flag flying over their homes" (Wadelton, 1943, p. 3). The geographical locations of our homes—Florida, Alaska, the Philippines—change, but the flag is always there. The United States and her symbols are, much like our families, a constant. As a country, it is a home-space, a source of who we are. Military children and families must believe that their fathers could die for something bigger and more important than them (Hawkins, 2001; Williams & Mariglia, 2002)—the continuity and health of a nation. The military brat identity is enmeshed in that something bigger: family, the institutional military, and country.

The mother of Morten Ender (2002), a well-known military sociologist, married an American serviceman in Germany when Ender was little. Professor Ender writes about attending kindergarten while crossing the Atlantic on a Navy vessel called the *USNS Patch*: "Although I have no memory of the experience, the *Patch* journey was my first exposure to military kids. Mom tells me I fit in and the other kids accepted me....It was my first impression of Americans, as I had been born and raised in Germany and I spoke no English" (Ender, 2002, p. xxi). Military children

come into this life in many ways: they are born into this life; their mothers and fathers marry into this life. Ender did not necessarily choose the identity. The military identity was thrust upon him. His story is not just about transience, moving, or home. Ender was a young German, a new American who did not speak English but found friends with strangers—other young children who lived all over Europe, perhaps speaking another language themselves, and who readily accepted him. Despite his difference and the differences of the other children, he discovered friends, another family, a place of belonging in the military community. Perhaps it was on a navy vessel, in the middle of the Atlantic, that a small German boy located a home-space, the military community and culture. The military brat identity is one of openness to others, places, experiences: friends are made and roots put down quickly; orders to move come every two-and-a-half years, and actual moves shortly thereafter creating a clean and tidy three year rotation cycle. Time is short to put down roots and create networks. Within military communities, those networks are almost ready made, because we all understand the realities of moving and finding friends. We know what it is like to have many friends in the world and no friends in a single town. We know what it is like not to speak a language, to be mute. And we know what it is like to have a home and not have a home. Therefore, we have many homes: cities, countries, and regions we lived in, the United States; the locations of extended family; friends around the world wherever they may be; and the larger military brat community.

As young military brats, we do not necessarily know that we are different from civilian children. We simply accept that nothing is static, everything changes—the locations of our homes, schools, friends, countries. When we go to civilian

schools, we learn our difference. Many civilian children do not move like military children, so when a brat enters a conventional public school in the United States, the brat may not be welcomed in the same manner as at a DoDEA school. Civilian children have no incentive to get to know the new person, because they have their friends, homes, and the safety of that one place, where their roots are embedded, sometimes generationally in the town or region. We feel unwelcomed in their established social networks.

A child who comes in from another country is suspect, a foreigner and outsider, even if they are American. The customs and knowledge are rather different. As a Third grader I spent a single spring semester attending Meadowbrook Elementary School in Norfolk, Virginia. I briefly sat next to an African American boy to whom I was explaining the geography around Panama, where I had lived only a month or two before. When I named the country of Nicaragua, he became visibly agitated. “You said N****r,” he said. I was confused. I did not know what the N word was at the time. He did not believe me when I pronounced “Nick-A-ra-gua.” He called me a racist. I responded: “I am half Puerto Rican.” “Dirty Puerto Rican,” he called me. It was the first time I had been called anything based on my ethnicity.

I think back at his confusion and pain that Nicaragua was a racial slur, but I also was confused. We lived in very different worlds. In my world, I was an officer’s daughter. I was an American. I loved Panama, the country. I was Puerto Rican and White. I had a life beyond Norfolk, Virginia. I do not remember this person’s name, but I remember his caramel colored skin. He taught me that the civilian world was nothing like mine. To this day, all the racial slurs I know, with the exception of

gringo, I learned from children who grew up civilian. I wonder how often he was judged, how he, as a third grader, knew that word. Who said it to him and in what context? In what ways was my military community different? Why was it we did not say these words? Is it because by law our parents cannot say these words according to military protocols? Is the military system protective in this way? Were these words simply said behind closed doors in soldiers' homes?

As I got older, the military brat identity became protective, a cocoon of safety from certain American social constructions of race and ethnicity. I am Hispanic, or I was when I moved away from the U.S. at 18 to attend college in Belgium. When I returned, I was Latina and White. This, in some ways, was cultural confusion for me. I am asked questions about my background: are you the most educated in your family? Are you the first in your family to attend college? Did you grow up poor? Is your family illegal? When I say "I am a military brat," or "I grew up military," suddenly I am safe, regarded differently by the individuals who say awkward things to me. Part of me gets upset as I respond, "My Puerto Rican grandfather was a colonel in the Chemical Corps and my father is a colonel working with NATO. We have been here for generations, and because of my family's service, I have more of a right to be here than you."

Not Perfect, but Somehow Better: Growing up Minority and a Military Brat

Important though the experience of men in the military ranks who have been raised in civilian families and who bring civilian values into the military may be, possibly even more significant are those of their children who have been born and raised in a desegregated environment. Although proponents of racial integration base their position fundamentally upon social justice and constitutional obligations, they also see it as conferring benefits not only upon

members of the minority, in improved performance, self-concept, and orientation to the future, but upon members of both the minority and majority, in mutual regard. (Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974, p. 3)

In 1974, African American Air Force Captain Quentin Ridgely conducted research with Alice Yohalem of Columbia University's Conservation of Human Resources Project. This is the year my sister was born to a Mexican American mother and a White Puerto Rican father at the hospital at Fort Benning, Georgia. The year before, my White skinned Puerto Rican father was commissioned as a First Lieutenant in the United States Army, a single year after my grandfather Roberto Peralta, a Puerto Rican colonel in the Chemical Corps, retired from the United States army. The military, in 1974, was not always safe for individuals of color, but in some ways it was safer than the alternative civilian world. While the race riots were quieting and the military was recovering from the public relations debacle of Vietnam, the military was a laboratory for desegregation, a laboratory that yielded good results (Moskos & Butler, 1997). Twenty years after Truman ordered the integration of the military (Moskos & Butler, 1997), "Black military [NCO] youth show[ed] a higher rate of college enrollment than that of civilian youth growing up in comparable socio-economic circumstances" (Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974, p. ix). By all accounts, many of the results of the 1974 study point to the wrecking of the hierarchies (Abram, 1996), a breaking open of binaries, and hope for equality.

In 1943, my grandfather Roberto Peralta of Sabana Grande, Puerto Rico, a recent chemistry degree recipient at the Interamerican University (then Polytechnic), was drafted for World War II (National Archives, n.d.). He was drafted into the Puerto Rican 295th National Guard Unit, which, along with the all-Puerto Rican 65th

Infantry Regiment, was sent to the Panama Canal zone (Segal & Segal, 2004).

Roberto never left the military. He became a career officer in the Chemical Corps, married, had children, and was promoted to the rank of full colonel despite a single bad fitness report² given by a prejudiced officer—the fitness report was “lost” at the Pentagon, so it never showed up on his record. In 1968 or 1969, he placed a ROTC scholarship application in front of his third son, my father David Peralta. David had moved enough times in his life—Panama, Puerto Rico, Alabama, Maryland—that he had briefly seen the “Whites only” fountains in the South, but did not know he or the military were culturally different. David “passed,” his white skin protecting him from racial incidents, despite his father’s ethnicity and his ties to Puerto Rico. I do not know how aware he was of his odd existence at the intersections of worlds: Puerto Rican, White, military culture, mainstream U.S. culture. David Peralta was a military brat.

Like my father, I exist in all these places, with the overlay of my gender. I play with these hierarchies each day, navigating how people perceive me and how I perceive myself. When I moved to Vienna, Virginia, I still sorely missed Panama: mangos straight off the tree; playing in the jungle; hunting for starfish at Punta Chame in low tide. In Panama, the houses were magical: the first had a balcony the size of a formal living room, a green and white bill protruding from a handsome, white bird. The second stood on stilts—siding like a graying stork—elegantly overlooking the parade field. From the wall of windows in that living room, I saw the

² Fit-Rep is short for a Fitness Report, which was the evaluation that officers were given to assess their suitability for promotion. A single bad fitness report can result in an officer being “passed over” for promotion to the next rank.

top of the Queen Elizabeth II as it passed through the Panama Canal. I held these houses inside me, even as a nine-year old, newly arrived in Virginia. My ethnicity and affectionate recollections of those houses caused confusion with my fourth grade class. I once arrived at school late and one of the students, or perhaps it was the teacher, announced they thought I was not coming to school that day because of my relatives in Panama. They knew I was Hispanic, but they did not understand the complexity of my background. I struggled to tell them that you can live in a country and not be from the country. Perhaps though, now that I am older, I know it is even more complex. In some ways, I feel as much Italian from living in Italy as I feel Hispanic. The homes, stitched together like quilt squares, are laid on a base of my Mexican American and Puerto Rican heritage.

This is My American Quilt

Sometimes my identity is passive, packaged and handed to me as I construct my homes and move houses. I remember the first time I had an inkling of what it meant to be a “minority.” In Italy, I attended a school comprised of one single hallway that served about 100 youth between the ages of 5 and 14. There were about 16 people in my 7th and 8th combined classroom. As a new 7th grader I was working hard to make friends, and I was fortunate enough that the 8th grade girls seemed to like me. The classroom was diverse: a Puerto Rican male, two African American females, two European-Asians (male and female), and myself. One of the European-Asian girls informed me that I was not a minority. I was confused: I knew I checked “Hispanic.” I thought that is what made me a “minority.” When I asked why, she

told me my skin was white. How could I be a minority and white skinned at the same time? What about a person makes them a minority?

But still, I question: does my white skin give me enough privilege to pass? When is my skin-color salient? When does it matter? While I had these initial hard discussions in the military community and culture, they did not define me as a person, nor were they stigmatizing. I was an officer's daughter: I knew I had privilege because of my parents' education, and I knew that privilege mattered more than my ethnicity. Even today, I think about how I now check "White" in addition to "Latino/a" because I am now obliged to choose a race. Does skin color make you a minority? Or is this a way to make a Latina with white skin "White" by law, using skin color to separate out an ethnic community?

Living in Arizona for part of high school made me tired of trying to explain to civilian teachers who and what I was: a Hispanic military child. Many of them asked me about my family: are you related to that Peralta in Bisbee? Or do you speak Spanish at home? My high school boyfriend, who was Taiwanese and White, hid the fact that he was dating me because I was Puerto Rican/Mexican American. These judgments hurt. I remembered in Italy that I was judged for being an American more often than not, a feeling that was easier to handle than wrestling with my U.S. racial identity. I chose to apply to college in Belgium, where if I were yelled at or asked ignorant questions, it would be because of my nationality rather than because of my ethnicity. Being American and being a brat is easier than being Mexican American/Puerto Rican.

In a recent conversation with a sociologist who has done work on military children and race in K-12 settings, I found these experiences may not be unusual since the sociologist believes that military children do go through the stages of identity development when it comes to race, but at a different pace from civilian children. This means that military children may have a delayed recognition and understanding of racial structures in the U.S. context, which may or may not be protective for military children during their college experience. Navigating racial and ethnic identity in military culture is not altogether different. There are still questions of social and economic privilege, especially since many of our non-commissioned officers are of color (Segal & Segal, 2004). However, I remember my Puerto Rican grandfather with white skin and a heavy Spanish accent and I think about what opportunities may have been open to him in the military culture that may not have been open to him had he simply come to the Mainland U.S. Furthermore, I think of the opportunities open to my father, my sister, and me, because we did not always have someone telling us who we were or what our socially acceptable roles were because of rank or skin color. Rather, we had to figure out who we were based on the history of the earth underneath us, the country we lived in, the memories our parents passed on to us, and the customs of our families. My white skin played an enormous role in blending into mainstream U.S. culture, but the psychologically semi-protective cover of “I am a military brat” prevented me from only seeing myself as others might see me: a Hispanic, a Latina, someone who probably came from poverty, had illegal parents or was illegal herself, or a girl lacking education and polish. Growing up as a Latina military brat was not perfect, but somehow better.

Something Isn't Right: Race, Education, and Department of Defense Schools

There are moments of Being where the “whatness and thatness” converge, and we suddenly know the question, the seeking (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 45).

Heidegger observes that questioning a phenomenon does not happen in a vacuum, a sudden blossoming of curiosity and drive, but rather:

Every questioning is a seeking. Every seeking takes its direction beforehand from what is sought. Questioning is a knowing search for beings in their thatness and whatness...As a seeking, questioning needs previous guidance from what it seeks. (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 45)

Each question begins with the past, with “previous guidance” or events that have shaped our Being. In this way, we must look to the past to see which direction we should take. These convergences of questioning and seeking happen every day as our *Dasein* or being moves forward. However, there are some convergences of “whatness and thatness” that completely reset our life course, give us direction and conviction to recover what has seemingly been lost, left, or forgotten in order to improve our collective future.

I had this moment in 2006-2007 while working as a new faculty assistant at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. I had spent the year before teaching 8th grade Humanities and earning my Master's in Education as part of the Boston Teachers Residency Program. While I enjoyed planning curricula, I was miserable at delivery—I hated standing up in front of students. I was naked, struggling to say the right thing, to effectively manage thirty 8th graders. My mentor teacher and I argued over content, and I felt like a fraud when she would strip out what I thought of as essential—thesis statements—from my lesson because, as she would say, “These kids can't learn content.” *These kids*, What did she mean by “these kids” and how were

they so different from me? My eighth graders lived in a different world from the one I grew up in despite my Latina status. They were African American and Latino. Many of their mothers were not much older than I was; many lived with grandmothers, aunts, or family members other than their mother or father. Families worked multiple jobs to pay rent, provide food, buy clothes. My students were not simply “low-income,” or “minorities.” My students were smart and funny and wanted to learn.

I remember my mentor teacher assigned one of my students to a spelling group that was below his level. I asked her why she would do that since we both knew he was an excellent speller and should be in one of the higher groups, if not the highest group. I cannot remember her response, but I remember the child’s response: “Miss, why am I in this group? These are so easy.” He was rightly confused. I told him I would talk to my mentor teacher to get him out of the group and into another since it was obvious he already knew the words. I was confused myself. I failed in not standing up more to the mentor teacher. Instead, I deferred to her. I became part of the system of oppression that decreases access to knowledge in our urban schools.

In all of this, I started to wonder how I, as a Latina, had escaped sub-par schools during my K-12 education. How did my mother, a Mexican American, and my father, a Puerto-Rican American, navigate the U.S. educational system and go to college? In what ways was my family different from my students’ families? The seeking began.

My mother’s father, Adan Salgado, had ruddy dark brown, reddish hued skin. His hair was always well-greased, curly. Born in Mexico, he became a ranch-hand in

Roswell, where my mother and her siblings were raised. My white-skinned grandmother, also Mexican American, was the child of migrant workers. My mother was the oldest of four. While it may not be completely true, I cannot help but draw a color line in my family when it comes to education, class, and color, especially when it comes to comparing my mother's experience as a Latina girl and my father's experience as a Latino boy in the 60s. My father's family all have white skin. They have "money"—my mother's words, not mine. Most everyone has at least a bachelor's degree, if not professional degrees. However, there is an additional factor: my father's privilege may stem from an upper-middle class Puerto Rican background, but he grew up as a military brat moving all over the states, Puerto Rico, and Panama. Race was not as salient to my father, not in the same way as it was to my mother. I carry both with me: my mother telling me my White skin would open doors to pass, but to never forget where I came from, and my father's stories about how he did not realize that attending an integrated school in Alabama in the early 1960s was anything special. My mother had the experience of being "raced in America." My father did not have this experience, not just because of his white skin, but because he grew up in the military culture.

How did military children and young adults perceive race in the 1960s and 1970s? In 1971 Alexander Shine was the second African American to graduate from the Citadel, a public military college in South Carolina (Macaulay, 2011). According to Macaulay (2011), while Shine faced rampant racism, he "benefited also from the fact that several K Company freshmen had come from military backgrounds and had attended integrated schools" (p. 71). The military society was altogether different in

its approach to race, something that military children internalized even if their parents had racist thoughts and feelings. My father grew up differently, but he was not ignorant of race relations, even receiving special training as a race relations officer in the 1970s. He simply marked race in a different way. I attribute his inexperience somewhat to his skin color. However, I cannot ignore that he attended an integrated school in early 1960s Alabama, and how something, that was so normal to a military child, could have lasting social impact.

After teaching in a segregated school in Dorchester, Massachusetts, I started to wonder how I never attended a segregated school. The Department of Defense Schools I attended—all five of them—were integrated. The elementary school outside Norfolk and the high school in Arizona seemingly served the base in addition to the local community; both were integrated. How were civilian schools not integrated? What was the use of *Brown v. Board of Education*? What was it about the schools I attended that I actually learned content? My DoDEA teachers taught me a thesis statement in eighth grade, a lesson I was told was not appropriate for my 8th graders attending an urban school in Boston. There was nothing wrong with “*these kids*.” There was something not right with “*these schools*.”

Bitter and shaken, I left teaching and returned to Harvard with plans to be an administrator. Hired back as a faculty assistant at the Graduate School of Education, faculty started to give me articles, book chapters, edited volumes, and books for editing and formatting. That is how Mica Pollock’s work, *Everyday Antiracism: Getting Real about Race in School* (2008) and *Because of Race: How Americans Debate Harm and Opportunity in Our Schools* (2010), came across my desk and

brought me to a new point in seeking. I worked for hours on the two volumes, contacting contributors, inputting edits, attending the teacher training course where *Everyday Antiracism* was used. I felt validated while working with the *Because of Race* manuscript: I saw my experience, the despair, and I realized that I was not crazy: something was not right with “these schools.” I got on to ERIC and typed Military Children into the search function. This is how I found Smrekar Gutherie, Owens, and Sims’ (2001) study on how there was little to no achievement gap in the Department of Defense Schools. I also found citations such as Smrekar and Owens’ (2003) “‘It’s a Way of Life for Us’: High Mobility and High Achievement in Department of Defense Schools.”

The research confirmed my frustration and lack of understanding. Not only was there something not right with “*these schools*,” but there was something inherently different in the way I grew up, the community I lived in, the schools I went to, and the military culture. I had my question, my seeking, my convergence, which I carry even now. What happens to military children, especially those of color, when they leave the military community, attend college, and learn that their father and mother’s service means nothing to people operating in mainstream American cultural paradigms about race? What happens to our identities, and how does our military child identity function in a civilian world? And in what ways do we process these identities in a college setting with the academic challenges, social struggles, and cognitive dissonance that accompanies learning about race? Something is not right. What was it about military culture and communities that works for all children?

My convergence is open, looking forward to what the military culture and community can teach us about what works for young people while looking back at the military child experience. As a Latina, I have always been caught between culture and my white skin. As a military child, I was caught between being a military child and Latina. As a researcher, I find I am caught between rendering the military child experience in college and bringing something of good to the broader community. I carry all these things inside me. While I can only recover the “whatness” and “thatness” of the experience of the military child in college settings, I hope this research can result in something good for the civilian children like my eighth graders.

Coming of Age as a Military Child: College and Civilianization

It [going to college] presents them with a time of change when their very identity is called into question. At a crucial stage in their lives it causes them to reflect on, and to react to, their home and cultural background, to reconsider their relations with others, and to question who they are to become. (Levering, 2000, p. 203)

Military children must leave their parents, leave the military base, and move behind the new university gates. The new gates are usually black wrought iron, ceremonial, attached to stone walls, constructed a hundred years ago, to signify the boundaries of the university-place. These gates are nothing like the military base gates—chain link fences with barbed wire, connected to guard houses where men stand with guns. The base gates function to keep civilians out, the military community in, which is very much like many of our university gates—the enclosure signifies a separation from the surrounding town. In higher education, the university and town relations are often called “Town/Gown”—a clever rhyme to set up a binary

relationship between the two: you are of the university or you are of the town. You cannot be from both.

Both the base and the university worlds are self-contained, temporary homes, for mobile populations. Rotations and graduations are expected, marked ceremoniously—move in days for colleges bring families from all over the country to drop off their children. Two suitcases per student if they fly; the seeds of their college life and their tokens from “home” and “house” packed tightly, neatly, and ceremoniously carried from shuttle to residence hall. On the military base, the scene is much the same but without the ceremony—moving trucks in drive ways at the end of summer as packers load or unload dish barrels, trunks wrapped in brown packing tape. Behind these gates, cycles of life play out. Who are the military children of color who leave the gates of military bases for the gates of the university? How do they feel moving between worlds? Is it like any other move? How do they perceive their culture and identities in civilian contexts? Do their identities change? And how can military children of color reflect on home when their constructs may be altogether different from those around them? How are they different from their civilian peers?

Military children may know how to live behind gates, the insular community set apart, but how do they choose these communities, their college experience, when their homes and communities always have been chosen for them? What happens when home is a place you can choose, not a set of orders given to your father or mother by the United States government? And what happens when most of your choices are perhaps a continent away?

One military child writes about her brother's journey to college, one that was brokered by family and friends in the United States when the family was residing abroad (Castro, 2012). College was not a place to be visited or chosen, but a communal and collaborative process of practical concerns: proximity to family, in-state tuition, appropriate major. College may not be a place to find yourself, because you have only ever had your family and yourself. The street you live on is not yours, nor is the house, but they are temporary places to grow. There is a sentimental attachment, but not a narrow one, precluding all other houses and homes. The attachment is not necessarily visceral. Rather than visceral attachments, there is nostalgia—this home saw my first kiss or this tree watched me say good bye to my best friend when I was 10. There is no duty to return to the place where you went to high school. The absence of parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents is felt; a place without blood relatives is simply a place to be, not a home.

Many military children choose colleges by not choosing. Rather, the choices are sensible and obvious. In the 1940s, the University of Maryland, University College, opened a campus in Munich, Germany for the sons and daughters of military families stationed abroad. This was after Claire Schwann, a colonel's daughter, who had fallen in love with Germany, asked her father about the possibility of University of Maryland classes for children of military families (Woessner, 2002). Not more than a decade later, the University of Maryland had a thriving program for dependents whose fathers were stationed in Europe. Major General Paul A. Gavan, in his welcome in the 1960-61 college catalogue, recognized the need for higher education close to military bases for the convenience of military families, who otherwise would

have to send their child aboard a ship across the ocean, back to America, for the entirety of their college education (University of Maryland, n.d.). Nearly 40 years later, my 18-year old sister came to Italy to see us for Christmas. After the New Year, my parents packed my sister and me in the car and drove to Augsburg, Germany, where my parents, seemingly on the spot, enrolled my sister in the University of Maryland, Augsburg. My sister would go to three colleges total, each time ostensibly making the choice to stay close to us as we moved from place to place. Despite the transfers—Maryland to Colorado to Arizona—she graduated with a bachelor’s degree in political science with a minor in Italian in exactly 4 years.

Are these choices of where to attend college so obvious and easy for the military child? Is it a choice? Whose choice? Military brat and Doors singer Jim Morrison graduated from high school in Northern Virginia as his Admiral father received orders to move to California (Hopkins & Sugarman, 1995). His parents enrolled him in a community college in Florida near his grandparents. He transferred to Florida State University and then finally to California for film school (Hopkins & Sugarman, 1995). While Jim was not necessarily on speaking terms with his parents given his father’s disappointment with Jim’s choice of major, he strangely went as close to “home” as possible to pursue his education and his dream. “Home” or California where his parents were, called to him, artistically and academically—giving him a place to grow creatively at the intersections of music and poetry (Hopkins & Sugarman, 1995). In this way, for the military child, the location of college and location of home may be intimately intertwined. The military child’s identity, past homes and future homes, can be soldered together, intermeshed wires of

a mother board. The pattern is very similar to my sister, despite the fact Jim Morrison and she went to college twenty years apart. How do military children make these choices and move from home without having a home from which they can move? Home and family being synonymous, military brats find they must question or explain their military culture but seem to insist on being close to family. How are these choices made with family in mind?

Even if these are not gates that military children actively choose, what does it mean to live behind the wrought iron gates of the university? Military children do not necessarily know there was anything different or unusual about their upbringing until they enter the gates of the university, where they intimately encounter civilian children who may have grown up going to integrated schools, lived in the same houses all their lives, and never left the continent or state.

“No Hold on Things”: Between the Military Family Life and College

My transition to and experience in college meant leaving the military community for a European college where I had to become someone else. I did not understand this at the time, did not see the class and social structures around me. How often are we aware of the water around us? For all the military children’s ability to transition to other cultures and places, they can always go home to the military community. However, college is different—a transition away from the military family and away from childhood. The rug is pulled out from under our feet as military children, without our consent and to our confusion. The transition is a descent into anxiety and nothingness, which Heidegger (1967/2008a) describes so astutely: “In the slipping away of beings only this ‘no hold on things’ comes over us

and remains” (p. 101). I was altogether absent from the newly stitched garment; my being slipped away, feeling powerless to “hold” myself together. What I became was something holistically different, so alien that it took years for the new stitching to become soft enough to conform to my own being. For many years, I did not know myself.

A Military Brat in College

My college was made of cinderblock towers, sensible concrete with floors numbered by an unfathomable fire safety code, a set for a 1970s communist higher education propaganda film. I went to an international college in Europe inside a socialist, atheist university, which also was divided by language. The buildings loom over some green, blending in with the overcast sky. On the grey campus, under an almost permanently grey sky, I majored in Literature Studies, taking a variety of mainly genre-based courses at my college and at the French campus and the Flemish campuses. We read King Lear line-by-line for a complete academic year; we memorized the Edith Hamilton (1998); *et oui, j'appris français*. The college was cheap in comparison to anything I would have paid in the United States. My family would have never been able to afford St. John's College in Annapolis or Carleton College in Minnesota. I still marvel that I managed to have a rather complete first-rate classical education that cost one year's tuition at an elite university.

In 2006, almost five years after I had graduated, I sat down to watch the American adaptation of the Spanish telenovela, *Ugly Betty* (*Yo soy Betty, la fea*). In the show, a somewhat overweight America Ferrera dons glasses, braces, and a dreadful oversized poncho. She walks into a large publishing company, hoping to get

a job on her merits. Instead, she encounters a world quite different from the Queens neighborhood she grew up in: women, perfectly coiffed, hair smoothed into chignons, gracefully navigating bleached bright floors in Jimmy Choos, and well-tailored dresses. Betty clearly is out of her league. I was Ugly Betty. I do not exaggerate: my glasses were large, my braces bright, and my clothes were from the military post-exchange or perhaps, at best, Macy's, a middle-brow department store. I was the ugly American. I talked too loud. I said too much. I wore oversized sweat-shirts and jeans. I was a self-proclaimed feminist and Catholic. I simply thought people should be judged on their merits and not on their appearance, and I told people as much. I was a sharp contrast to the pedigreed students with whom I attended school. I did not realize how pedigreed until I saw someone's brother in the society pages of *Vanity Fair*.

Van Manen (1997) observes that all phenomenology is “after the fact” or “retrospective.” In making meaning of my college experience, I did not understand the full power of the intersections of class, nationality, and culture, until years after I had graduated. Nor did I understand the stark cultural differences I had successfully navigated until after I had navigated them. However, I remembered the social alienation and the general feeling of academic failure because of my cultural difference. The other students spoke more than one language, came from titled or old money families, and carried name brand bags. Their clothes were name-brand, well-made, and the height of European fashion: tailored shirts hugged the svelte figures of the girls, who too often seemed like full-grown women to me, which they were from their gap years traveling the world, working internships with their father's companies,

and attending language schools or other universities in other countries. I knew one girl who smoked Cartier cigarettes, because she said they tasted better. Summers were spent on yachts, at family country homes, or interning at an office in Italy where their father had connections. The social-class divide was not just a chasm; it felt like the Grand Canyon.

My first semester was marked with the struggle of not feeling like I was learning anything of substance and my constant ostensible social mishaps inside and outside the classroom. In my ethics class, a philosophy elective, we began a discussion with a moral dilemma: Would you choose placing all suffering on one little girl for the sake of the happiness of the world, or would you have everyone suffer? My 18-year-old self ventured to start the conversation: “No, because I would know about the little girl.” “But Americans are responsible for the genocide in Rwanda” a Swedish girl said.

An African girl then jumped in, addressing another international travesty. The class spiraled out of the professor’s control, as I had become the “American” who was responsible for each horrific world event—when our military went in, and when our military did not go in. We were evil occupiers and guilty silent partners, participating in mass killing and mass oppression of people of every color and creed. Everyone knew my father was a NATO officer, which compounded the accusations. I walked out 3 hours later, shell-shocked. An Italian girl, whose father was a United Nations officer, looked at me and said: “I would never let them talk about my country that way.”

Four years later, I returned to the United States an ostensibly different person. My French was excellent for an American. I knew how to dress: black skirts, fitted blouses, well-tailored pants. I was slender, so the clothes I bought hung well on me. My hair was well coiffed. And I knew how to apply simple make-up. Most of all, I knew what to say, when to say it, and how to say it. The interviews I had looking for a part-time position say more than I can about the transformation: Cartier, The Ritz, and Harvard University. This well-finished-self was instrumental in finding my vocation in higher education. I sent a single resume to work as a part-time assistant to a professor in the Harvard English Department. University Professor Helen Vendler hired me on the spot, later telling me: “You walked into my office, and I knew you could do anything.”

The Art of Persistence or How Loss Breeds Resilience for the Military Child in College

The Art of Losing isn't hard to master;
 So many things seem filled with the intent
 To be lost that their loss is not disaster
 (Bishop, 1999, p. 2624)

As Elizabeth Bishop (1999) describes loss in her poem, “One Art,” it is a loss that military brats know intimately—door keys to the multiple houses we have lived in, each crafted in the fashion of the country or lock-type. European skeleton keys dig into your thighs when you tuck them into a jeans pocket, declaring their individuality and daring you to lose them. How will you enter your house without them? They cannot be copied. American keys tend to be more generic, only the ridge of the key can tell you its difference. The American keys can be put on chains while you are running or tucked in a boot when you are going out. They can be

copied at hardware stores. Military children are used to the systematic loss of door keys. These keys are friends for three years, perhaps two, and then we pass them to another owner. Keys to rooms in residence halls are no different: we tuck them in our pockets, silvery or sometimes worn brass in color, and always worn in texture as the hands of countless other undergraduates have clutched them. These keys are ours for only a short time, so we keep them, protect them, but we are always aware they are loans, short-term relationships for our years in college. The residence hall keys are replaceable.

In this choosing of the college life, and the choosing of civilian life, the military child is rapidly losing a way of life—the distance between family, the places parents go on a temporary duty assignment (TDY), the names of the parents' new friends in their new duty station, and the ability to travel. They at first creep out of our reach slowly; we are too busy with college to notice. Suddenly, the military child has new friends and new experiences behind the new gates; and we grow as individuals, sometimes in conflict with our military families and roots. Military child Mary Lawlor (2013) describes the conflict well as a military child attending the American University in Paris in 1968—she befriended “draft dodgers” whose world views were diametrically opposed to that of her fighter pilot father. Stuck between two worlds, she was gradually losing access to her father's military world, even though she worked for the heavily military-affiliated University of Maryland system in Europe after leaving college (Lawlor, 2013). This schism, breaking of self into two, or experimenting with the non-military community is a part of our becoming an adult. The older we get, the more military children lose access to places we know;

behind new gates, we can never really go back to the old gates. As we grow aware of this loss, it happens faster: losing people, places, our military family, and a way of life. The military base, the place that used to keep us in, will now begin to keep us out—being shut out is not a disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
(Bishop, 1999, p. 2624)

Military children survive losing houses, the apartments in Europe, split-levels in the suburbs, base quarters in the mountains. We persist, showing grit and resilience with the loss of these loved houses. There is always another to take its place, so losing them is not so much a disaster. Our college house is one of many, and by the time we arrive, losing is something we have mastered. One military child, who attended a Christian college in the Southwest, described moving residence halls and having a new roommate each year. While her civilian peers thought this was odd, she did not mind the newness, the change. To her it was rather normal and not negative at all. Military children know this is a temporary existence, a between place, a growth place, much like all the other places we have lived.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.
(Bishop, 1999, p. 2624)

Perhaps we persist in college because we realize it is okay to miss cities, rivers, mountains, and continents. We know the feeling, the initial ache and discomfort, the feeling of foreignness in a place that should not be foreign. A Swedish phenomenological scholar and the spouse of a diplomat told me about a young man who had recently moved to Australia and would not change the time on

his watch—he had lost a city and a country, but he could hold on to the time, the watchband hugging his wrist, close to his pulse, his heart beat ticking at the pace of the hand. Eventually, Australia began to seep into his pores, becoming a part of him, filling the loss of the city and country, which will be missed and remembered but now with a fondness and nostalgia that only time brings. The lulling resilience brought on by time fends off disaster. Loss is temporary when there is so much to gain in a new place.

Perhaps people are the primary loss for military children. We make friends easily and sometimes just as easily leave those friends behind. On the college campus, this cycle is much the same. As many people as we may lose, we also gain, expanding our networks, which after a while are not losses at all. We find that leaving friends does not mean we completely lose them. Rather, the friendship is simply on hold, existing in a shared time and shared place. By the time the military child arrives at college, the practice of loss becomes positive—new friendships blossom, the worldview expands, exposure to people unlike and like the military child. College becomes like any other duty station where loss is not a disaster, because it is equally coupled with the richness of a new adventure. All loss is an art; stoking the resilience of the military child who knows little in the world is a disaster. But how does college prepare us for the loss of our childhood?

When I returned to the states, there were new realities: my life abroad and status as a military child were over. I was a civilian now. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.), Civilian means “a person who is not professionally employed in the armed forces; a non-military person.” While I was never employed,

my father was, so I was part of that world by default. I did not choose to be a part of that world, but I did choose to be outside it. This was one of the first adult choices I made: I chose not to join the United States Army. For the first time in two generations, a 2nd Lieutenant was not commissioned from my family. With this decision, I lost the access to my childhood.

Re-Turning and Remembering the Military Child: Phenomenology and the Children of the Other 1%

In a recent conversation, a military brat acquaintance said her childhood was a blur, like being on a train, it all passed, grey, place-to-place, in the American South, where she did not belong. The memories of the houses, streets, and schools were never anchored with-in her. She lived in a Bachelardian (1994) rootless house, no-basements to connect her with the earth underneath. She never felt the places in her—they were never nestled in her soul, nourishing it like sticks in a fire. Place was also never with her, as it passed too quickly. Or perhaps, she never reached the houses, but stayed with the wheels of the train beneath her—always an alienated tourist, never a local. Instead of a richness with-in sustaining her, there was nothing.

The lived experiences of military brats are much like their constructions of home: they are no one thing. While her memories were grey and blurred, my own are vibrant, anchored with-in, touching the earth and knowing intimately many houses as homes. However, there was mutual recognition between us: we carry our homes with-in us; we make our homes; we construct them as a reaction to our visceral lived experience as a military brat.

As differently as we experience being a military child, it is the ostensible mystery of why we do so well in college settings that pre-occupies my thinking in this

study. One military child can have a difficult experience, remembering mostly the sense of dislocation, and another feels the dislocation as liberating. Why do these children successfully navigate a college setting, finding it within themselves to adjust and adapt, even when the circumstances are socially, emotionally, and academically difficult? But even more so, how can we fairly render, with equal respect, the lived experience of individual military children? There is no research that incorporates the voices of military children, their constructions of home, and how those constructions of home influence their college experience. The current research is from a different time and a different place (Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991; LaGrone, 1978; Ryan-Wenger, 2001).

In 1978, LaGrone published “The Military Family Syndrome,” which delineated psychological issues military children exhibit as a result of the military community. The article became a touchstone for future military child research. However, most of this research, like “The ‘Military Family Syndrome’ Re-Visited: ‘By the numbers’” (Jensen et al., 1991) yields results like the following:

Overall results find no evidence of a military family syndrome (LaGrone, 1978). Rather, they support other recent findings (Manning et al., 1986) that personality characteristics of children in military families do not differ from those of children in civilian families. (p. 107)

The absence of mental illness or stress in military children because of military family status does not seem to deter many researchers from a deficit approach or pathologizing military populations. The literature may not be intentionally provocative in nature, but titles like “Impact of the Threat of War on Children of Military Families” (Ryan-Wenger, 2001) are loaded. Military children are ostensibly made subjects of studies with the researcher imposing constructs of the military

child's lived experience. In this case, the research builds the military child experience from their impressions of the military community—such as the fear of war—rather than taking for granted that all children, military and civilian alike, are concerned with the immediacy of everyday things. The childhood of someone growing up military is in some ways a mirror of children growing up in the civilian world: mothers and fathers live in houses; they may move; they go to school; make friends.

Military children cannot be understood as individuals who constantly live under the threat of war; they are reduced to one act, declared by the state. Because they live within the military structures, they do not reduce the military to only war, or their parents to cogs in the military-industrial machine. Their fathers and mothers are convoy drivers, mechanics, police, intelligence, photographers, or logisticians. There are many duties that take a parent away from the family—not just war. What is the difference between a parent going to Albania for 6-months to work at a refugee camp and a year tour in Iraq? One would think there would be a stark difference in how children and military families perceive these events. However, according to the Coalition for the Education of the Military Child (2012), military families do not seem to differentiate between deployment to a combat zone and other types of absence. For the military family, “gone is gone” (Coalition for the Education of the Military Child, 2012, p. 10). War or no war, threat or no threat, a military child experiences deployment, temporary duty assignments, or an unaccompanied tour in the same way: a parent is gone.

Ryan-Wenger (2001) does make an important observation though: “Much more research from the children's perspective is needed, including phenomenological

studies” (p. 243). While she is referring to perspectives on the threat and meaning of war, I agree with the observation. We put military children and trappings of their lives into spreadsheets, but we rarely talk to them. In addition, where are the voices of the adult military child? Why are we silent about our lives? Outside Morten Ender, the Military Sociologist at West Point, and Pat Conroy, the writer, and a few others, we have armies of civilians speaking for us, putting words in our mouths, and making decisions about our lives. Even then, most writers and filmmakers who address their military up-bringing are highly privileged—white and officer’s children (e.g. Mary Lawlor, Lois Lowry, Donna Musil, Channe Willis, Mary Edwards Wertsch). Where are the voices of the military children of color? Children of career NCOs?

In the deficit-based literature, military children are reduced to integers, inserted into a statistical equation, simply to reconfirm the agenda of someone who has no understanding of military culture. The end of conscription means that very few individuals have intimate or personal contact with the military culture. To the majority of the population, we are the children of cogs in the military-industrial machine, the children of people so poor they could not survive in the civilian workforce, so they had to enlist. We are the children of the of the military.

More than ever, the lived experience of military brats needs to be brought forth, rendered, celebrated, and mourned. In the 1960s, the Department of Defense School system served about 160,000 military children, but that number declined to a mere 84,000 children in the 1990s (Department of Defense Education Activity, n.d.). While that number does not account for the total number of military child dependents,

it is a result of the steady Reduction in Force (RIF) that has taken place since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, if military sociologists are correct, the new military will become Post-Modern (Moskos, William, & Segal, 2000), which means family services will become increasingly controversial. Family services are expensive; these are resources that could be used for something else. If family services are cut, the military will fall into line with the occupational model (Moskos, 1977), removing state responsibility and obligation to military families.

Given the shifts in the military structures, what is it about the military child population that is worth contemplating? Why can I not let it *go gently into this good night*, dying a natural and honorable death of state institutions that are no longer relevant, but more a zoo attraction for civilians? With this dying way of life, there are benefits for children we have not seen in any other population in the United States. There is evidence of little or no achievement gap in Department of Defense Schools (Smrekar et al., 2001; Wineripe, 2011). There is evidence that military children go to college and graduate twice as often as their civilian peers (Cottrell, 2002; Ender, 2002). We need to hear the voices of military children to understand how they construct their childhoods and if and how they connect their academic success, their view of the world, and their persistence in college settings to their childhoods in the fortress.

To the Military Child Herself: Phenomenological Rendering of the Military in College

Phenomenology turns us to the “things themselves” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 81). A phenomenon is a thing, a way of life, a part of who we are, a sliver of reality that the research wishes to explore, un-cover, un-veil, and un-earth. Using

Max van Manen's (1997) methodology for researching lived experience, I recover the "meaning of being" of the military child in college settings. Van Manen's (1997) phenomenological methodology uses the hermeneutic circle to construct the lived experience with a six part process:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
 - (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
 - (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
 - (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
 - (5) manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
 - (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole.
- (pp. 30-31)

All of these tenets are digested in the corpus of the phenomenological investigation.

My central question is *What is the lived-experience of military brats of color in college?* Turning to the phenomenon explicates the personal experience of "being" that is shared with others. Heidegger's (1927/2008b) *Being in Time* observes the purpose of this personal history: "In its factual Being Dasein always is as and "what" it already was" (p. 63). Turning to this shared history, the "thing itself," I observe what the experience "was" to give direction to what it "is" (p. 63).

In chapter 2, I interrogate the phenomenon, alternately questioning and explicating the experience, using research, literature, and other artistic and philosophic texts to render the *quotidian* of the lived-experience. Chapter 3 provides a philosophic grounding for phenomenology as a methodology. Heidegger (1967/2008a; 1927/2008b; 1954/2008c; 1954/2008c), Gadamer (1975/2004), and Casey's (2009) insights, explication of Being, language, and construction of culture provide the basis for my phenomenological investigation. In chapter 4, the

conversations with military brats are thematized, providing both a rendering of the lived-experience in addition to the questioning appropriate to opening up and enriching the phenomenon. The pedagogical insights, or the lessons learned and perhaps employed, are explicated in chapter 5.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is an entry way and captures the story beyond the military child as a number. As a methodology, it has inherent respect for individual experience, not reductive by nature, but offers insights to improve pedagogy and human interactions. I prefer a non-reductive methodology, because military brats are as different as rocks on a beach. We are united in our shared lived experience as children of active duty non-commissioned and commissioned officers, but we are different colors and ethnicities, have mothers and fathers from other countries, move every few years, live all over the world and the United States. As we are constructs of language and culture, products of the earth beneath us, and the streets around us, phenomenology gives voices and faces to this richness of experience, constructing a vivid portrait of visible difference and invisible sameness. And in giving voice to the voiceless, the military child in college settings can be understood better.

CHAPTER 2: A HOUSE IS NOT A HOME: MILITARY BRATS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF HOME

Home is Where the Army Sends You

Home, for some people, is one place, a single domicile or dwelling with four walls, windows, and a roof. A person can live his or her entire childhood in this house. The house and the child grow together, the elements and earth as witnesses: the children freckle and the house paint fades from sun exposure; the roof tiles are lost like teeth, but not redeemable to any fairy; and as the child stands straight, young and virile, the house may lean on its porch posts, exhausted. Bachelard (1994) reflects on ideals of houses and childhood, constructing home as full of dreams and poetic ministrations for the soul, a balm for the potentially cruel world. Or as he states: “Come what may, a house helps us to say: I will be an inhabitant of the world, in spite of the world” (Bachelard, 1994, pp. 46-47). The house, in this case, is a fortress and retreat.

Military brats do not share this conception of home. Their houses are impermanent structures—always existing, but not necessarily growing with the child for extended periods of time. The relationships between military brats and their houses are far shorter, like summer flings or youthful trysts that do not last beyond a demarcated period; therefore, military children conceive of many houses, nestled in Italian gardens, English moors, desert mountains overlooking training fields dotted with WWII mines. The multiple landscapes and ostensible impermanence of the relationship can seem daunting, shallow, and rootless. However, studies of military children (Weber & Weber, 2005) show that aberrant behavior decreases with each

move, indicating that the frequency of moves is important. Two or three moves may increase frustration and incidences of maladjustment, but with four or more moves (Weber & Weber, 2005), military children reconstruct and internalize their homes, extending their conception beyond the conventional “house” and adopting a broader construct. Home is no one thing. Home is a tapestry of the emotional and physical experience of space, land, culture, and people.

Houses are one piece of the brat construction of home. Home is the mental-emotional landscape existing in the mind, and it is the physical landscape in which the brat lives, giving the land and military child a symbiotic relationship in daily life. Abram (1996) observes this phenomenon: “A particular place in the land is never, for an oral culture, just a passive or inert setting for the human events that occur there. *It is an active participant in those occurrences*” (p. 162). The house is a “place in the land” and is an “active participant” in the development of the child. However, instead of the conventional one or two Bachelardian (1994) houses, military children can live in nine houses in multiple countries and states. According to Ender’s (2002) research on military brats, over 60% of his sample moved between five and ten times. Each house or the “place in the land” shapes the child, raising the child in the house’s own way. Each land is substantially different.

A military child friend and now military wife recently complained of her living conditions in Belgium: lack of conventional heat, hot water from buckets, mold growing in her sink, and cows ringing the doorbell at 3 a.m. Her toddler has no conception that this experience is “unusual.” We cannot know what he remembers from the United States, but this house is nurturing the child at this point in time,

teaching the child how to live within its walls—the rises in the floor, the warmest places to play. The house in the Belgian countryside shapes the child's perceptions of what it means to live in that location. The next house, which could conceivably be in Japan, Italy, or Washington D.C., will teach the child another way of being. Conversely, the child will teach the house another way of being—perhaps the feel of feet on its wooden floors and the secrets of a teenager, whispered during sleepovers. In this sense, the house is much like the bridge described as a Heideggarian (1954/2008c) dwelling: the bridge creates the banks with its presence. Houses or towns are built on these river banks, altering the landscape because of the bridge. The skyline of the banks grows with the increase in human traffic; initially the buildings are in the shadow of the bridge and then over the years the buildings shadow the bridge. The military child is much the same. The circumstances of these houses like the circumstance of the bridge shape the child as person, her being as well as approaches to the world.

For the military child, home also extends beyond the house. The cultural conventions in the place of the land re-orient military children to their physical location. Each land grows the child, tending to the individual as a weed or native plant. Fruit trees are plentiful when living at the foot of the Italian Alps, but clothes dryers and ovens are not. Heat in Belgium is not central, even now, but you learn to wear warm clothes inside the apartment, which is considered markedly warm at 62 degrees Fahrenheit. Air conditioning is considered terribly unhealthy in Europe; it is only for tourists. These locations may be physical, but they change the child from the inside. The feeling of cold is a scale—whether it is caused by mountain zones or air

conditioners—but how the child copes with the cold is cultural. In the United States, the thermostat alters the climate. However, most houses in Europe do not have the same kind of thermostats. Most often, children will twist the knob on the single radiator in their room, or they will wear a sweater, pants, and socks, with house shoes. The response to cold is cultural but also a result of the house and land. Military children, as they move, must re-assess how and what they do in response to the land, but it is different in each place, unique to the expectations of their surroundings. The land in Europe has different luxuries than the United States. Military children balance the two, internalizing both as aspects of home.

Military brats compose their homes using a routine orientation to their current location, pulling threads from the cultures of houses and place. The doll from Germany sits next to their kindergarten diploma from Panama and their American young adult novel on the Tiananmen Square massacre. The life experience of living in another country opens them to the world, stirs curiosity, and results in dreams of other places. Place and the experience of place imbue military brats with a boarder sense of curiosity, shaping their identity and sating their desire for learning about places. Anne Baker Cottrell's (2002) study on the "Educational and Occupational Choices of American Adult Third Culture Kids," reports that "Close to one-third (29%) of those who had completed a bachelor's level degree had an internationally orientated major or minor at the undergraduate level, graduate level, or both" (p. 235). In addition, careers were seen as a means to live abroad (Cottrell, 2002). From this data, adults who lived abroad as children have an orientation toward the world, to knowing cultures and people in addition to seeking new experiences. If they did not

embrace the world, would that be a denial of their childhood home? What would happen if military brats stopped moving and ceased to know or acknowledge places they have lived and places they want to live? Would it be a refusal to accept their construct of home in favor of another, perhaps more common Bachelardian (1994) construct of home? Surely, military brats would almost lose some aspect of home if they stopped moving. The absence of places would stifle their dreams and keep them from that magic of the new location and re-orientation. Or would they be able to dream more deeply? Perhaps, the dreams would change? Is it a matter of having better dreams? More dreams? How are the dreams of military brats different? And how can they dream of one place when it is not a life they have ever known?

The military child recognizes that “The singular magic of a place is evident from what happens there, from what befalls oneself or others when in its vicinity” (Abram, 1996, p. 182). The magic of place is salient: architecture shapes feelings about events; the political climate of a place shapes thoughts about ideology; and the approach to food and hospitality welcomes or alienates the individual. All of these aspects converge, transforming the military child into an “other.” Williams and Mariglia (2002) observe issues faced by adult military children, recognizing their difference and community, but also the uniqueness of “what happens” in the magic of place: “the walks downtown, the nights spent in Mergellina, the visits to Capri and Sorrento, the time spent in school, the friends, the teachers” (2002, p. 74).

The quote continues, capturing place as a living organism:

What I miss most about Naples isn't something that you can see, hear, or even touch. It's an attitude. One which openly defies life's hardships and shrugs off any misfortune.....the real pleasure of

returning was realizing that the Neapolitan spirit and character still thrives. (Williams & Mariglia, 2002, p. 74)

The military brat here conceives Naples, Italy as a breathing creature with “spirit” and “character,” a living thing who witnessed his growth and events—walks, nights, visits. Each of these events was only possible in Naples, because of Naples and its vicinity; otherwise, casual visits to Sorrento and Capri as well as a walk downtown would not have been possible. In addition, some part of this person will always carry Naples with him or her, because the place gave itself to this person as the person gave him or herself to the place. Place and the magic of the place were woven into the military child’s construct of home.

Military Brats and Their Houses of Privilege: Variations of Appearance, Identity, and Experience

That being said, the military may have its own set of institutional norms, which effectively override any preexisting black-white differences. Yet it is also likely that the bridged gap in marital behavior largely reflects the decreased presence of racial discrimination in the military. The overriding importance of military rank compared to more typical stratifiers like race or class, the lack of residential racial segregation and more equal access to social and economic resources may create an overall social milieu in the military that is conducive to family formation. (Lundquist, 2004, p. 752)

An older military mother described her horror once, when upon taking her two sons to the National Zoo in Washington D.C., one stated: “I like the London Zoo better.” This was a White officer’s child, privileged even in military culture. While many of us have American cultural touchstones as to what it might mean to be a White child who prefers the London zoo, what does it mean to be a White child who prefers the London zoo in the military context? Would anything change if the child were military and African American? Bi-racial? Asian American? Or Latino? How are the intersections of race, ethnicity, and ethnicity and privilege different for the

child growing up in the institution of the military? What are the institutional norms for the military families and in the culture of the U.S. military? And in what manner do these experiences shape the military child's entry into and persistence in college?

The lived experience of military children is and is not dictated by their race and ethnicity. Military children of all races, ethnicity, and rank, especially when living overseas, live in the same base housing, attend the same schools, go on the same Youth Services trips to Paris, shop at the same post exchange and commissary, share the same place of worship no matter their religious sect, and participate in the same field trips to Venice and Florence. Cultural and social capital are not necessarily a result of your father's or mother's race or rank, because all soldiers are subject to the same code of conduct that makes discrimination illegal. Social structures of inequality not based on rank would fracture unit cohesion—choices are made by who is in charge not by who is white and who is black.

Hawkin's (2001) ethnography of living on base in Cold War Germany quotes an African American soldier reflecting on the difference within the Army community: "...At home [Civilian world in the States] I got to fight the obstacle of race. The number one reason that racism is out [unacceptable] in the Army is you can't afford to lose a friend in the military 'cause that same guy can either kill you or save your life in combat" (p. 27). Racism is not upheld as a virtue in the U.S. military, but friendship and camaraderie across racial and ethnic difference is valued. One soldier cannot judge another based on civilian social stratification, but those ingrained ideas about inequality must be redirected and reshaped for the functionality of a unity. The job is what is important, not the color of the skin of the people doing the job. How

are these values transmitted to children by mothers and fathers who must work together for one goal? And how are they communicated when latent racism may not be apparent to the child?

A colonel's son who was working as a physician in a hospital once said that he always felt confident that everyone had his place in the military, and in the event something did happen, you always knew it would be okay. To the military child, the military is organized, which makes it inherently safe—the adults act like adults and can be trusted to be adults in all cases, an essential component for children to develop trust in their world and community. In this process of place-giving, the military displaces civilian social stratification based on race and ethnicity, and institutes a social structure based on rank, which is determined by job performance and education. Both job performance and education are in the locus of control of the individual soldier—government funds provide money for college credits for the soldier without a college degree or for the soldier who wishes to pursue a master's degree. In this way, the soldier becomes a citizen with elevated rights, placed in a different sphere from civilians whose government entitlements do not necessarily extend to the educational assistance or housing assistance. The military is an institution that is outside the “normal” American socio-cultural milieu. Joining it sets you apart, but being born into or growing up in it may forever alter how you view the multiple societies and sub-cultures who call America home.

However, we must note that it was perhaps the early winning of civil rights for African Americans in the military, which may truly set soldier-citizens apart from their civilian peers. Why and how did this happen? In what ways is life different for

soldiers, sailors, and airmen of color? And how does this make life different for their children? For a moment, let us consider the concept of earned entitlements (the GI Bill, retirement, housing and social services) as they impact the lives of dependents, which was first seen in the Revolutionary War and Civil War pensions (Skocpol, 1992). Specifically, what does this mean for the children of African American soldiers? Since the integration of the military in the 1950s, there has been “no relation to any reality whatsoever” (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 173) because there are few places in American culture where races and ethnicities live so intimately as in the military. In the 1950s African American children went to school with White children in Department of Defense Schools on Military Bases (Kingston, 2002). In 1974, a Columbia study found that “black military [NCO] youth show a higher rate of college enrollment than that of civilian youth growing up in comparable socio-economic circumstances” (Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974, p. ix). Furthermore, African American students attending Department of Defense Schools performed almost on-par with their White peers, an uncommon occurrence in the civilian community (Smrekar, et al., 2001; Winerip, 2011).

These conditions have no bearing in any reality since there are no known equivalents of these conditions in the civilian world. Military children live in a fictitious utopian society, comprised of what feels like a fairytale or a spinning of social lies and delusions. If these conditions and outcomes are not necessarily found in the civilian world, but rather the basics of citizenship in conjunction with these earned entitlements create these conditions, then what does this imply about the citizenship status of soldiers? In addition, the State does not necessarily confer free

education, burial rights, pensions to anyone who has not served in the military. Do service members simply live in a different sphere of citizenship? Are they uber-citizens? And what does this mean for military children of color who grow up as citizens apart but are slowly stripped of these entitlements as they enter college and the civilian world?

In our Foreignness, We Are More American: How Living and Not Living Abroad Changes Us As Americans

When I step off a plane on the continent of Europe—Charles De Gaulle, Frankfurt, Malpensa—I know I am home. I exit the plane, down the stairs, into the shuttle, into the airport itself, and neatly funneled into customs. However, I do not go to the E.U. citizen queue. I am an American who lived in Europe for 7 years before the age of 22.

I am a military brat. My habits are not completely American, nor are the habits of my military brat friends. At Christmas, my Mexican American mother always has *lebkuchen* (German gingerbread from Nuremberg) in the house: the cookies are most often perfectly round, like chocolate or iced full-moons, with a thin paper-white wafer on the back—as if monks grew bored making communion wafers and dropped cookie batter over them before baking. In my Mexican American Catholic world, they were communion wafer cookies, even when my mother called them German gingerbread. As an adult, when I relay my love of *lebkuchen* to Germans, they are impressed that an American knows and loves “proper *lebkuchen*.”

Military children are as foreign as they are American. Houses, accents, word usage, mannerisms, and ways of thinking betray the military child as odd amalgams of the exotic and the domestic. As a Monet’s fine dotted brush marks form solid

objects, we are a muddle of colors that take shape to form the military brat lived experience. We are mosaics—small flecks of Northern Italian marble, Hawaiian volcanic rock, red stone from Arizona, and turquoise from New Mexico. The textures and colors, sometimes finely embedded and other times awkwardly inserted, can cause cultural confusion at home and abroad.

“You cannot be American,” or “You are not a bad American,” the Europeans say. “You have an accent,” the Americans say. While we work hard to blend in—changing the way we dress when we move or adopting new slang—we learn just enough to keep from being marked as different, or perhaps the civilians simply get used to us, and accept that we are somewhat different. In educational settings, the new schools, new cities, we observe what other children do, what they say, how they act, and manage to conform. We adapt but we do not lose who we are. Rather, we become better at adapting (Weber & Weber, 2005); our lives are a continual exercise of self-efficacy. Doing and doing again, knowing that we did it before, we can do it again. These skills, while seemingly innocuous, are powerful when we arrive in university settings, particularly when we transition into the university.

The Importance of the House and the Souvenir: Institutional and Occupational Military Children³

In the *Great Santini* (1976), the military children make jokes about how civilian children perceive them because of the foreign objects that decorate their

³ Moskos (1977) developed the Institutional/Occupational model. This military sociological model was supposed to show the tension and complications that arise from the conception of the military as an occupation versus an institution. I apply this model intentionally and in a new way to military children and their lived experience.

house: “Hey, Mama,” Ben said, “half this house looks like the Teahouse of the August Moon and the other half looks like A Thousand and One Nights” (Conroy, 1976, p. 62)⁴. Ben does not like that the house feels foreign to him, his father buying objects from all over the world, souvenirs from his cruises. To him, the objects are ugly and distasteful, because they are a mark of his difference as a military child. No civilian family routinely has *tchotchkes* from Korea or Okinawa or Istanbul. Ben is also a brat who has never left the United States; rather, he has moved almost every year, in the Southern United States, raised by a Southern mother. Therefore, his alienation is twofold: from the house that symbolizes his military life and from a region that is his and not his. He is not completely part of the institutionalized military, where families are sent to foreign bases, dependent on themselves and each other to adjust to a new country and sometimes new language. The foreign objects in his house are not objects for which he knows the origins. He did not choose the items from the Grand Bazaar in Istanbul. There is no story or memory for the Japanese swords or the Persian rugs. He cannot pick up a piece of Venetian glass and say: “On this day, we wandered through Venice and Maryanne, my sister, really needed to use the bathroom, and we got caught in the maze of bridges and alleys searching for a restroom, until they finally met a kind Italian woman on a stoop who let Maryanne use her bathroom in her house. The Italian woman told us stories about World War II and the American soldiers she met as a girl.” While that quote and story is perfectly

⁴ Reading Conroy is an interesting experience as an adult, because while the *The Great Santini* (1976) is progressive in its depiction of the friendship between Ben and Toomer, the son of their African American housekeeper, the dialogue in many places is extremely racist. This shows the complexity of military living—tolerance extends to people we know but not to whole populations or perhaps to populations with whom we live in close quarters but not to those with whom we have not lived in close contact. If this is the case, how does this play out in everyday military life?

fabricated for this example, it opens up the possibility of the lived experience of a single object.

With the memory, the object is a *souvenir*, a French verb meaning “to remember.” *Sou-venir*: *sou* (under) and *venir* (to come). The word traces the transmission of memory from object to person—the memory *comes* from *under* the souvenir, entering the person’s mind, flooding the person with bodily recollections of the day or moment. In this way, all our objects, are like Bachelard’s (1994) wardrobes: “A wardrobe’s inner space is also *intimate space*, space that is not open to just anybody” (p. 78). A souvenir statue of the Eiffel tower carries its own secrets in its soul, which are conjured when touched. This intimate space of memory is only open to the person who carries the souvenir with her, who purchased the souvenir, and who told the story of the souvenir. A person can die choosing to leave the memories to the souvenir and no one else. One’s children and friends can touch the bronze statue; they can say “X loved this statue,” but they will never have access to the *intimate space*, the secrets the object carries.

Now imagine, living in a house where none of the objects is your own. They are cold to you because they do not know you, and you can never touch their souls. Ben Meechum had an unfortunate military brat experience; he had all the cultural experiences without intimately connecting to the institution of the military. In essence, he was a stranger in his own home, none of the objects being his, none of them containing his memories, none of them whispering, after a move, comforting words in the secret language of remembrance. The experience of disconnectedness happens, but it is not always this way. Many military children do not see their

father's or mother's travels from afar. We are not removed from the objects in our homes, but rather, we are entrenched in the experiences of each of the objects; the objects are ours. We gather our souvenirs in Rome with our families, a school trip to Paris, or while driving through the Badlands of the United States.

For a military brat tied to the institution of the military, our homes are filled with soulful objects, collected and carried in our small pouches: sweet and bitter souvenirs of the military brats' cycle of loss and gain. These objects decorate our homes, which are safe places; although that home may be temporary. We are at home in spite of the temporary nature of the home. As Heidegger (2008d) describes, the bridge linking two shores shapes the land on both sides. These objects are bridges to other homes. These small trinkets are proof that we do not lie about the unconventional lives we lead in the eyes of civilians. The small objects—a bracelet from Germany or a necklace from Panama—ground us in ourselves and who we are, because they are tangible proof that we lived in Panama, hunted for sand dollars on sandbars at sunrise with our parents, ate mangos from the tree, and ran through the jungles, playing hide and seek like all other children. This is one of the hallmarks—the connectedness to knowing and living in different cultures—of an institutional brat, who is more American in some of his or her values from living abroad, but also sees America differently from those same experiences.

Ben Meechum and his family talk about the differences between brats who live abroad and the ones, like themselves, who live domestically. The oldest daughter says:

I met some Air Force brats in Atlanta. Now they do some good traveling. They'd lived in London, Hamburg, Rome, all over Europe. They'd skied in

the Alps. They'd seen the Leaning Tower of Pisa. One of the boys spoke three languages. All of them had been to operas and gone to symphonies. (Conroy, 1976, p. 43)

Moving and living abroad sets a military brat apart because of the unusual cultural exposure. While there are well-known opera companies and symphonies in the United States, there are few opportunities for extensive travel abroad and language immersion. This form of cultural capital is usually reserved for the upper classes, which was seen in upper-class children attending finishing schools in Switzerland or the customary European Tour, which has now become a bourgeois past-time of back packing through Europe. This cultural sophistication is thrust upon the military child: access to European products, the development of a worldview beyond the United States, and a nuanced understanding of daily life outside the suburbs and the shelter of bases. Doors are open to military children who have lived abroad because they know how to eat escargot or developed a palate for specialized European cheese or have knowledge of a less commonly taught language such as Japanese or Tagalog. These experiences render the diversity American students encounter in college as normal and even a little confusing.

After living in Italy for three years, military brats may be confused when they meet an Italian American whose cultural practices are not those of the Italians with whom they lived: the pasta sauces are distinctly Americanized; the desserts are unfamiliar because they are from a different region of Italy; the names they use are pronounced with markedly American accents. And sometimes the person who lived in Italy feels more Italian than the Italian-American who has lived in the North End—the Italian neighborhood in Boston—all their life; but to say these things is rude.

Military brats, as they age into college, do not ask questions and cannot make assumptions, but smile and nod. In the eyes of many, blood origins dictate culture rather than the experience of daily life in Italy; however, there is a true struggle when customs and cultural mores are adopted in ways that put military brats in-between.

The Lived Space of *The Little House*: Nostalgic, Imagined Perfection of American Houses and the Fairytale of Foreign Houses

The experience of living abroad is also one of initial cultural isolation and then integration into a new-hybrid culture. We travel and move as families. The families are not perfect, but when we move to a new place, we only know our families. While this is true for all military children, this is amplified for military children in a new country. In essence, the family is a form of home for the military child. The family does not supplant houses as home, but it complements them. Overseas, the houses are not American houses. They are not constructed as a 2,000 square foot, 4 bedroom monstrosity on a small plot of land, located in the suburbs or a small town outside a nameless military base. There are two kinds of houses when a military child lives abroad: housing on the military installations or the houses of the foreign country.

Houses Just the Same: Nostalgic Imagined Perfection

In 1942, author and illustrator Virginia Lee Burton published *The Little House*, a homage to the social and cultural changes in the life of a house. *The Little House* was the quintessential American house: a box with two windows as eyes, a nose for a door, and her front-steps a welcoming smile.

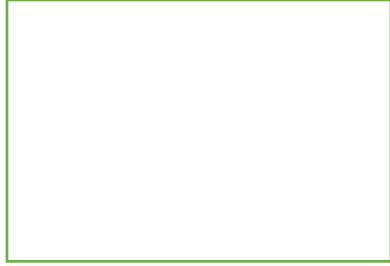


Image Redacted. (Burton, 1942)

Almost every house on a military base aspires to be *The Little House*—a dream of a perfect past that never truly was. In what ways does a military base house want to be like *The Little House*? *The Little House* is always there, always staunch, never changing, standing proudly resistant to time, technology, and social and urban evolution. *The Little House* is security, a buffer from a foreign-place and of a changing society, because it is nostalgia in four walls.

Like *The Little House*, the houses on bases are small cookie-cutter structures reminiscent of the veteran's villages post-World War II—Levittown rows of the 1950s expectation of a rich myth of the two-parent, two-child, one-dog family. Unlike Levittown—which shut out any veteran who was not white—*The Little House* from the military world has no expectation of race. They are painted and kept so uniformly that they look like they belong on the set of *Edward Scissorhands* or perhaps *Leave It to Beaver*. The conformity of shape and color is supposed to create comfort in its imitation of Americana as portrayed in popular media. When you see these well-kept boxes, you simply want to sit on the curb and wait for a fictional father to exit. A fellow military brat once observed that growing up military, particularly on a base, was like growing up in Mayberry. But is Mayberry a place or an idea? Where does it exist outside of the lit television box we gather around? This

observation means the military realized its objective in the construction of the houses. According to Martin and McClure (2000), bases overseas are built to be an “Idealized...small American town” (p. 13). Military base houses are symbols of where, how, and in the ways military children are expected to live. The sheer uniformity of them, the same Hollywood set feel that renders these houses mythic also makes them place-less and time-less: “Frank Lloyd Wright said of the modern mass-produced houses he abhorred that they ‘[do] not belong anywhere.’ Instead of being somewhere in place, they could anywhere in space” (Casey, 2009, p. 178). The military house was designed in this manner, a generic structure to be inserted into any land-scape and base-scape.

While each military base may be located in a different state or country, the houses are almost exactly the same in the tradition of the *Little House*. In this way, the house is not just “somewhere in place” or “anywhere in space” (Casey, 2009, p. 178) but it is *everywhere* in place and space. The four walls transcend state and national borders. While the windows may look out at a different landscape—a parade field not far from the equator versus a parade field in the desert—the house is itself the same—a symbol of the childhood and life that everyone expects from 1950s America. Military children grow up in this myth, entrenched in an America that does not really exist.

However, the civilian world depicts the military child differently. In the popular media, we are products of our parents’ profession: we act like soldiers; we fly our parents’ planes; and we engage in deviant behavior, drinking and smoking marijuana (Ender, 2005). Our lives are perceived to be marked by war, fragments of

ourselves strewn across continents, cultures, and houses, our being spiritually dismembered, like the figures in Picasso's (1937) black, white, and shades of grey, war painting *Guernica* below:



Image Redacted. (Picasso, 1937)

Researchers see us as traumatized by the terror of chaos—the body parts lost, the displaced suffering, and the disproportionate hands and heads looking up at God for mercy (Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991; LaGrone, 1978; Ryan-Wenger, 2001). Military child Pat Conroy (1976) with his violent depiction of growing up military might say that *Guernica* was his childhood. Mary Edwards Wertsch (2006), a brat whose childhood was marked by alcoholism, might also agree. Norman Schwarzkopf (1992), whose own mother was an alcoholic, probably would not agree despite his mother's illness. He writes of loving Iran, navigating his Swiss Boarding School, and his transition to base schools in Germany. For General Schwarzkopf, (1992) the military was never mentioned as a cause for his mother's disease, but the military life was possible in spite of it. The difference in perception of the military shows the complexity of the lived experience of military children. How do they attribute and perceive aspects of their lives differently despite shared difficulties? All of these bits of chaos always fit in a box. The boxes all hold different items.

Unlike Schwarzkopf (1992), Pat Conroy⁵ (1976) and Mary Edwards Wertsch (2006) describe childhoods that might very well have been the war-box that Picasso painted in black and white.

The boxes that I grew up in were uncannily like the American myth of the suburbs, where we did not have room for floating bull heads—not in our boxes! The life of the American military child perversely resembles a Norman Rockwell painting, framed and pristine, or a 1960s family sitcom glowing miraculously from the television box. In these little boxes, military families and children are expected to behave in a certain way (Hawkins, 2005; Wertsch, 2006). Lawns must be mowed, bushes trimmed, mail collected, noise levels kept low. Everyone must drive about 10 to 15 miles an hour. This is the safest place in the world: little boxes behind chain-link fences, where all the mothers care for children. And all the children retreat for dinner at 5p.m. with the lowering of the flag.

Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes made of ticky tacky,¹
 Little boxes on the hillside,
 Little boxes all the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 (Reynolds, 1962)

In Ft. Huachuca, there was a green house next to the pink house next to the yellow house, all adjacent to Colonel's Row, whose houses were just the same. In Ft. Lee, the small houses with the communal yard where we could play, the little boxes stood guard—watching over us, all colors of us just the same. In Ft. Clayton, houses

⁵ I reference *The Great Santini* (1976) since it is acknowledged that the abusive military father in the novel is based on Pat Conroy's own father.

stood on stilts, like white storks, hovering over her little ones just the same. All of these houses were my boxes, hundreds of miles away from each other, but they all were just the same.

And the people in the houses
 All went to the university,
 Where they were put in boxes
 And they came out all the same,
 And there's doctors and lawyers,
 And business executives,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 (Reynolds, 1962)

The ASVAB⁶ sorts the soldiers and their families, who live in little boxes. There are logisticians, aviators, intelligence, and infantry. The NCOs and their families live in smaller boxes, in more crowded boxes, in their own part of base. The officers live in boxes, bigger boxes, by parade fields on their own part of base.

And they all play on the golf course
 And drink their martinis dry,
 And they all have pretty children
 And the children go to school,
 And the children go to summer camp
 And then to the university,

 Where they are put in boxes
 And they come out all the same.
 (Reynolds, 1962)

And their children go to school together, in the same building, with the same teachers: Black children, White children, Latino children, Asian children all learning just the same. And they move every three years, first to Virginia then to Germany

⁶ Every service person takes the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), which assesses occupational fit.

then to Asia, then to university, where they cannot be put in boxes because they are not all the same.

And the boys go into business
 And marry and raise a family
 In boxes made of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 There's a green one and a pink one
 And a blue one and a yellow one,
 And they're all made out of ticky tacky
 And they all look just the same.
 (Reynolds, 1962)

And at university, we become doctors, and teachers, and soldiers, but are we achieving just the same? Suddenly we are not in our boxes, but civilian boxes, which are altogether different, and we are no longer just the same. These boxes are false and true, four-walls, uniform, rank-and-file, the same and not the same. The NCO children and officer children live in their parents' boxes, where some parents teach their children rank while others try to shield them from it, but are the children ever the same? Or are they simply the same to civilians? Do these boxes matter to civilians who view us just the same? And do these separate boxes matter when children achieve just the same?

“And then to University” (Reynolds, 1962). What are the differences in experiences for the military brats in university? In what ways do their father's or mother's rank matter and do not matter? In what ways did those smaller houses, houses on stilts, and different houses shape the person the military child becomes in university where they no longer are just the same? First, we must know the foreign houses which are not just all the same.

The Story of the Foreign-Houses: A Fairy-tale for a Strange Land

These military houses or stairwells⁷, as the apartment buildings are called, are positioned on cul-de-sacs and quiet streets, standing in formation often behind the safety of a chain link fence and barbed wire. The house is like an empty shell, a carbon copy of the houses around it. Does the family living in it put a mark on this type of house? Does the house quietly exist, its soul buried, non-visible? Or are these houses only as soulful as the people who dwell there and the objects they bring? While this sounds tragic, a soulless house, can there be something magical in the architecture of these dwellings?

When I returned from college to the four-family stairwell—four apartments in one building—in Heidelberg, Germany, I remember every family kept their front door open. These unlocked or completely open doors gave the children the freedom to run up and down the stairs howling with laughter. The black lab Bella would spread herself flat like an animal skin rug in the main foyer of the building, guarding her young. The fenced-in-communal-yard meant bar-b-ques almost every summer evening; each family would eat bratwurst from the grill and German potato salad. The stairwell, with its generic layout, mass manufactured and functional, expanded the military child's definition of family and home. The family home resided inside the communal home, and each made dinner, each adult parented, and each child built almost sibling-like relationships with children of other faiths, races, and ethnicities—Mormon, Catholic, African American, Latino, and White. It was often remarked in

⁷Hawkins (2001) explains the intricacies of stairwells: "Each building had from two to four entrances, each giving access to a stairway that led to a pair of apartments on each landing. The stack of six to eight apartments connected by a common staircase and sharing a single entrance was referred to as a 'stairwell'" (p. 33).

that stairwell how strangely diverse we all were, and how sometimes something so ostensibly small as haircare could highlight the differences. The African American Colonel's wife upstairs told her daughter not to get her hair wet after a perm. The White mother downstairs did not bring an umbrella to pick up the children after school, which resulted in the education of the White mother about the intricacies of African American hair care. The exasperated African American Colonel's wife relayed the story to my Mexican American mother. Maybe this is what military children should anticipate in college. What changes when a White child knows that her African American friend's mom will get mad at her for ruining her perm? In what ways do military children perceive their civilian peers differently in college after living in such close quarters? After all, stairwells and apartment buildings are much like the suites in modern residence halls. They are houses just the same.

The houses off-base, on the economy of the country, are reflections of a new culture. Some are apartments located in cities, without gardens or greenery; they are in buildings or stand-alone houses with lush flora—mango and cashew trees in the tropics and plums, apples, and apricots in Europe. These houses are made differently: stucco, wood, stone, brick—some of the materials dating back a hundred years, perhaps more. In many countries outside the United States, one hundred years is a young house, nubile, and unknowing. If the dwellings are old by U.S. standards, then the lifestyle is sometimes even more archaic: no garbage disposal, recycling that includes composting, no dryer but a clothesline, no large American kitchen, no floor-board heating or cheap gas, no air-conditioning.

Campus-scapes and Base-scapes: The similarities between Military Bases and College Campuses

The landscapes, offices, and social conventions of military bases and college campuses are surprisingly similar. The heart of campus is almost always a ceremonial green called something appropriately official: the quad, the hill, the yard, the mall. Commonly, the most important buildings are on these greens, the library, administration, powerful departments, and prestigious residence halls for specific student populations. At Harvard University, the heart of the yard is buttressed by Widener Library and Memorial Chapel, signaling the importance of both knowledge and the university's initial mission to train American clergy. At the University of Maryland, McKeldin Library looks out over the mall, watching over the young people crossing from one side of campus to the other; less conspicuous, the Mitchell building, where major administrative offices are located, is nestled at the bottom of the mall.

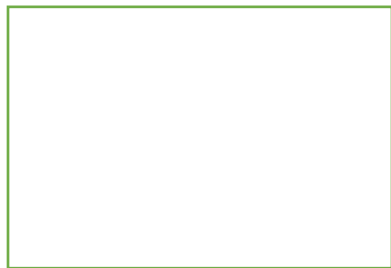


Image Redacted. (McKeldin Mall, The University of Maryland, n.d.)

Like their university counterparts, the military installation has a parade field in the heart of the base where the highest ranking officers live; these are usually the historic and more aesthetically pleasing houses—a far cry from the boxes in which the non-field grade officers, non-commissioned officers, and enlisted soldiers live. This green is as manicured and cared for as its campus doppelganger and used for similar

ceremonial purposes: graduations from training schools, changes of command, events that are intended to inspire pride in the institution such as color guards, parades, and drills. What is it about these places where people seem to grow and knowledge is generated, but the place itself always seems to stay the same?



Image Redacted. (Fort Sill Parade Field, n.d.)

The military field and the campus green are only one example of the numerous cosmetic likenesses. Each military base has a few key offices and services which are almost mirrors of what college campuses offer. The base and college are self-sufficient communities—cafeterias and dining facilities, the post exchange and the campus store, the shoppette and the small union shop, the food courts at the center. There are also campus golf courses and socials clubs, which are similar to ones found on military bases.

The layouts of a military base and a college campus are uncannily alike. The military child moves between the two, but the college-space is one of transition for all young people, civilian and military, and so is not a conventional civilian space. The closed communities are universes unto themselves. How do these similarities help and hinder military brats in their transition into and out of college? In what ways do military brats use their military social and cultural capital derived from living on military bases and in military communities to navigate campus?

As transient communities, military bases and college campuses have a fundamental sameness in that while generations of students and soldiers cross their respective greens, these places rarely change, as if they are monuments or symbols of cultural values. Parade fields still fly the United State flag, and statues of campus luminaries or mascots still grace the campus mall. These things do not change. However, once a military child turns 23 or is no longer a student, the gates of the military base keep the brat out. The community is shut. A military child can never go back unless he or she joins the military. More symbolically, individuals who graduate from college can never re-enter that community unless they stay as a student or are employed in some capacity by the university. The college, too, is a closed community. Once a student leaves, she may have alumni privileges, but it is never the same. Both communities shut their gates, only opening them on rare occasions to visits—a testament to the cliché that “you can never go home.”

Speaking American: The Language of the Military Child

Military brats who live abroad or move domestically do not have accents in the same way other Americans do. Our accents are deceptive and fluid, depending on where we have lived and with whom we came in contact. For a brat who is not embedded in the institution, like Ben Meechum, this can be because fathers or mothers would “expurgate that sound [the accent] from his child’s tongue on the spot” (Conroy, 1976, p. 42). Their accents can be flat American, generic as a newscaster, leaving no trace of place. The non-institutional brats may feel alienated from their homes and themselves, as empty as their accents and as removed from their father’s military occupation.

An institutional military brat, or a brat who has lived abroad and domestically, has a decidedly unique accent. A word might betray three years stationed in Texas, or a simple “y’all” from three years in North Carolina. Accents can be local, tied to a small town in Arizona or a base in Florida. At the same time, the traces of local accents are deceiving. As children we learn to associate certain words with certain duty stations, but we never leave these words behind. Instead, we carry them with us, because as Bachelard (1994) observes, “for we do not change place, we change our nature” (p. 206). Each city and country gives a piece of itself, altering the nature of our speech: a rolling “r” for brats who live in Spanish speaking countries or an understanding of cognates from living in another country.

I still laugh when I think of the first person conjugation of the Italian verb *spendere*: *Io spendo*. I spend. *Io Spendo*. To a 12-year-old girl who plays with Spanglish or other mixtures of language, there are few things funnier than attempting to speak a language by adding a vowel to the end of a word being right. There is joy in this learning, experimentation, and in the attempt to perfect both a French “r” and a Spanish “r.” However, while this sort of play can sound disrespectful, it is a part of learning to use and not be afraid of languages that are not your mother tongue. Furthermore, these words—once so mysterious—creep into our vernacular: Haribo gummy bears are said with a German accent: GOOM-EE rather than the American GUM-EE. Americans pronounce crêpes as “crape,” while a military child who has lived in a European country may pronounce it like a French speaker “krep”—with a rolled “r.” As our nature changes to accommodate these new words, our accents change with the words. We only know certain items by their French or Japanese

names. We have not left Italian words or our Midwest accents in the place of their origin; they are part of the things we carry. Our changing natures mean that we are always more American when living abroad and more foreign when living in America, because we cannot refuse to be who we are: we are both, and one, and the other. In being both we mourn not being one, creating a longing for a culture and home that we can never have again.

For the institution and the occupational brat, the accent and word usage are further complicated by the language of the military culture. We shop at the commissary, live on post or base, eat at the club, and carry I.D. cards. Our fathers and mothers bring us MREs (meals ready to eat) as treats when they return from the field. The daily vocabulary is as foreign to civilians upon encounter as French or German is to an American military family. What is a commissary? What does it look like, and how is it different from a civilian store? Why do you carry an I.D.? And what kind of club? The vocabulary of the military culture separates the military children from their civilian peers. For example, civilians do not understand that a “club” was historically a divisive place, separating classes of military families. The “club” is not like a country club in that it does not exclude non-whites—Latino, Jewish, and African American individuals. Rather, a “club” excludes those who are not of the correct rank or status—officer versus non-commissioned officer. While in the past the “clubs” reflected the institutional and structural racism of American culture; they were some of the first institutions, along with the military itself, to be integrated. Currently, the military has begun to move away from the separation of

officers and non-commissioned officers for dependents, specifically spouses, but research has not yet shown if and how this influences social interactions across rank.

All this said, the nuance of military culture embedded in the language of the military brat is not obvious to the civilian in college. The military child can say these words—club, officer, rank—and they are almost meaningless to children of those who have not served in the military. What does this mean for military children when they arrive at college? What happens when their father’s or mother’s rank carries no meaning in their new civilian culture? In college, we are at the cusp of this no-man’s land, the threshold of civilian status, and there is a quiet nostalgia of culture (Raj, 2003) as we begin to examine and piece together the fragments of our childhood. As we near graduation and the decision to join the military or live as a civilian, we realize we did not know what we had, we did not know our own childhoods, and we suddenly have to know ourselves, as individuals outside our family unit and outside the military family. How can we know ourselves, when we do not even know where we are from?

Where Are You From?: The Question of Identity and Origins for the Military Child

The Phrygian hearth-gods I had brought with me
 From Troy, out of the fire, seemed to stand
 Before me where I lay in sleep. I saw them
 Plain in the purple light cast by the full moon
 (Virgil, 1990, p. 70)

“Out of the fire” Aeneas carried his heritage, led the survivors, and began a quest for home (Virgil, 1990, p. 70). Troy is in ashes, ruins, but does that mean Aeneas is no longer from Troy. Can you be from a place that does not exist? Can you be of a place that simply is an idea? What makes us from a city or state or country? Is it

something we declare? A feeling? A piece of legal paper? Furthermore, in looking for a place to establish a home, in what ways will Aeneas make the new place his own? How will he blend the old and the new cultures? How will his hearth gods find rest in a new home? Military children face these same challenges, wrestling with “where are they from?” and what exactly that question means for them.

In college, orientation can be overwhelming: as freshman we are herded from place to place—led from one end of the campus to the other, given tours, shown dining halls, visiting residence halls, and finding our classes. As we sit in one of the many workshops on how to navigate campus bureaucracy, there is a nervous camaraderie. No one really knows anyone else. We are strangers who are not strangers, asking generic questions in a vain quest not to feel or be alone, banding in groups that, in some ways, are completely unnatural. In our efforts to cultivate relationships, one of the first questions anyone asks is, “Where are you from?” It is part of an introduction, a measure of who someone is and what they are like. We judge people on, “where they are from.” As Casey (2009) observes, “‘Where are you from?’ we ask a stranger whom we have just met, not reflecting on how acutely probing such a mundane question can be and how deeply revealing the answers to it often are” (p. xiv-xv). If someone is “from” a certain zip code or city, we can tell something of their socio-economic status, their parents’ education, their parents’ professions, their race and ethnicity. One may talk to two people, one Black and one White from New York City. From their race and dress, we will assume and assign our own impressions of New York City on the individuals. The Black individual may carry a name-brand bag, indicating upper class. However, that person could be from

the Upper East Side or the Bronx, but we might assume a traditionally Black neighborhood, because it fits with what we think of New York City boroughs. While the White person, despite their middlebrow, name-brand bag, may be from Queens or New Jersey. These assumptions, based on a simple answer, can be as false and harmful as they are true and helpful.

For the military brat, the answer is never simple and can be confusing to a non-military individual who desperately wants to insert the military child into a genre they can understand: White, Black, Latino, working class, middle class. These genres may have signifiers like the type of music the individuals prefer, the brands of clothes they wear, or their favorite television shows. All the efforts to put military brats in boxes are confounded by life experience different from their own purview.

This disconnect in understanding most often happens when both populations of children are younger, but the brats are buffered by the presence of the uniformed parent and the military sub-culture. When moving to a base located in a rural area, military children tend to be different from the local children. Military children are more likely to have a parent or friend's parents who are not the same race or ethnicity as themselves, so they may not look racially White or have a parent who does not look White (Heaton & Jacobson, 2007; Lundquist, 2004). However, we have our parents to tell us that it is okay to look different. In addition, there may be differences in cultural and religious practices. In one case, a military child being raised Catholic may learn that his/her sect is different from a predominantly Mormon town adjacent to a military base. A parent may have to sit down and talk with their child about respecting difference and American sub-cultures. In this way, families guide their

military child through feelings of confusion and difference, creating a safe space for the child to ask questions about culture, race, religion, and what it means when you are not like the people with whom you attend school. For military children, the difference also may be considered acceptable in their schools when they say, “Oh, my father is military.” Their father’s or mother’s profession explains their difference to the local children. In college, there is no buffer of their family dialogue or the local community’s familiarity with the military. There is only the military brat and his/her complex intersections of identity. For the first time, the military brat is alone.

Military brats have a few ways of handling or answering inquiries as to where they are from. Some military brats prefer to say they are from “nowhere,” placing themselves in negative space and the Heideggerian (1967/2008a) anxiety of nothingness. However, “What is the nothing?” (Heidegger, p. 96). What is “the nothing” in relation to the origin of the military child? (Heidegger, p. 96). Many military children have never returned to the location where they were born or otherwise have no connection to that location. A military child who was born in Germany may have no ties to the base or city. The base may be shut, erased from existence. Or a military child who was born in Guam may never return to the island. Home is not where you are born. There is nothing about birth that ties you to a place other than an isolated event of life-giving.

Heidegger (1967/2008a) specifies that the nothing is something that “we must be able to encounter” (p. 98). The first encounter may very well be in college, around the time when parents move to another base, where the military brat has no friends and did not go to school. This sometimes happens during the transition to college or

shortly thereafter, but it is inevitable for the military child whose parent is still on active duty. Suddenly, going “home” is going to a house they have never lived in and never been, to a base they do not know, and a place where they no know no one. Home is suddenly “nothing” and they have “nothing” in the way of a place to call home. The military community in which their parents live begins to slip away, almost without warning. Therein lies the anxiety of nothing for a military brat without a home. There are simply parents who exist in a house and have a life without the child. The encounter of the nothing in association with home is unsettling, and perhaps it is the military child’s first realization that she has no place in the world from which home can be claimed.

Other military brats choose to transcend the nothingness, claiming an identity, a selfhood, and freedom (Heidegger, 1967/2008a). This military brat responds to the question of “where are you from” with “everywhere.” Everywhere is not a place, neither here or there. But it is expansive, all-encompassing, non-directional. The everywhere is not rooted in a place, but connected to all places. While continents are fragmented, broken, they still have the same base molecules, grains of dirt, sand, rock, on which we tread. Every-where brings an image of being held or nested in the earth, never displaced or lost because the ground and the sky and the water around you are still the same. There is a sense of safety because there is always a place to be, a place to make home, the normalization of a constant immigrant status. Every-where is still vague even if it is safe—it leaves too much unsaid.

“Where are you from?” perhaps is not best answered for the naming of place. Military brats have many places to call home, many places where they belong. What

if home for the military child is not a question of place but a question of identity? Who are you in relation to where you live? What does it mean to live in Ft. Sill, Ft. Jackson, and Ft. Bliss when your father or mother is in the military? You cannot be “from” there having only lived there for three years. In wrestling with the dilemma of place and belonging, in all these questions and questioning, there is a simple answer: “I was a military brat.” The claiming of identity, especially in college, can temper assumptions about you as a person because of your race or what you wear or eat.

College is routinely characterized as a place for young people to find themselves, to answer “big life” questions, to become fully realized individuals apart from their family and home community. Levering’s (2000) phenomenological exploration of the relationship of *heimat* (home) and the university is acknowledgement of the almost unnatural inbetween space of higher education, adulthood, and identity: “Home is with your parents, whether you like it or not” (p. 208). Home cannot necessarily be “with” parents for military children when they reach a certain age. When parents stay in one place, in a home one knows intimately, a house is home—you know the pattern of the shadows in the kitchen as the sunsets in the winter or the scuff on the side of your sibling’s door where you accidentally scraped it when hauling your sister’s large green upholstered wooden chair into your room that first summer she went away to college. Instead, the military parents continue their nomad life, their moving life, and the military child can never truly return home to parents, but must go out into the world, into college settings, alone. In this lies *Hiraeth* (Petro, 2012) in the truest sense. *Hiraeth* is a Welsh word that describes a homesickness for a home where one can never return or perhaps that

never was. Military children leave the institution, the imagined community that exists in parallel with the civilian world, only to find themselves without what they always thought they had despite the ritual moving. The identity along with the trinkets of childhood, the things they carry, are the only proof that they grew up somewhere and everywhere and were not simply birthed at the age of 18.

The military culture becomes their touchstone of what home was and is, their ties to their parents. The comfort is found in what military children carry, the family culture and military culture, and values and skills gained from their upbringing. For military children, claiming a military brat identity is both embracing the culture in which they were raised, while appropriately distancing themselves from their mothers and fathers who will forever remain “military.” In recognizing where they are from and the culture in which they grew up, military brats can forge their own adult identities.

College as Another Adventure: Transition, Exploration, and the Military Brat Identity

An adventure, however, interrupts the customary course of events, but is positively and significantly related to the context it interrupts. Thus an adventure lets life be felt as a whole, in its breadth and in its strength. Here lies the fascination of an adventure. It removes the conditions and obligations of everyday life. It ventures out into the uncertain. (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 60)

Adventure is its own genre—sea adventures, epic adventures, war adventures, girl adventures, school adventures. Each genre has its own tropes and stylistic devices: sea adventures involve monsters like in *Moby Dick*; epic adventures depict boasting men; school adventures include intellectual and social awakenings. An Anglo-Norman (*aventur*, *aventour*) and old French word (*aventure*), “adventure”

looks very much like a modern French phrase: *a-ven-tour* or *a venir d'un tour*, meaning, loosely, *to come from a visit* or *to make a visit* (OED, n.d.). One would say: “*Je vein d'un tour du Marseille . C'était une ville genial.*” Or “I am coming from a visit to Marseille. It was a great city.” A visit, like an adventure, can be mundane, such as a visit to grandmother's house. A visit can expand to include a wolf. Or an adventure can extend past a walk involving a wolf and become a trans-Atlantic voyage on a vessel. The historical uses of “adventure” are rich as the phrase *a venir d'un tour*. In its historical form, adventure was used to mean luck, fortune, a military expedition, risk, an activity (OED, n.d.). The word was an act (expedition or activity) to a state of having (such as having luck or risk).

For a military child, an adventure or *tour* is a number of years at a duty station, domestic or overseas, remote or urban, and on-base or off-base living. A *tour* is both an act—moving—and a state—being in a single duty station. The tour encompasses the coming from, the staying, and the leaving that happens during a military child's adventure. It is not uncommon to hear: “We did a tour in Europe” or “our Pentagon tour.” Tour even extends to war as military fathers and mothers call their deployment “tours” in Iraq or Afghanistan. Deployment is now a place *to come from a visit*. A tour is no longer a happy word, but laden with risk and uncertainty. There are fears in the tours of the military child—fear of separation and fear of what may happen, loss of life or loss of mobility, fear of making new friends in a new school. The adventure of the tour is both that of loss and bodily risk (war) in addition to the developmental risks of a healthy adolescent (adjusting to a new high school).

For a military child, college is an adventure undertaken by a young person, since it is perhaps the first time leaving family rather than being left.

The Adventure of Moving: Places of Transition for the Military Child

College is a place for adventure, a between-place, where young people of all races, ethnicities, from all over the United States and World, live in closed spaces. For many, it is the first time they may have lived in proximity to other cultures and American sub-cultures. How is this time unique for military children, who have lived in more integrated settings or perhaps attended more integrated schools? For military children, is moving to a new place simply another adventure, another place to explore and understand who they are in the context of others? What is this between-place but a place of transition specifically for transformation? Transition to and transformation in to what?

Transition, from the latin *transition-em*, means “a passing or passage from one condition, action, or (rarely) place, to another; change” (OED, n.d.); it is a “noun of action” (OED, n.d.). Everything transitions according to the definitions—geological structures, physical elements, architectural styles, languages, molecules, even time itself. Transition is as natural and as repetitive as the rising and setting of the sun. Military children often may experience moving and transition as inherently natural, normalizing the experience of college as a “passing from one condition...to another” (OED, n.d.). With normalizing transitions, such as sunsets and sunrises, are the transitions ritualized? If so, how do military children ritualize transitions, like moving, and in what ways do those rituals play a role in their adjustment to college?

Monks have matins, ritual prayers and readings to welcome the dawn, and the

military has reveille to greet the day. How do small things mark moves and transitions for military children, and how has the repetitive nature of the moves cemented and altered these rituals? Furthermore, are military children simply making the transition away from military life, their families, and to adulthood as a civilian? And how does college facilitate this transition or any transition? Even before attending college, how do military brats navigate the intersections of transition, the passages and corridors they navigate as they move, and how do they find spaces for experimentation and exploration in the military and civilian worlds?

“Leaving Was Never Easy”: Moving and College as Rites of Passage for the Military Child

It’s not been an unpleasant life at all. I was an extrovert as a kid, so while leaving was never easy, new places meant fresh beginnings and opportunities to reimagine how I might move through the world. When I started high school in the Philippines, there was no one to remind me of some embarrassing thing I did in the sixth grade in Mississippi. And when I left the Philippines, I could invent an entire narrative about it for my college friends in Shreveport. (Matthew, 2014)

This act of leaving and reinvention in each new place sets military brats apart from their peers, the ones who Levering describes as reacting to their culture and home. Military brats have been forever transient; therefore, they may not be reacting to their culture and home when at college. But rather, they are people who “invent an entire narrative about it [the Philippines] for my college friends in Shreveport” (Matthew, 2014). And here is where we see a split, the lived experience of the military child and reimagination of self, which irrevocably alters an approach to college. College is not just a place to go to discover self, but it is an addition to the litany of places lived. These places are chanted and recounted orally like a prayer, a laundry list of saints evoked in Catholic communion blessings. In each new place

there is the reality that no one knows you as a person, what you have done in the past, how people have regarded you in the past. And each place is full of hope for a new adventure, an untainted reputation, new clothes and hair, new demeanor. The military child re-invention plays with the culture we are new to and the cultures we have known in past lives. This is empowering: every few years, we get a free pass at life, to go to a place where we are not known and where we perhaps have control over how others will perceive and know us. In this sense, the transition place, the college place is something altogether different in the development of the military child identity. However, with the re-imagination of self in the new place, military children are still sensitive to transitions. These transitions are ritualized rites of passage much like the ones Van Gennep (1960) delineates.

Vincent Tinto (1993) was perhaps the first to use Van Gennep's (1960) *Rites of Passage* in higher education literature. Van Gennep's (1960) theory was perhaps the corner stone of one of the first attempts to explain why young people are not retained in college settings. Tinto (1993) imaged that leaving college was a failed *Rite of Passage* that resulted in a form of cultural suicide—the latter idea being borrowed inelegantly from Durkhiem's writings on suicide. Tinto (1993) seemed to shape his theory on rites of initiation, framing college as an initiation to adulthood, which ostensibly might work for European-American upper-classes who may view attendance at an ivy, baby ivy, or seven sisters as finishing schools, steeped in smaller ritual and lore such as ring ceremonies, eating clubs, and secret societies with potentially powerful social connections. For those outside the upper-class social circles, college is more of an individual rite of passage, much like that of a pilgrim,

who leaves home, carrying his/her home culture, and then encountering and incorporating other cultures. When returning to one's home community, the individual is home but apart from his/her community, conscious of the journey and how it has changed the individual (van Gennep, 1960). The military child is like and unlike both these examples, a pilgrim who may or may not be mistaken for someone from the upper-class, precisely because of the constant moving.

Leaving is a repetitive process for the military child. Each part has its own ritual, its own sense of departure and arrival. If military children have ritualized leaving, then it is only understandable that moving is a rite, a brat custom that is honored in its own way. Van Gennep's (1960) *The Rites of Passage* delineates the elements of a rite: "rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminial rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal* (or *threshold*) *rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (p. 21). As with van Gennep's rite, the moving process is in three distinct parts: packing (preliminal), traveling (liminal), settling (postliminal). Packing is the separation from the duty station, the world the military brat is leaving; this is the stage where emotional leaving begins. The transitional stage is traveling; this is a physical journey which takes place via car, train, or plane. This physical journey includes the bodily and emotional experience of the transition. Settling is the entrance and incorporation in the new world; this is both a physical and emotional experience. From settling, the process of leaving begins again. Military children have done this all their lives. It is a familiar cycle, on which a child comes to depend. This is the military brats' life, their "normal" as my mother used to say. In what ways does college fit in this military rite of passage?

College fits neatly into this repetitive process: the *preliminal rites* being the application process and/or leaving home; *liminal (or threshold) rites* being oriented and welcomed to campus, and the *post-liminal rites* full settling on to campus (van Gennep, 1960). In applying van Gennep's (1960) theory to military children, Tinto (1993) makes a salient observation:

It is understandable, for instance, that persons who have acquired skills in coping with new situations or have had past experiences in making similar, though smaller, transitions (e.g., living away at summer camp, traveling) seem to have less difficulty in making the transition to college than do other students. (Tinto, 1993, p. 47)

If military children are always in transition, always leaving something for something else, then the transition to and integration into college is simply another duty station. For the military child, moving and transitions may be ritualized, which offers some comfort and healthy coping mechanisms. Furthermore, in the military child's mind, she has a strict objective to obtain a bachelor's degree. College is functional just like any duty station. However, this duty station is one done alone.

Alone is not new to the military child who most likely has dealt with parental absence and the day-to-day responsibilities of self-care that may come with temporary duty assignments (TDYs) and deployments. How can transition be difficult if it is all you know? In what ways does the military child take transition in stride? And what tools and rituals does the military child use to integrate into their new environment? Where and how did the military child learn these coping skills and techniques? Where did the rituals of moving come from? What purpose did they serve? And can they serve the same purpose in the transition to college? Were the

military children explicitly taught these rituals by parents and peers? Or were the rituals simply a matter of survival?

In this transition to college, Tinto (1993) asserts that “Having given up norms and beliefs of past associations and not yet having adopted those appropriate to membership in a new community, the individual is left in a state of at least temporary normlessness” (p. 93). I believe this is a false statement in regard to young people in college, especially military children. Military brats never leave behind social norms nor are they ever normless. They do use the social norms they have collected over the years to assess, navigate, and incorporate new social norms. Culture is a tool to a military child, something fluid. There is no cultural straight jacket but, rather, a blending of home culture and social culture that entails a constant balancing act. The thought that you must leave one community behind in order to integrate into another feels disingenuous to the lived-experience of transition. No one ever leaves all of them-selves behind or sheds all of them-selves to grow a new skin—we are not snakes.

As Casey (2009) observes, “But more than comfort is an issue in the elective affinity between houses and bodies: *our very identity is at stake*. For we tend to identify ourselves by—and with—the places in which we reside” (p. 120). Rather than lose our identity or self in culture, we live within our current culture at the same time we live within our past culture and our home culture. It is not a choice, but a fact of our lives. The current houses and the cultures become part of us: we drink water flowing from its pipes, which then nourishes the blood that runs through our veins, creating us on a cellular level—hair, skin, mucus. We are immersed in the

culture and our identity grows within the current culture of place and in our home culture, a constant push and pull of social and familial expectations. We are of and not of cultures and location. Even when we undergo a transformation, it is not to become alien to ourselves, particularly in the transition to adulthood. We grow more fully into self, a complex adult self, not disowning any part of us, but rather working through nuances of identity. Van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage theory is inclusive of external and internal considerations such as home culture, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, and other nuances of lived experience. In addition, rites of passage respectfully render military children's past moves as they are part of major patterns of life events, allowing the researcher to uncover the richness of the lived experience of the military child in college.

In its broadness that extends to previous transitions military children experience, van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage illuminate how what is new to many college students has become a comfortable pattern for military children. The skills required to fill out paperwork, talk to strangers, or the ability to ask questions to find out who can help with a specific issue were all learned before—changing schools, moving into a new house, watching parents fill out paperwork at a new bank or duty station. Military children have done this before, but this time, they are required to do it without their families.

Leaving and Not Leaving Family: Preliminal Rites

Moving itself is a transition, a process with its own action verbs and nouns: pack out, rotate, PCS (permanent change of station), get orders, or as my own mother would say “go on an adventure.” However, these words are not litanies but they

describe the process of moving. *Getting orders* is the initial paper work the soldier receives with the new duty station and report date or date of arrival. The movers *pack out* the family; they are a physical part of the move. *Rotating* and *PCSing* (permanent change in station) encapsulate the entire process of moving. However, in PCS, the permanent is misleading. Nothing is permanent about change. In these words, we see patterns, the shape of the moving experience as a rite of passage to be performed again and again. Military children transform and learn a new way of being in their new state, country, school, and culture.

One military brat said growing up military meant always leaving—a house, a home, a state, a country. These departures, like for many of us, were ritualized. The movers packing out, the family loading the car with suitcases and other household goods necessary for a home, and the physical journey of driving to their new duty station. This is an experience each military child knows intimately. Each family has their own ritual in this house-moving. In *The Great Santini* (Conroy, 1976), the Meechum family rises and drives before the sun comes up, traveling in the dead of night such that the children will start a new day in their new house. What *preliminal rites* come before the physical departure? In what ways does the military child and her family prepare for moving? The military child's *preliminal rites* for moving—the getting orders, the knowing that the three years are ending, the family dinner table conversations about the new place, the quiet start of goodbyes—are parallel almost to the college choice process (Cabrera & LaNasa, 2000; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). Instead of a Dream Sheet or a list given to a soldier of open slots around the world, military children are looking at colleges in geographical areas that make sense for

them and their families; location of family and state residency often seem to play a central role in choice. Military children are signing up for SATs, making sure they are taking the right classes for their top choice colleges, and thinking about finances.

The leaving of going to college may be, in fact, somewhat different for military children. If anything, it might be easier than the conventional military move, precisely because all their classmates also are leaving home. The military child is engaging in a cultural phenomenon of the middle-class American child: the SAT exams, the AP credits counted, the discussions of who is applying to which schools and for what reason, applications, recommendations, and the choosing of a university culture. For the first time, military children are like civilian children and are not alone in their feeling of “always leaving.” Everyone from their high school is graduating, so “leaving” high school is taken for granted on a certain level. This is an American rite of passage: caps and gowns donned and tassels flipped. Each senior discusses the college move and starts to assemble items for packing. While stores have made a fortune off the lists in-coming freshman receive, and dorm showers have become popular in recent years, most young people bring what they have at home in two suitcases, and some pocket money. In these small ritualistic acts and ceremonies—dancing, turning of a tassel, packing lists—military children may be able to feel like everybody else.

In this ostensible sameness with the civilian child, is there actual difference? For some civilian children, leaving their “homes” may be celebratory; it is their opportunity to see and experience a life-world that is unlike the familiarity of their

“boring town” (Levering, 2000) with their families. In what ways do military brats process this choice? Do military children leave their families to leave for college?

Many military children seem to ask or consider where their parents live now, where their parents may live in the next few years, and where they might be close to relatives in making their college choice. When my parents were stationed in Heidelberg, I chose to attend college in Belgium. While I applied to five other schools across the United States, I knew I could go to school in Arizona or even Texas as a back-up. My sister was living in Arizona having just graduated from the University of Arizona and I would have had access to in-state tuition. In Texas, I also had access to in-state tuition because of my father’s in-state residency. But there was little incentive to be away from my family. Twenty years earlier, when Mary Lawlor’s (2013) family was stationed in Heidelberg, Germany, she chose to attend college at the American University of Paris; her sister went to Schiller International University in Germany. There is an inherent paradox here: for all the moving, and all the leaving that military children do, there is a resistance to leaving family. If family is a fixed-place, a home for the military child, leaving is a different demand.

Mary Lawlor (2013) and I both moved to entirely different countries just to be near our parents—an irony if there ever was one. But it complicates what home is to a military child: what does it mean when your mother and father are more “home” than your passport country? When seemingly adrift, without a “home” in the conventional civilian sense, family and the military community comprise all the home necessary. There is an inherent tension in leaving for college and leaving family. Perhaps the real question is, if military children are so good at moving and transitions,

what drives them to attend college near their families? Family members? Or perhaps even a certain state in which they felt most at home? In what ways does this attraction to staying near “home” alter the transition process?

Culture is a Tool for Incorporation: Liminal (or Threshold) Rites

A life of leaving, of habitual transitions is “not an unpleasant life,” (Matthew, 2014) but has its own benefits—fresh beginnings and the opportunity to reimagine self. For Patricia Matthew, a military brat growing up in the 1980s, Mississippi and the Philippines and Louisiana were worlds apart, each with their own set of social conventions and cultural trappings. Patricia’s invented narratives smooth her transitions, empowering her to take control of these passages of time, place, and conditions. No one has to know what her life was actually like in the Philippines or Italy or Oklahoma, and most of what military brats share sounds like a lie anyhow—who actually lives in the Philippines? What is the Philippines? Is it simply a dot of green in blue, seemingly so small on a world map that hangs on a bulletin board? Or is it a country with people who have their own history, culture, and languages? What does it mean for an American teenager whose father is in the military to live there? How did she incorporate certain aspects of that culture into her life? How did it feel to know something of the Philippines, to take parts of the country with her to college? She is not Filipino; she has no relatives there; she simply has the lived experience of the Philippines, an intimate knowing of place. In what ways, if at all, does she feel Filipino? She is and is not of the Philippines. These narratives, invented or not invented, are an inherent part of how military brats navigate transitions from place to place.

Military brat transitions, our moving, are constant; it is the one thing that we know will come, a patterned and ritualized re-occurring rite in our lives. By the time we arrive at college, we are masters at these transitions, at adapting. However, this goes beyond adaptation, this cultural expertise from the constant moving. Adapt derives from the French *adapter*, meaning “To become adjusted or used to new conditions; to change one's behaviour or attitude to suit a different environment” (OED, n.d.). The verb fails to capture the nuances of the adaption process—to be used to new conditions or altering behavior shows adaption at its most shallow. For military children, adapting to a new culture is a tool, to wield, much like we would write with a pen or hammer a nail into a wall to hang a picture. Culture becomes a shovel to excavate and understand new surroundings, new people, and a new place.

Heidegger (1954/2008d) addresses the urge to wield and master a thing when he addresses technology: “Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as means. We will, as we say, ‘get’ technology, ‘intelligently in hand.’ We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control” (p. 313). Military children manipulate culture as a “means” to blend into their surroundings, to make friends, and to adapt to a new place (Heidegger, 1954/2008d, p. 313). However, once they “get” the culture in which they were asked to live, it is time to move again (Heidegger, 1954/2008d, p. 313). It is mastered only to be unmastered or re-mastered or mastered in another way. General Norman Schwarzkopf (1992) describes this mastering and re-mastering, this ability to wield culture or use culture as one would use technology.

When moving from his Swiss boarding school to Frankfurt American High School, he observed:

I had been away from the United States for two years, and the world of the American teenager was totally alien to me. When I showed up in Frankfurt in July, I was wearing Swiss summer clothes while all the other Americans had on blue jeans and white socks and loafers. I had long, stringy European hair; but in Frankfurt crew cuts were in style. I don't think I've ever felt more out of place. I spent hours poring over a Sears, Roebuck catalogue, looking at men's clothes...it took months before I unlearned Switzerland enough to fit in, but I gradually became Americanized. (Schwarzkopf, 1992, p. 46)

Schwarzkopf arrives as an outsider, an American who is not-American, apart from others. Blending in is a matter of studying his surroundings, understanding what is done and what is not done in this particular sub-culture. First, there is observation: blue jeans and white socks with loafers are part of this particular American uniform, a part of the puzzle for Schwarzkopf to comfortably fit into his new culture. He is learning between and among cultures—Swiss and American—seeking to master one culture now that he has mastered the other. What do his fellow teens wear? What do they do for fun? How they do it? This may seem shallow and a rather surface approach to blending in, but it is inherently logical, reminiscent of the chameleon, changing colors but never changing biological make-up. There is nothing strange about this in the mind of the chameleon; it simply is. If military brats can blend in, wearing something that helps them look like other teens, it is their first step to adapting to a new place and becoming part of their new landscape. This is using culture as a tool.

After military brats figure out the more surface aspects of the culture, military children can truly begin to learn and manipulate the culture in which they live. At first it may seem that military children are simply ape-ing culture, engaging in

boutique multiculturalism (Fish, 1997) through the superficial acquisition of whatever home culture with which they are living. Culture is lived both *with* and *in*. Military children live in parallel to culture (with), of it but always apart, and they are physically or otherwise immersed “in” a culture. There is no choice about this, because rejecting a culture does not meet with expectations set forth—you adapt, blend, and find a happy medium or you will be miserable for three years. However, it is only through recognition of cultural systems—the “*with*”—and all they entail—the “*in*”—that military children can begin to engage with the cultures around them.

Schwarzkopf, begins this journey, wielding culture as a tool, a set of social rules and behaviors to learn. As he navigates cultures, he also learns they have *horizons*: “The horizon is the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 301). A horizon moves with the individual’s awareness of the horizon and because of the individual’s past experiences; eventually, all of the horizons of an individual’s past fuse together, creating one horizon out of many. Military children see the horizon of culture because many times they are not of the culture in which they live, creating an awareness of culture and where they locate themselves in relation to the new culture. They live “with” the horizon and “in” the cultural landscapes of the horizon. When General Schwarzkopf (1992) first arrived in Switzerland from Tehran, he realized he must alter his behavior towards women: “I ran over, realizing that I was no longer in Iran, where it was a breach of propriety for a man to offer a woman help” (p. 41). Acting in a socially acceptable way is not the same every place. His horizon had changed and he had to relocate himself in the cultural landscape. When this happens,

we see the fusing of two horizons of culture—the impoliteness of not assisting a female in Europe and the rudeness of it in Iran. He must hold both cultures but act according to the culture he is currently with and in. Looking at this another way, Norman saw his past horizon in Iran and located himself within the European cultural horizon of the moment, leaving the two to collapse into one another, recreating a new, far richer, cultural horizon. The awareness of the cultural horizon aides the military child in wielding culture as if it were a tool. In this way, military children learn to play with culture.

Schwarzkopf must “do” what others “do,” altering and playing with the cultures in which he finds himself surrounded. This might seem oppressive—disconnecting—but there is an inherent sense of adventure and curiosity:

That fall, every once in awhile, I’d think about my friends back in Princeton, joining the Boy Scouts and raking leaves, and I’d marvel at my good fortune. I was with my dad in the Arabian Nights [Iran], having manly experiences, with no women bossing me around. I was living every boy’s dream. It never occurred to me to be homesick. (Schwarzkopf, 1992, p. 32)

This art of blending into a culture to which one distinctly does not belong, does not mean loss of self, but is rather a constant addition to our initial understanding and appreciation of the world. The military child is like a perpetual tourist. Schwarzkopf is of the United States but living in Iran, which he presents as exoticism, a story book of adventure, an unreality. In essence, the Arabian Nights were temporary, “a dream” from which Schwarzkopf (1992, p. 32) would wake. In this impermanence, there is a freedom of play acting to blend in, to do and take up customs that are not conventionally American. While this may be play acting to a child, how will the young adult military child in college interact with other students and navigate the campus culture having had such experiences? Will the military child

in college continue these childhood “affectations,” or perhaps the play acting of culture has been internalized bit by bit, resulting in a mish-mash of cultures? Is this disrespectful to culture in general, making military children shallow consumers of it?

The internalization of culture can only be achieved precisely because we have known other cultures, which means this tool is not something that appears to the military child magically; there is no magic here. Rather, the military child uses culture as a tool out of necessity. Can military children be blamed for “using” culture as a means to an end? To cultivate friendships? To blend into their surroundings? The idea of culture as a tool does not mean that every new experience can be solved by taking out a hammer. Not everything is a nail. Rather, as military children age, the tools become more varied, nuanced, and sensitive because they have an awareness of the horizons of culture. The horizons always move as the military children’s awareness ebbs and flows and the horizons of the past fuse with the present. In seeing the horizons, the military child wields culture as a way to work within a system: it is not enough to use the tool but you must understand the space, time, and place in relation to your tools.

Schwarzkopf’s navigation of culture forced him to see systems and work with and in systems, something which started to become obvious first when he attended Valley Forge Military Academy and then West Point. While at Valley Forge, Schwarzkopf realized that he would have to work to get into West Point, a revelation that he was part of a social system that he needed to negotiate in order to succeed. While he could not always control his environment or rules, he could build alliances with and in his current community. At West Point, when the graduating seniors

choose their job field, the job field that fills up last is shamed. Schwarzkopf knew he could not change the rules so that infantry, his job field of choice, would win, so he banded with a group of young graduating cadets to make sure that infantry was full before the last cadet chose their specialty. He worked within the rules of the culture, changing what he could change. His fellow cadets were far more changeable than the system, and in influencing the cadets, he was able to create the outcome he wanted within the system. This was culturally acceptable. The story seems small, and seems obvious: Schwarzkopf became a well-known general, so of course he had leadership skills. His recognition of the system and how to work the system for something he cared about, speaks volumes about the tools he obtained from living in various American, European, and Middle Eastern majority- and sub-cultures.

The military child's incorporation into college is a rite of passage into adulthood, a push to individualization, and an odd existence in two worlds—the military and the civilian—precisely because the military child can never truly belong to either. After four years on campus, military children will leave the university gates, like they left the military gates, never really to return. And they will use all of those skills, the rites of moving, the rites of leaving, to facilitate another transition into a new phase of their adult lives, carrying bits of their houses, cultures, countries, and childhoods with them.

Post-liminal Rites: Settling in to the University Home

As Levering (2000) observes even after leaving for college, “Home is with your parents, whether you like it or not” (p. 208). For military children, there is an increasing sense of dislocation in relation to home and family. Military children

return and discover their parents have their own lives in a community where the child no longer belongs. Their clothes may no longer be from the post-exchange because the child bought clothes “on the economy”; the fashions are different; the customs learned and capital gained change the child. Military children in college exist in multiple cultures, always bridging them, always between them, and ultimately they must choose or reconcile these cultures. The gaps between family culture and university culture can be stressful and almost alienating. The life as a chameleon finally catches up with military children who are no longer really military children but on the cusp of adulthood, on the verge of striking out on their own, having cultivated separate non-military-family identities. No one cares what rank your father or mother was in the college environment. No one cares what part of base you lived on, or who your grandfather was—if he was a high-ranking officer. When you return to base, you know the rules. The military child is different, living at the intersections of military culture, civilian culture, and university culture. What does this living between for the military child mean for settling into the college setting? Are military children ever really settled? Ever really civilian?

Settling into place, the transitions to college, to civilian life, are never complete, never realized, simply a mathematical limit that we approach but never reach. The small things, however, a cup of pens on your desk or learned ritualized habits make acclimation to the new house and the new gates easier. Finding a place for the Welch’s grape jelly glass or exploring a neighborhood or campus itself can be integral parts of settling.

Settling can sound negative, as if military brats lower their standards when they move from point A to point B, expecting the worst of their new location. However, settling is bitter-sweet. There is an initial boredom of the physical settling, a sense that life in a place has yet to begin. How does a military child create this new life? What does one do to settle in college or any new environment? To create or build a life, there is first an element of exploration. Military children often have had to explore their new duty stations. Karin, an Air Force brat, described how her mother would put her and her brother in the car and just drive around a new town. Her mother framed it as an adventure; they would essentially “go exploring” as part of their moving “adventure.” Karin did this by herself as a college student, walking the streets of Prague, exploring the city of her study abroad experience. She called her mother and said, “Mom, I pulled a ‘you’!” The ritualized knowing of a place is not without the influence of a mother, a father, and even other military families and friends.

As with van Gennep’s (1960) idea of incorporation, Karin explores to become part of the breathing corpus of a new city. In walking or driving the streets, she immerses herself in the ecosystem. In English, we walk “on” the street, we experience the street in a position of power. It is there for us to walk on, at the will of our feet. If we are “in” the street, there is a sense of danger, of being hurt by a car. Casey (2009) comments, “Cities certainly contain homes, but in their capacity to demand and distract they are continually luring us into the streets. They take us out of our homes and into a more precarious and sometimes hostile extra-domestic world” (p. 180).

Homes and streets are binary: home is safe and streets are unsafe, something we are “lured into” as if humans are prey. The city and the streets are “precarious” and “hostile,” indicating that any feeling of home “in” a street is impossible. In French, we walk “*dans le rue*” or “in the street” sans the ominous connotation that it possesses in English. We are immersed in the experience of the street, at the mercy of the street, its trees, and its uneven cobbles. This mercy is benevolent because the street cradles us, surrounds us, and creates space for us. In settling, military brats walk “in” the street, absorbing the culture, subject to its whims, because it is wholly foreign and uncontrollable. Perhaps this act of walking in the street feels precarious because it is still rather unknown to us, but feelings of discomfort are not indicative of danger. However, it pushes us to grow and consider another way of being in the world. This is our ritual of respect for a new city, a new neighborhood because it has a life before and after us; the street is simply kind enough to host us for a while, until we leave, and the street takes “in” a new family.

Geography and physical space are only two aspects of the settling process. Emotionally and psychologically, military children must adjust, building new friend and support networks. In the military community, many of these networks appear ready made. Military children must take initiative to engage with their peers in their new surroundings. Perhaps the settling into college is simpler because everyone is new; everyone is trying to make friends at the same time, find classes, learn time management, and studying. But how deep do these friendships run? And in what ways do military children feel different from their civilian peers? Do they encounter odd micro-aggressions from civilians who make assumptions about them for their

lived experience abroad? How does a military child respond when someone says: “Oh, she is just European” because the military child lived so long in Europe that his or her ways might be substantially different from a middle-class individual who has traveled but never lived abroad? In what ways do military children, while having grown up with difference, cope with their own difference at an age when they are experimenting with and establishing their own emergent adult identity? Military children may use every coping mechanism they know to adjust, but if they do not adjust, what new coping skills do they cultivate for their new environment?

Military children in college are not using new coping techniques to navigate college-settings or the college experience. Instead, they subconsciously or consciously use previously learned behaviors from their mobile childhood—culture is a tool after all! This knowing of how to move and how to be in foreign settings is a translatable skill, entrenched in problem solving that was part of their childhood. In this sense, while the location may be new, the issues that arise may be simply variants of something seen before in another country at another age. To think about military brats’ cultural tool kit in another way: an army brat, raised in the 1960s and 1970s, observed growing up as a military child, might have transferred that knowledge to settle into and navigate college much like possessing a mental map of Venice. The knowledge needed was accumulated through lived experience over a period of 18 years, walking new streets, attending new schools, watching parents fill out paperwork. The intricate knowing of how to handle jet lag or what food to carry with you while traveling is a sophisticated kind of capital that seems to be awarded in college. The streets of Venice are winding, ill-marked, and ostensibly circular, but

with the appropriate knowledge of how to navigate them, they become fascinating mazes filled with interesting architecture and people. There is also a feeling that being lost is okay because eventually military children will learn the streets and find their way; therefore, the understanding that it is okay not to know because you will learn is as helpful as their map of Venice.

The knowledge of settling and navigating will increase the likelihood the military child will persist in college. Given what we know, in what ways have childhood adventures prepared the military child for navigating new spaces such as college? Has the ostensible hardship of moving, strengthened their resolve to learn and navigate new places by themselves?

In the Making of Transitions: Turns Made, Prejudices Revealed, and An Existential Investigation

In my first chapter, I explored my own turn toward the phenomenon, my impetus as a researcher to uncover the lived experiences of the military child. The turn is a marriage of the personal lived experience of the researcher and current research which informs that lived experience. It is also a way into the phenomenon, which is not restricted to my own experience. Rather, in chapter 2, I try to open up aspects of the phenomenon as they are described in autobiography, fiction, blogs, and in current research. Phenomenological writing is much like eating an artichoke: the outer layers are tougher, have less meat, and as you eat towards the inside the leaves become richer, more robust, until you get the alternately softer and unwieldy leaves covering the heart, which is a bit of plant flesh that stands on its own. Philosophers are the heart of the artichoke. They are studied in their own right, standing on their own. Everything we do as phenomenological researchers depends on the presence of

the heart. Philosophy is present in each part of our writing; however, we also must explicate the philosophy we are using. We must explain the philosophers we have chosen to use and why we have chosen to use them. chapter 3 functions in this way—giving a detailed explanation of the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology and how this philosophy will be used to research the lived experience of my phenomenon.

CHAPTER 3: NO ONE THING: PHENOMENOLOGY AS METHODOLOGY

The lived experiences of military brats in college are not a “what,” or a thing to be attached to a college retention framework (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 72). There is too much to the experience to slot it into a flow chart. As with the military brats’ constructions of home, the lived experience must not be reduced; it is no one thing. To adequately shine a light on the human experience of the military child, I turn to phenomenology. Phenomenological inquiry “shows itself in itself;” it is “what is manifest” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 73). The conception itself, grounded in uncovering a single phenomenon, orients us “to the thing itself” (p. 72). And with this thing, this phenomenon, we uncover the “how” (p. 72). The thing itself is a broader set of experiences beyond a single moment in time—military children moving houses, changing schools, navigating new countries, acquiring knowledge of foreign languages, choosing and attending college.

In what ways do military children construct their identities and homes from these broader sets of experiences? And how do these broader sets of experiences manifest themselves in college settings? In what ways do these experiences assist with the transition to adulthood that theoretically takes place during college? With phenomenology we can collapse these questions and simply ask: **What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college?** We may collapse those questions precisely because phenomenology provides an all-encompassing methodology beyond a conceptual framework, a way of investigating the essences of being. I begin with a broad question and find my way into the phenomenon as I interact with the participants themselves.

Phenomenology is applied philosophy. Recognizing the difficulty of researcher objectivity, phenomenological researchers instead are called to embrace the subjective experiences of their lived-world, using those experiences as a starting place for questioning (van Manen, 1997). In chapter 1, there was the turning to the phenomenon, using my own experience as an entrée to investigate the richness of the lived-experience of military brats. Chapter 2 illustrates how literature, film, and scholarly research represents military brats, which further illuminates my own prejudices, or pre-judgments, about the life of a military brat: “For Gadamer, our ‘pre-judices’ do not constitute a willful blindness which prevents us from grasping the truth; rather they are the platform from which we launch our very attempt at understanding” (Moran, 2000, p. 278). In explicating and exploring my own construction of the military brat experience, I attempt to reveal, understand, and overcome such pre-judgments. Here in chapter 3, I explicate hermeneutic phenomenology as my methodology.

The writings of various philosophers—Martin Heidegger (1967/2008a; 1927/2008b; 1954/2008c; 1954/2008c), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975/2004), and Edward S. Casey (2009)—and the six part process delineated by Max van Manen (1997) guide this study. Heidegger (1967/2008a; 1927/2008b; 1954/2008c; 1954/2008c) introduces concepts such as “*Dasein*” (or “Being”), “nothing,” “dwelling,” “questioning” which deepen our understanding of hermeneutic phenomenology. Gadamer (1975/2004) theorizes on conversation, the interactions between the researcher and his/her participants in addition to explicating the concept of “horizons,” and the cultural contexts of one’s historicity. The shared experience of the phenomenon informs these verbal exchanges. Casey’s (2009) ruminations of home speak directly to the experience of the military brats

and their construction of home. From these philosophical writings which are explicated in this chapter, van Manen (1997) extracts and distills the methodology of phenomenology, translating the dense prose into a human science research process.

Phenomenology renders no one lived-experience, no one truth. The past informs the present and the present would be an enigma without the context of the past.

Phenomenology recognizes all experiences, problematizing and complicating the phenomena to paint a textured picture. How does this investigation begin? In what ways does the methodology speak to the experience of the military child? How does the methodology capture the essence of the military child navigating college?

On the Choice of Methodology

When my starting place is my own life experience, memories, values, and cultural understandings, I wondered how best to approach the lived experience of military children in college. How would I render without bias, without subjectivity, a lived experience that could be so much like my own? At times, when I speak with other military children, it is like talking to myself. We speak our own language of shared experience—and the things we say and the way we say them. Which methodology would do everything I needed it to do, would fit my writing style, thought process, and experience, but would also stay respectful to my fellow military brats and the military community? Phenomenology was a revelation: van Manen (1997) states, “A phenomenological question must not only be made clear, understood, but also lived by the researcher” (p. 44). The questioning of a methodology must arise from somewhere. Van Manen (1997) goes on to describe phenomenology in contrast to other scholarly “disciplines”:

Phenomenology differs from other disciplines in that it does not aim to explicate the meanings specific to particular cultures (ethnography), to certain social groups (sociology), to historical periods (history), to mental types (psychology), or to an individual's personal life history (biography). Rather, phenomenology attempts to explicate the meanings as we live them in our everyday existence, our lifeworld. (p. 11)

Van Manen does not say this to exclude these aspects from phenomenology or give them less privilege, but rather to put these disciplines in context with the daily lived experience. Humans wake up and go to bed every day as a member of different cultures, social groups. We, as humans, have our own individual psychology, shaped in part by our culture, social group, history, and biography. We live at the crossroads and intersections of these disciplines. Instead of choosing one for explication, phenomenology attempts to touch on all these disciplines as they pertain to the everyday lived experience. I weave my questions and all these disciplines together, binding them with phenomenological philosophy, to seek an understanding of how military children experience the world differently as young adults because of their unique up-bringing.

Choosing a methodology is much like finding a home or creating a home. There are homes you try to see if there is a natural fit or affinity. Sometimes this happens instantaneously. When I was nine, I was living in Virginia and learning American history, much of which took place in Boston. And all the books I read were written by people from Massachusetts. Boston was clearly a place of intellectual growth. I wanted to live in Boston. At 22, I moved to Boston, and walking in the streets, I knew I was "home." Other times, the fit is not completely obvious—when I moved to Maryland, I was terrified because of negative experiences I had living in Northern Virginia. However, four years later, I walk in the streets of Silver Spring, Maryland and it is home—not a natural home, but home nonetheless. Methodologies are much this way—

some you settle into immediately, locating yourself inside the tradition, and others you learn consciously and respectfully because while you will love them and exist within the tradition, it will not be a comfortable home.

Finding phenomenology was the former for me. Van Manen (1997) spoke to me and the writing style was the style that felt authentic to me. Here, within this tradition, I could say, “I am a Heideggerian phenomenologist,” or “I am a hermeneutic phenomenologist,” and I could also say “I write in a style that feels authentic.” Moran (2000) describes this feeling and moment perfectly in his discussion of Heidegger’s stance on authenticity: “*Authentic* moments are those in which we are most at home with ourselves, at one with ourselves” (p. 240). This authenticity means that I can use everything I have ever learned, multiple disciplines, conversations I have had with scholars and military child friends. There is no pretense of knowing or not knowing, but there is an honesty of where I locate myself within the phenomenon and how I perceive the military child research. The authenticity may speak to my current maturity as a human and scholar, where I am ready to lay out beliefs and challenge them. Even now, my understandings of military children have grown deeper as I write my way into the phenomenon and that is okay. With phenomenology, I am allowed to be at home with myself, my experiences, and my being in a way that opens up my research rather than hinders it.

Perhaps this feeling of authenticity stems from the inclusiveness of phenomenology. As van Manen (1997) observes, “We might say that hermeneutic phenomenology is a philosophy of the person, the individual, which we pursue against the background of understanding of the evasive character of the *logos* of *other*, the *whole*,

the *communal*, or the *social*” (p. 7). The individual experience is often overlooked in the military child literature. No one asks a military child to speak for himself or herself. Instead there are negative quantitative studies and a handful of autobiographies and memoirs by officers’ children (Jensen, Xenakis, Wolf, & Bain, 1991; LaGrone, 1978; Lawlor, 2013; Ryan-Wenger, 2001; Schwarzkopf, 1992; Wertsch, 2006). The voice of the military child is lost in these studies, and when it is heard, it is a voice of the most privileged of military children.

Military children and families are often pathologized, reductively studied. Even, to some extent, van Manen (1997) himself reduces the value of human life and experience of the soldier in his critique of other methods: “Actions and interventions, like exercises, are seen as repeatable; while subjects and samples, like soldiers, are replaceable. In contrast, phenomenology is, in a broad sense, a philosophy or *theory of the unique*: it is interested in what is essentially not replaceable” (p. 7). I was enraged when I first read this. My father is not replaceable to me. No military family believes a uniformed member is replaceable. Even now, politicians create zero-casualty policies. A researcher has no reason to discard the lived experience of the soldier when espousing the “*theory of the unique*...what is essentially not replaceable” (van Manen, 1997, p. 7). I do not believe that van Manen meant to discard the lived experience of soldiers; however, even the most conscientious of researchers who are sensitive to language may reductively see the military even if it is not a view they intended to communicate.

After the post-World War II baby boom, the integration of the military, and the rise of the all-volunteer force, it is time for military children to be seen. They need to be seen and shown against the backdrop of their military families, their cultural experiences,

and their choices about college and in college as they navigate the civilian world and young adulthood. By placing military children front and center, understanding the complications of their lives, their unique experience as highly mobile and culturally diverse young people, we are giving voice to an otherwise voiceless community, making “an invisible...tribe” (Conroy, 2006, p. xix) visible, and holding a lantern to the people who serve by default. If phenomenology is “the curriculum of being and becoming,” (van Manen, 1997, p. 7) the methodology will not simply shine a light on the lived experience of the individual military child, but it will take into account the whole child—past, present, and future experiences.

While this is a comfortable relationship, that does not mean it has not challenged me. My beliefs, my experiences, and the experiences of others are constantly considered and reconsidered as I write my way into my phenomenon. I have been forced to rethink systems and structures I have taken for granted my entire life, questioning whether I write what I want to believe or I write the truth of the matter. In phenomenology I find the space to speak about the complexities of my life experience and my own subjectivity, while doing authentic and responsible research on my phenomenon.

Starting with the Question of “Being”: Home, Self, and the Military Child

If you were to ask a military brat “Where is your home?” or “Where are you from?” the children may pause. Home, to military brats, may be a construct far more complicated or more problematic than simply giving a street name, a neighborhood, or town. One blog entry describes a 7-year-old military child being asked that question by a civilian adult: the child was confused because he had already lived in a number of states and countries (Hartman, 2012). However, as the military child grows older, and the past

blends into the present, the child may ask a clarifying question in return. A question rarely answers a question. However, it remains that in some way, the concept of home is undefinable for the military child. Why is home undefinable? What does the undefinable home show us about the “Being” of a military child? For Heidegger (1927/2008b), the concept of *Dasein* or

‘Being’ is the most universal and the emptiest concept. As such it resists every attempt at definition. Nor does this most universal and thus undefinable concept need any definition. Everybody uses it constantly and also already understands what they mean by it. (p. 42)

Civilians and military children alike use the word “home” every day. At the end of each school day, teachers line-up children with labels: children who take the bus home, and children who walk home. Teachers may see home as a place children disappear to until the next day when the bus arrives again. Conversely, a man leaves the office to go home because the dog needs to be let out. To him, a home may be a house with four-walls and a yard for the dog. Or a woman flies “home” to see her parents. Her construction of home may be her family house, where she grew-up, had her first kiss on the porch. These constructions of home are ones that “everybody uses” and “already understands what they mean by it” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 42). However, these are a few constructions or understandings of home that may be more prevalent in civilian communities than in military communities. Military children may tell their college roommate that they are going “home” for winter vacation. That home may be a house they have never lived in before, in a state where they have no friends, or in a town where they may not speak the same language. Another military child may “already understand” this concept of home, this concept of Being. But to a civilian, it could be foreign. What

does it mean to “be” in this home-space? “Being” as universal and empty also means it is the fullest, messiest, and hardest concept to understand.

Being is the essence of, an essence that is known and unknown, simple and complicated, everything and nothing. “Being is undefinable” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 43). To uncover Being, to investigate Being, we must see what is. However, what “is” was not born of a single moment; it is no one thing. Rather,

In its factual Being Dasein always is as and “what” it already was...Dasein “is” its past in the manner of *its* Being which, roughly expressed, actually “occurs” out of its future. (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 63)

The Being of military brats is as they are and what they were: the past and present collide, bringing the present military brat’s self into existence. Much like the military brat identity, “The Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or already grown up in them” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 54). As military brat identities and experiences develop into Being, that part is something chosen, assigned, or adopted because of circumstances. How does this Being further develop in college? In what ways does the military child conceive of his or her *Dasein* as she or he first discovers it? In what ways does the Being of a military child provide strength and resilience?

In this seeking to understand *Dasein*, there is an integral questioning—what is the question we are asking of *Dasein*? In what ways is *Dasein* inextricable from the question? If “Every question is a seeking...What is questioned is to be defined and conceptualized in the investigative or specifically theoretical question” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 45). The *Dasein*, so taken for granted, must have a question to be interrogated; it must have presented itself already, accessible to the researcher in some

way. For this, “Dasein has either chosen these possibilities itself, stumbled upon them, or already grown up in them... We come to terms with the question of existence always only through existence itself” (Heidegger, 1927/2008b, p. 54). In chapter 1, the turning to my phenomenon, I show how the question of the lived experience of the military child presented itself to me, how as a human and scholar, I grew into my phenomenological question: **What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college?** In this instance, in questioning, I have acted to “bring into the open” that which is indeterminable, which is required for every “true question” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 357). I have opened the question, as one opens up a pomegranate, the countless lush red seeds exposed, I “concretized in a specific ‘this or that’” (p. 357) of the lived experience of the military child. Only then, was I ready to pick out the seeds of the pomegranate, excavating the lived experience of the military child as seen in chapter 2.

No One Construction of Home: Philosophy for the Existential Investigations of Military Children in College

There are as many ways of Being in college as there are phenomenological ways of Being. The Being of the military child is not confined to the university setting or a conventional sociological framework. In the richness of this methodology, I draw from a farrago of other scholarly literatures to illuminate and uncover the lived-experience of the military child in college.

The military sociological literature on families, culture, and structures is perhaps one of the most salient. This literature is woven into the lived-experiences of military children to show the unique circumstances in which military children exist, giving context to their lived experiences. According to Moran (2000), Gadamer believes that “We are in the grip of concepts not of our own making. Furthermore, we do not

construct our concepts but inherit them within the context of a living historical tradition” (p. 283). The military sociological literature acknowledges the tradition from which military children come and how they construct themselves in their historical context. Military children may field offensive questions from civilians such as, “How can you live with a father who is a baby killer?” or “Does your father have PTSD?” which stem from the popular memory of the Vietnam War, tropes revived by the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. At the same time, military children must alternately construct themselves in numerous other traditions: as women, as African Americans, as European-Americans, as children of mothers from Korea or Taiwan, and as transcultural citizens of the world. As we attempt to uncover the *Dasein*, the essence of the military child, we also must make an effort to recognize the multiple traditions and histories in which military children live.

If it is the history and the tradition from which the military children spring, we must also attend to the identity development of these young people. James Joyce’s (1916) *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man* traces the development of Stephen Daedalus, from his child-self who yearned to be transported to a mythical island by the magical moocow to his young-adult-self who rejects his Irish identity, choosing instead the adventure of the European continent. Joyce shows the shifts and changes that alter Stephen’s perception of self and his identity. Irish politics and Catholic education, his cultural tradition and socio-historical contexts, create the unique circumstances for his formation. In this way, so must I trace the development or the formation of the young military child. Military child identity formation is much the same.

This exploration of formation is also referred to as the *Bildung* (Gadamer, 1975/2004). Gadamer links *bildung* with culture, explaining that it is primarily

concerned with “developing one’s natural talents and capacity” (p. 9). He further posits that this formation of natural talent is a state of being that continually comes into being. Natural talent and formation is emergent, shaped by place, people, and experiences as much as it is shaped by the innate inclinations of the individual. The military brats’ experiences of formation are ones of continual change and encounters with the other—other countries, cultures, language. Even if the military child moves from Alabama to California, the cultural context indeed changes despite the ostensible common language and culture of the United States. The *bildung* is then in-alterably changed; the formation shifts. Or as Gadamer (1975/2004) discusses theoretical *bildung*:

To recognize one’s own spirit in the alien, to become at home it in, is the basic movement of spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself from what is other. Hence all theoretical Bildung, even acquiring foreign languages and conceptual worlds, is merely the continuation of a process of Bildung that begins much earlier. Every single individual who raises himself out of his natural being to the spirit finds in the language, custom, and institutions of his people a pre-given body of material which, as in learning to speak, he has to make his own. Thus every individual is always engaged in the process of Bildung and in getting beyond his naturalness, inasmuch as the world into which he is growing is one that is humanly constituted through language and custom. (p. 13)

Military children do not necessarily suffer extreme disruption when they leave a house, school, state or country; rather, it is part of the natural way of the theoretical *Bildung*. The child is pushed beyond the borders of himself and herself to absorb bits of the other, the foreign world around him or her. The encounter with the other, while it can be initially “alien,” becomes an integrated part of the child’s Being, which is constantly emergent. In higher education and human development literature, we see theorists struggle with the classification of *Bildung*—the urge to categorize states of cognitive and socio-emotional development, in addition to the charts that tell us how and why young people make decisions about college. These are ways of understanding the *Bildung*, the

emergence of self and the formation of the young person, which may assist us in uncovering the military child experience in college. How does this constant emergence of self and the encounter with the other create certain conditions for the military child's choices about college and navigation of the college environment? In what ways does the finding of the familiar in the alien equip military children in their continual natural growth and formation?

On Hermeneutic Phenomenology: Interpreting the Things Military Children Carry

Phenomenology was first popularized in the early 1900s in Germany by Edmund Husserl, a Jewish mathematician and phenomenologist. Husserl's career was at its zenith during the rise of Nazi, Germany; he lost his academic appointment as a Jewish faculty member and many of his notes and manuscripts were strategically smuggled to Belgium for safety (Moran, 2000). Husserl was the first to introduce the idea of the life-world and descriptions of environment. In this life-world, the phenomenologist's main concern is "the things themselves" by which he "means we cannot be satisfied with employing concepts whose evidential basis has not been properly clarified by being brought back to their original sources in intuition" (Moran, 2000, p. 108). Rather, the "things themselves" must be defined by their "meaning-intentions" and "interconnected meaning fulfillments" (p. 108). Husserl's greatest breakthrough was the editic reduction, which was supposed to distill the one true essence of the phenomenon in question. Van Manan (1997) describes this study of essences: "A universal or essence may only be intuited or grasped through a study of particulars or instances as they are encountered in lived experience" (p. 10). This quest for the singular truth was perhaps a product of the time, when truth was one thing rather than many things. The reduction and distillation of

essences did not take into account the complexity of the lived experience. Martin Heidegger, Husserl's protégé and member of the Nazi party took issue with the single essence. Thus, hermeneutic phenomenology was so born.

Heidegger posited that there were many ways of being and that there was no one phenomenology or no one way to render the lived experience. This critical phenomenological lens, the breaking open strict "truth" as one thing, made space for hermeneutic phenomenology as an inherent recognition that the lived experience is dependent on interpretation and the illumination of text. This text may be a verbal recounting or a biographical account of a lived experience, but each has its own rendering; it is unique to the person and the circumstances. The text is essentially the interpretation of the individual or a phenomenon. When the reader consumes the text, she, too, is interpreting the phenomenon based on her own life experience: "To interpret means precisely to bring one's own preconceptions into play so that the text's meaning can really be made to speak for us" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 398). In this way, there cannot be a single essence of an experience because we are all prisoners of our history, even the person who is writing the initial account. In admitting our prejudices, we orient ourselves to the phenomenon in a transparent way. Therefore, phenomenology as a methodology is an exercise in hermeneutics or interpretation.

For humans interpretation is as automatic as breathing, since our mind is always in the process of interpreting experiences whether we are aware of it or not. A child touches a hot stove and the pain receptors activate, sending a message to the brain. After the experience of the hot stove, children will look at stoves differently, not as a place to explore but a place to avoid. This event may be imprinted in their memory, or they may

simply remember the pain. The event was processed and interpreted by the brain. Part of the premise of hermeneutics is that interpretation and understanding of a phenomenon are inherently intertwined; one is always dependent on the other. Gadamer (1975/2004) probably explains it the most clearly: “Interpretation is not an occasional post facto supplement to understanding; rather, understanding is always interpretation, and hence interpretation is the explicit form of understanding” (p. 306). How we understand the world is inextricably linked with how we interpret the world. If this is true, then what does it mean for hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology?

What is hermeneutic phenomenology and how does one apply hermeneutic phenomenology to uncover a phenomenon? We first begin with the life-world, the thing we want to uncover, which is grounded in the *quotidian*, the rising of the sun, the smell of decaying leaves in November, the ostensible small things. To this end, as van Manen (1997) says, the methodology is in the writing and deeply embedded in language. The words participants use, the stories they tell, the silences or what is not said are all ways for the researcher to start writing about the phenomenon. Researchers also are drawing simultaneously from phenomenological philosophy; their theories of lived-experience—*Dasein*, horizons, *bildung*—are ways for us to show the lifeworld of our phenomena. Therefore, the work of hermeneutic phenomenology is steeped in the writing process. Imagine if an artist were painting a home seen in the tradition of Vermeer—a small glimpse into *le vie quotidien*. The artist, perhaps having lived this herself, may have many impressions of this phenomenon; she may have written notes and sketches of what she remembers of the process. The artist may then observe or read about many home scenes that she would like to depict. Let us say for our case, it is a military child moving

into a residence hall. After observation and reading, she will begin to interpret with first a sketch, using the conventional colors or framing techniques that Vermeer used; Vermeer is her primary guide. As she shows the scene through her brush, she may begin to add influences from other painters, drawing on other artistic traditions, rendering the complexity of the scene. The hermeneutic writing process or reflection is very much the same as the artistic process described.

To examine it another way, Gadamer (1975/2004) explains, “Hermeneutics was subdivided as follows: there was a distinction between *subtilitas intelligendi* (understanding) and *subtilitas explicandi* (interpretation); and *pietism* added a third element, *subtilitas applicandi* (application), as in J.J. Rambach” (p. 306). In this sense, the observations or conversations in addition to our own lived experience, bring the researcher to a certain understanding. This involves a thematizing process of examining language, the parts of conversation, and the whole of the conversations in light of the segments of the conversations (van Manen, 1997), which are then interpreted using not just our own impressions but also that of literature, art, and phenomenological philosophers. In the thematizing process, the researchers embark on “explorations into the structure of the human life world, the lived world as experienced in everyday situations and relations” (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). How is this exploration done? In what ways do understanding and interpretation come about from the thematizing and subsequent writing process?

Ways of Living: Hermeneutics of Space, Time, Body and Human Relation

Van Manen (1997, p. 101) explains that “There are four existentials that may prove especially helpful guides for reflection in the research process: *lived space*

(spaciality), *lived body* (coporreality), *lived time* (temporeality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality). These existentials are a guide, just as Virgil acted as Dante's guide in the *Divine Comedy*—they give the researcher direction to show an experience. They uncover not one single essence of a phenomenon. The researcher may seek understanding and some sense of knowing, providing an honest and rich rendering of the phenomenon, but no definitive answers. Phenomenology is not an algorithm with a strict answer according to the numbers plugged into the equation. But what is the use of a methodology with no answers, but many answers? Hermeneutic phenomenology does not pretend to generalize, to give one simple truth, but leads to multiple aspects of a phenomenon that can give us insight into our own actions as educators. What can we do as college administrators, faculty, school counselors, residence hall assistants, and admissions officers to smooth the path for military children in relation to their experience in applying to and persisting in college settings? This sense of application is not just of the understanding of philosophy, but it is what van Manen (1997) calls “action sensitive pedagogy.” This is a call for awareness and action as a result of our pedagogical insights.

There is nothing simple about hermeneutic phenomenology. As with our daily lives, it can be incredibly messy, unclean, and rife with contradictions and misunderstandings. In the process of writing and understanding, working with philosophers, the researcher must acknowledge and uncover the complexities, illuminating them. Gadamer (1975/2004) describes these tensions well:

Every encounter with tradition that takes place within historical consciousness involves the experience of a tension between the past and the present. The hermeneutic task consists in not covering up this tension by attempting a naïve assimilation of the two but consciously bringing it out. (p. 305)

As a researcher I explicitly include this because the lifeworld of military children is so complex, incorporating continents, cultures, skin color, ethnicity, and gender. The inherent tensions of being a military child of color in a military that cannot legally acknowledge color is both good and bad. They are trapped in multiple traditions—a tradition of racism in the U.S. culture and a tradition of anti-racism of the U.S. military sub-culture. There is something unusual when an African American brat, the child of an NCO, who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s said she first knew privilege when she saw the officer's club pool. What does this mean for her identity, her understanding of self in college upon leaving the tradition of the military, Or her experience in college? Also, how does a White military child versus a military child of color live these tensions? In what ways do they experience these tensions differently, and how do they shape their young adult selves in college and beyond?

Tensions are essential to address since few voices of military children of color are heard. Rather, with the exception of Marilyn Nelson (2014), all the narratives we currently have are from White officers' children who talk about racism, but may not have lived experiences of being of color in the U.S. While we have hard evidence that military children of color are successful academically in a way that civilian children of color are not (Smrekar et al., 2001; Winerip, 2011), we do not know the lived experiences of the military children of color or even, frankly, White NCO children. In this way, the use of hermeneutic phenomenology opens up and explores these tensions in an in-depth and culturally respectful way.

Always and Never the Other: The Military Child's Cultural Horizons

Military children do not always know that their lives are different from mainstream American culture. This *connaissance* or intimate understanding of their location in American culture is brought about by their encounters with the civilian world, which tell them in no uncertain terms they are “other.” I use the French term, *connaissance* intentionally, since we do not have an equivalent in English. In French “*savoir*” means to know something, like a fact or the price of salmon at your local market. However, “*Connaître*,” the infinitive of *connaissance*, means to know something intimately, the streets of a city or another person—it is as corporal as it is visceral. Military children come to a place in their being where they experience this *connaissance* of what it means to be a military child, an “other” in a society and culture that is theirs and not theirs. This *connaissance*, which naturally happens in time, alters their perceptions of themselves, the cultures and sub-cultures in which they have resided, and the cultures beyond their immediate experience. However, in this understanding of difference also lies a historical limitation: military children may not fully or even partially understand the military culture in which they reside; this happens slowly and with increased exposure to other cultures. It is only perhaps in adulthood that the military child will understand the full extent to how different military culture is from mainstream U.S. culture, and even then a military child will most likely never grasp this in full. Despite this limitation of the military tradition, it is in this knowing of difference that we find it logical that military children often encounter or are aware of horizons.

Military children constantly are aware of being in a situation in which they continually understand their condition or location, or as Gadamer (1975/2004) would

posit, military children are aware of their horizon—“the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (p. 301). There are multiple ways to apply this for military children. First, there is the physical location of “vantage point,” which changes as the military child physically moves from place to place. Standing outside your house in the California desert presents a markedly different landscape from standing outside your house in Okinawa, Japan. This is the experience of the lived-body, lived-place, and the literal horizon.

Military children also have a vantage point of culture which they are forced to be aware of with their changing physical horizons. The language and customs of Okinawa and California are as different as the language and customs of Florida and Italy. The range of vision for customs and social expectations expands, creating a cultural horizon. Military children are not suddenly aware of the horizon with a single move to another continent or state. Rather these are learned with the subtleness of the everyday lived-experience as their *dasein* is shaped and marked by the quiet and sometimes not so quiet transmission of cultural mores. The horizon is always moving, almost its own living and breathing entity, which military children must befriend as they encounter new landscapes and cultures.

With a constantly shifting horizon, the military children’s understanding of their situation or being changes as their horizon expands. Gadamer (1975/2004) states:

Our own past and that other past toward which our historical consciousness is directed help to shape this moving horizon out of which human life always lives and which determines it as heritage and tradition. (p. 303)

The horizon of the military child is in a state of constant fusion, particularly in regard to where and how they locate themselves inside their own culture and other cultures.

Military children must be aware of their surroundings in order to know them in an intimate way in a small amount of time. Young people who have deep roots in towns or suburbs have their entire lives to trace the curve of a street or to know the tree outside their window. The young person who stays in the same house may or may not be conscious or aware of her cultural context. This is the luxury of a deeply rooted house (Bachelard, 1994). The horizon is something the military child lives with on a daily basis. Military children are always walking towards it, trying to grasp the small things of culture in which they live, to exist like everyone else. But the horizon is as ephemeral as the post-monsoon sunsets in southern Arizona desert give way to the gray Brussels' sky or the monument dotted Washington D.C. skyline. With this in mind, I specifically address the horizons of culture to communicate this ephemeral relationship, the ability and inability for military children to take hold of and to master the customs around them. After all, in all our difference we also strive to be like everyone else, often to our own detriment.

If Houses are Homes, are not all Homes Houses?: The Lived Experience of Home Spaces and the Relationship with Home

A rendering of the lived-experience of military children is not complete without consideration of identity and home-spaces. Therefore, it is not surprising that the metaphor of home has become a primary way of uncovering the Being of the military child. As Casey (2009) observes, "Where you have been, including where you have traveled, has a great deal to do with who and what you are, although the determination is by no means simple" (p. 303). Who are military children in relation to the places they have travelled and lived? And what are they in relation to where they have been? In what ways do socio-political and cultural landscapes of different countries and states

influence military children? There is no doubt that military children's knowing of every day life in different countries and cultures alters their relationships with place and people; nothing about it is simple. Military child Mary Lawlor (2013) describes her shift in political orientation while attending college in Paris in the 1960s: the anti-Vietnam political sentiment of young men from the United States living in Paris and the French student protests influenced her own understanding of the Vietnam war, which enraged her fighter pilot father. These events and political sentiments were steeped in time and place, but also heavily influenced who Professor Lawlor was and what she became. In this way, place is both ground into the consciousness and perceptions that military children have, even while it is ephemeral and ever-changing.

As Casey (2009) says, "Determination is by no means simple" (p. 303) in terms of who and what military children are. Military children must balance differences and experiences, asking questions about where to locate themselves within the cultures they have lived while trying to adjust and be in a new culture or subculture. Home is everything and nothing—a country but not a specific location within the country, an idea that is never anything but abstract, a thing to be carried within you, the past locations where you have lived or locations where relatives may live, even if you have never lived with or close to your relatives. With the constant migration, the nomad nature of military children's existence, college signals a place to halt, gather themselves, and consider their place in their world.

Casey (2009) considers Plato's statement on space as something that is always there: "What is most striking in this claim is that space is credited with 'providing a situation for all things that come into being'" (p. 176.). College is a rather neutral space

for growth since everyone else is also away from home, feeling the absence of family. Students begin to wrestle with issues of adulthood: What career might work for me? Where do I want to live? How do I want to live? What types of relationships would I like to have? Military children appreciate a time when they are close to being like everyone else—far from home and making transitions to adulthood. And while one could claim that military children are always “coming into being” (Casey, 2009, p. 176) no matter where they are living, it is the college setting that is particularly special, precisely because they are away from their parents and the military community. This is the first time when military children are completely on their own, immersed in a sub-culture without the routine support of family and the military culture. Like all traditionally aged college students, this situation allows military children to become more fully themselves, forging and exploring identities relevant to the civilian community in which they live.

For military children, homes are liminal entities “just insofar as they are at the threshold between a series of things: between a building (domestic or institutional) and circumambient nature; between dwelling-as-residing and dwelling-as-wandering...” (Casey, 2009, p. 155). If liminal spaces are treated as thresholds for rites of passage (van Gennep, 1960), then military children make their homes in these cusps of newness, discovery, and difference. This learned behavior, to make a home in liminal spaces, makes college like every other place they have ever lived or called home. They walk through these places as if they are gardens to visit, enclosed and finite spaces where one is a constant visitor (Casey, 2009). In our sense of walking through these places, we can never actually go home to any of them. Casey (2009) describes this experience of transience or a journey as disorienting and negative, but this is not always what the

military child encounters because she or he lives in these transient spaces. Despite the fact we walk through places, we still internalize and appreciate culturally the streets and cities we travel through, as Casey (2009) states: “I can feel these locations *within* my body and sometimes even *in* my body when I internalize them” (p. 66). There is a bodily knowing of the places we have lived and the houses we have lived in, which shapes how we approach and encounter new places. Each house, street, and city has its own smell and character, which are imprinted upon us.

In asking adults, who grew up as military children and who still are to some extent military children, to converse about their childhoods and college, I ask them to come with me on a journey of reflection. In recounting memories, shared experiences of what it means to be a military child, and thoughtfully speaking about college, we can excavate and make meaning of our lived experience. We return to those places that mattered, saw us grow, and shaped us as young people and adults. Casey (2009) perhaps communicates this act of “going home” through memory:

The things of memory *remain with me*, within me. They occupy interior psychical (and doubtless also neurological) places and are the determinative loci of my life. I remain *with them* as well by returning to them in diverse acts of remembering. (p. 129)

In the next half of this chapter, I describe how military children participants and I return to our homes.

The Ways of Uncovering: Operationalization of Hermeneutic Phenomenology Methodology

This research uses a phenomenological approach as described by van Manen (1997) to answer the question: **What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college?** Hermeneutic phenomenology does not have a strict formula or an algorithm.

Rather, the approach gives guidelines as a way to uncover and explore a phenomenon. In this section, I address and delineate those guidelines used to create a rigorous and efficacious study of what it means to be a military brat of color in college.

Phenomenology as Methodology

Van Manen (1997) deftly answers the question, “What is Hermeneutic Phenomenological Human Science?” by explicating major tenets of phenomenology:

- 1) Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience;
- 2) Phenomenological research is the explication of phenomena as they present themselves to consciousness;
- 3) Phenomenological research is the study of essences;
- 4) Phenomenological research is the description of the experiential meanings as we live them;
- 5) Phenomenological research is the human scientific study of phenomena;
- 6) Phenomenological research is the attentive practice of thoughtfulness;
- 7) Phenomenological research is a search for what it means to be human;
- 8) Phenomenological research is a poetizing activity. (pp. 8-12)

These tenants, or what phenomenology is, concretize and give definition to what is otherwise an ostensibly ephemeral process. The methodology is grounded in the phenomenon itself: the lived experience, the explication through art and literature, the breaking down and recognition of multiple essences. To do this, there must be a careful reflective approach to the lived experience. For example, “thoughtfulness” as a tenet reminds the researcher that this is a rendering of someone’s lived experience, not simply one’s own. We as researchers have a responsibility to care for and be responsive to the population with whom we are working. In addition, we also must be reflective in the writing of these experiences—description is essential to the process of understanding and interpretation, rendering the writing of these essences a poetizing act. This calls for writing beyond the reporting that we frequently see in a qualitative researcher. Rather, we use language to uncover what the experience “was” and what it “is” in the co-

researcher's mind—it must be “an incantative, evocative speaking, a primal telling” (van Manen, 1997, p. 13).

The tenets above give an excellent picture of what hermeneutic phenomenology aims to do as a methodology. However, the methodology itself is laid out in van Manen's (1997) six components, which create a coherent approach to hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30-31)

These six components are guide posts for the phenomenological researcher, markers of where and how to do phenomenological research. What do each of these components ask the researcher to do? How can the research engage with the phenomenon?

Turning to a Phenomenon Which Seriously Interests Us and Commits Us to the World

Van Manen (1997) delineates how humans are driven to understand lived experience on a visceral level. This means a phenomenon as the object of research is not removed from human experience, but rather is a “quest” (van Manen, 1997, p. 31) to uncover that experience. The “quest” is steeped in questioning the experience, probing the experience, and the commitment we as researchers have to see and interpret lived experience in more than one way. With this task at hand, we appreciate that a single experience can provide multiple interpretations, providing a rich depiction. The first chapter is my own turning, which demonstrates my own personal understanding and commitment to the phenomenon of the military child in college. And while we can

appreciate the complexity of understandings derived from my single experience, it also opens up the phenomenon, allowing for more depth of exploration and interpretation in subsequent chapters. Some may question the subjective and objective role of the researcher in the phenomenological inquiry, but these terms are approached rather differently. In phenomenology, the objective is to be “oriented to the object” and be “true to the object” (van Manen, 1997, p. 20), while subjectivity is the strength of the orientation toward the object, to be connected to it in an intensely “personal way” (van Manen, 1997, p. 20).

Investigating Experience as We Live It Rather than as We Conceptualize It

Military brat autobiographies, art, blog posts, and the physical landscape of both military bases and college campuses are primary texts for investigating the daily life of a military child. How do we make sense of these smaller experiences, moments, encounters in regard to growing up military and going to college? What does it mean to hit snooze on an alarm in a base house in Frankfurt versus not having an alarm clock in a Swiss boarding school? In what ways does the physical landscape of a military base mirror the landscape of the college campus? In investigation, objects and experiences of daily life become ways for us to uncover further nuances of these lived experiences of military children in college. But how does a researcher actually render these moments? Aside from using personal experiences, the phenomenological researcher also looks at the etymology of words, since over time, words have evolved and their meanings obscured (van Manen, 1997). This sensitivity to language extends to idiomatic expressions, which may help us to see the experience in a different way. Choosing the best word and the

best phrase to show the lived experience is part of what renders phenomenology a poetizing process.

Reflecting on the Essential Themes Which Characterize the Phenomenon

Reflecting on themes is difficult because it requires the naming of something(s) of the phenomenon, or “The insight into the essence of a phenomenon involves a process of reflectively appropriating, or clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience” (van Manen, 1997, p. 77). These themes give insight and understanding to the structures of a phenomenon—giving the experience a shape, contours, and description. We isolate themes in three ways: “1) the wholistic or sententious approach, 2) the selective or highlighting approach, 3) the detailed or line by line approach” (van Manen, 1997, pp. 92-93). After isolating the themes, we may explore them according to the lived existentials—lived body, lived space, lived time, and lived human relation—which help organize our renderings (van Manen, 1997).

Describing the Phenomenon through the Art of Writing and Rewriting

Van Manen (1997) observes that “Writing is closely fused into the research activity and reflection itself” (p. 125). As an act, writing separates us and brings us closer to our phenomenon, as we hold both the abstract and the concrete, distancing ourselves yet intimately fused together as well. Writing allows the researcher to explore the phenomenon in an organic way, alternately writing and rewriting to reflect on the phenomenon. In writing, we aim to see the phenomenon through a sensitivity to what is said and what is not said. The silence or what is not said can be powerful; there is something in the unsayable. Writing also is a layered process—we write and then rewrite, giving texture to our meanings, creating a dialogue between meanings. We

describe the phenomenon while in conversation with the phenomenon, choosing our words to convey concise meaning, to prompt feelings and emotions in our reader who may experience the phenomenon or connect to the phenomenon vicariously through the text. The laborious word choice and the careful phrasing to show the phenomenon is a process that cannot be done in one sitting. Rather, it is a continuous process that is constantly informed by art, literature, non-fiction, music, and our participants.

Manipulating a Strong and Oriented Pedagogical Relation to the Phenomenon

Remaining faithful to your phenomenon is essential for ethical research.

Research must not be distracted from its aim: to improve the lives and bring about new understanding of young people who are affected by the phenomenon that we study. Van Manen (1997) states that “Too often pedagogic concerns tend to be reduced to political ones while the question of what is good for children rarely gets raised” (p. 142). For military children, everyone has an opinion, usually negative, about their high mobility and access to streamlined education. However, these assumptions are political in nature and really do not take into account the child as the person who lives this life. How are children damaged by something when it is all they know? In addition, no one actually listens to military children unless they are hearing what they want to hear. In maintaining a strong orientation to my phenomenon, I hope to communicate to a civilian academic population what it means to wake up every morning as a military child in college to incite cultural action and competency when interacting with military children. This is my call for pedagogic understanding and action for military children.

Conversations as a Means into the Lived Experience

Van Manen (1997) cites conversations as a source for rendering the lived experience. However, conversations in and of themselves may be unpredictable since “...a genuine conversation is never the one that we wanted to conduct...All this shows that a conversation has a spirit of its own” (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 385). While the researcher may have parameters with a conversation, perhaps a topic or a few guiding questions, the conversation must be able to emerge authentically for research to occur. The researcher must treat with caution, though, these interactions. Understanding should not be derived only from the researcher’s experiences, or by “transposing oneself into another person” (Gadamer, p. 385). However, in these conversations there develops a common language between the researcher and the participants. From this common language, agreement develops and understanding follows. But the very act of “understanding occurs in interpreting” (Gadamer, p. 390).

When these conversations are transcribed and placed into writing, an additional act of interpretation and understanding occurs. Additional interpretations also occur in the reading of the text. In all this we must acknowledge that “there cannot, therefore, be any single interpretation that is correct ‘in itself,’ precisely because every interpretation is concerned with the text itself” (Gadamer, p. 398). The multitude of interpretations for any text or any language may be hindered by our own understanding of language, but there are universal understandings “with which reason rises above the limitations of any given language” (Gadamer, p. 403.) In phenomenology, the researcher and the co-researchers aim to engage in rich and genuine conversations with the hopes of uncovering universal understandings.

Participants in the Rendering of the Lived Experience: The “Way” of the Study

In choosing my seven participants, I included a cross-section of the adult military child community. First and foremost, all participants personally identified as someone who grew up in the military community or as a military brat. All participants graduated from college and are working professionals or graduate students, giving them each space and time to process the experience. This was intentional since phenomenology is a retrospective rather than an introspective exercise (van Manen, 1997). The participants were the age range of early 20s to mid 30s, which means that processing of the military child identity and experience has begun. In addition, all participants had a father or mother who was active duty until the child reached the age of 12 or after the age of 12, so the individual was near puberty. Given the diversity of the military community, four of the seven were the children of non-commissioned officers (NCO) and two of the seven had a parent who began their military career as a non-commissioned officer but became an officer. Too often the voices of NCO children have been lost; most of the literature written about, for, and by military children address the “officer’s child” experience. The loss of the NCO child also would mean a loss in diversity, since most African Americans and children of color come from NCO families (Segal & Segal, 2004).

Of the seven participants, there was a mix of gender, race, ethnicity, and rank of uniformed parent. Five of the seven participants lived abroad but the remaining two never lived abroad. There were:

- 1) diverse children of color;
- 2) at least two officers’ children and two non-commissioned officers’ children;
- 3) at least two men and two women;
- 4) Three of the four branches (Navy, Air Force, Army and Marine) represented.

These criteria reflected the richness of lived experience.

In addition, co-researchers were recruited from various military brat online communities, relevant list-servs, and word of mouth to create a rich group of participants. Co-researchers lived across the U.S. All seven participants received the following email letter (Appendix A) along with the consent form to participate (Appendix B) and were asked to submit the signed form to me by the time of our first conversation.

Research Protocols: Conversations and Reflections

I had two conversations with each of my participants; each conversation was between a half hour and an hour long. All conversations were transcribed and thematized. The first conversation was simply to become acquainted, covering basic history of childhood and a discussion of their college experience. I asked guiding questions such as:

- 1) What was it like growing up as a military child?
- 2) Tell me about your schools, houses, family?
- 3) Tell me about elementary school? Where did you live?
- 4) What was high school and middle school like? Socially? Academically?
- 5) How did you decide to go to college?
- 6) How did you choose which college to go to?
- 7) What was leaving home like? How was it coming back the first year?
- 8) How did you figure out how to be a college student?
- 9) What was college like?
- 10) In what ways did you find support during college?
- 11) What moments do you find defined your identity then and now?

These were just a few guiding questions for the first conversation. In some ways, I attempted to gain a holistic feel for who they are and what was important to them growing up and how that played out in college. This was also an act of trust building, sharing my own experience, and co-creating meanings of the lived-experience of growing up military and the college experience.

For the second conversation, I asked the participants to bring in pictures of a childhood home or two that meant something to them in addition to a picture of their college campus or residence hall that also meant something to them. During this conversation we discussed why they chose those pictures, what home meant to them, and how their conception of home and their military child identity influenced their college experience. I asked them to write a reflection on this exercise, which were read over for retrospective context for the conversations.

In the final part of the process, we had two gatherings of participants to discuss their college experiences in relation to their military childhood and their current adult life. We tied ideas together and asked follow-up questions. It was a time of mutual sharing about the college experience amongst the participants. These two gatherings took place via google hangout/skype.

Analysis for Rendering

I used van Manen's (1997) methods for thematizing the textual accounts, which includes:

- 1) The wholistic or sententious approach,
- 2) The selective or highlighting approach,
- 3) The detailed or line-by-line approach. (pp. 92-93)

Out of preference, I used a detailed line by line approach to pull out and break down themes. The line-by-line or detailed approach allowed me to dig into the language to uncover aspects of the phenomenon. I did not intend to reduce the phenomenon to these themes, but rather used the themes to further interpret and render their lived experiences. After the line-by-line analysis, I used van Manen's wholistic approach. Sometimes there were words or phrases that opened up a phenomenon in a very deep way, a way that

allowed for further interpretation and interrogation. With these themes, I opened up the “four existentials” such as “*lived space* (spaciality), *lived body* (corporeality), *lived time* (temporality), and *lived human relation* (relationality or communality)” (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). I used philosophers such as Heidegger (2008a), Gadamer (1975/2004), and Casey (2009) to interpret these layers of the phenomenon, exposing their richness in fully rendering the lived experience.

Wending our Way Home: An Overview of the Path to Uncovering the Lived Experiences of Military Children in College

This chapter delineates both the philosophical underpinnings and the practical approach of the hermeneutic phenomenological methodology used in my study. The philosophy was discussed first because it provides a prism and structure for the approach to understanding the lived experience of military children in college. Gadamer’s (1975/2004) horizon speaks to the lived human relation of military children as they locate and relocate themselves in their historical and cultural spaces. Casey’s (2009) discussion of home and place speaks to the experience of lived space—the various physical houses and landscapes which have influenced and altered the lifeworld of the military child. Heidegger’s (1927/2008b) concept of *Dasein* ties these experiences together as it takes into account lived body (the self as she or he exists in the world)—the body that moves from house to house and the body that knows cultural expectations. After examining the philosophy, this chapter describes the implementation of the study in addition to the parameters by which the study was governed. All of this, the relationship between the philosophy and the phenomenon, in addition to the study itself, is essential phenomenological research.

Being an Open Book: An Introduction of the Participants

“I am an open book” two of my participants said, a phrase that stuck with me for its ostensible transparency. In this section, I introduce each of my participants and begin to contemplate their lived experiences, their presented volumes, and their being in the world. In the latter half of 2015 and the beginning of 2016, I had two individual conversations and two group gatherings with seven military brats of color. They were a diverse group—three officers’ children and four non-commissioned officers’ children. There were two African American men; one Black woman; one Black Latina; one Black, White, and Asian woman; one Black and Mexican American woman; and one Black and Asian woman who was adopted and raised by an African American military couple. Their experiences overlapped—their homes, houses, duty stations, races, ethnicities, parents’ positions in the military, education levels, parents’ approaches to raising children in the military culture. I could take a white board and write down small facts about each and then start connecting the dots as if they were all related in some way, but each in a different way. It is as if I could write a genealogy of military children of color or trace their experiences as constellations in the night sky. In introducing my participants, I begin an attempt to write a small history of specific members of the military brat tribe, to make them visible where they once blended into homes on bases, in neighborhoods nestled in a foreign village or city, in polished civilian suburbs, and college residence halls. All names have been changed; each participant chose an alias.

The Case of Sherlock Holmes

For Sherlock, it was all about facts and diplomacy—he is a diplomat, proclaiming himself an open book but reminding me that he would share only what he is comfortable

sharing. Sherlock analyzed his surroundings and the people with whom he interacts and makes decisions about his actions based on this information. Every move is effortlessly calculated and strategized with an objective in mind, and even the objectives seem to be revised continually. On a practical level, Sherlock was born in the early 1980s to an African American officer. His father began his military career as a non-commissioned officer and eventually attained the rank of full colonel. Sherlock was the oldest of three and attended eight different schools in four different states and Asia. He chose to go to college in a southern state school where he finished high school but considered other schools such as an elite historically Black college and university (HBCU) and a military academy. It was at his state school that he found a shift in his political ideology—from conservative to liberal—and came out as a young gay man. He was highly involved in campus life—student government and university theater. He was 29 years old at the time of our first conversation in 2015. Sherlock always seemed involved but always removed by his own choice. This is not a negative portrayal, but a product of his social savvy: he is the most private open person you will ever meet.

The Portrait of a Young Black and Mexican American Woman

Maria, the eldest of three girls, was the daughter of a career non-commissioned officer who retired as a master sergeant. Maria's mother is Mexican American and her father is Black. She grew up hop-scotching around the continental United States and completed high school adjacent to a base in the South. She attended a small private women's college in a southern state. Maria loved her experience at a women's college, joining student government and the dance company. It was in college where she felt the latitude to be who she was, have intimate and hard in-class discussions, and found a

collegial atmosphere. Her college became co-educational after she graduated. In a matter of years she lost not just the military community, her ID card, and various homes, but an integral part of her college experience was razed like an old house. Maria grieved the loss of tradition and the loss of place, but she has an unfailing positive spirit of moving forward and looking ahead while acknowledging who and what influenced where she is today as a successful college graduate.

“I Am Also a World Traveler”

Luz is a Black woman in her mid-30s who initially grew up with her mother, an addict, in poverty. She went to urban and under-resourced schools but felt as though teachers genuinely invested themselves in her education. At the age of 11, Luz resolved to attend an elite HBCU after meeting a friend’s brother who attended one. When her mother could not appropriately care for Luz at the age of 12, Lucia moved to Asia to be with her father, a career non-commissioned officer who attained the rank of E-9. Luz’s father was a force—he gave her latitude while he gave her guidance; he talked through actions and consequences; he gave her a safe environment filled with books which took the form of a small apartment in places across Asia and the Pacific. With his presence, Luz forged her way to the same elite HBCU she decided to attend when she was 11. There she worked on campus, joined residence hall politics, an honor society, and ROTC. She was commissioned an officer upon finishing her senior year, months after watching the planes hit the towers on 9/11. Today, she is a veteran and in a graduate program, and she has a strong identity as a world traveler.

“Labels I Am Peeling Off...”

Lynne was adopted from an Asian country at 10 days old by a Black military officer and his wife. She is Black and Asian and spent most of her life living in Asia. Upon graduation from high school in Asia, Lynne attended a conservative Christian college in the Midwest. She was active on campus but one of the few students of color. After two years of feeling increasingly alienated, Lynne transferred to a large state university further west. She graduated from college and became a teacher. Her identity is complicated, a series of labels that she tries to peel off to figure out who she is—not who others think she should be or what society or family expects. There is a quest for self that is frustrating and authentic when confronting various realities such as: she can never go home to Asia.

“From Any One Place...”

Sherri’s grandfather was in the military. Her mother is in the military. And her step-father was in the military. Her mother was a senior non-commissioned officer, whose career has included deployments during which Sherri lived with her grandfather in a rural community in the Southwest. Sherri is also Black, White, and Asian. She first started to think about her identity when living in Europe and going to integrated Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) schools. Sherri completed high school and attended a private university in the Southwest. Much of the direction she found was not necessarily purposeful, but rather guided by individuals who would ask her if she were interested in X or be on Y committee. There is a sense of fluidity and ease about her path to college and through college, even though it was marked by experiences of questioning and understanding her identity, as well as the reality of having a parent

active-duty during wartime. Sherri is the youngest of the group: 23 and in a master's program. She is finding her way, following the horizon of adulthood.

“You Can't Handle that I'm Black Latina: What Would You Like Me To Be?”

Paloma's memories are of Central America and Europe—growing up in the midst of spoken Portuguese and Spanish, being allowed to run free on the safety of base and then the adventure of barbed wire fences in Central America. Her father was an NCO who transitioned out of the military when she was in high school on the West Coast, an alien place to her even though the U.S. was her passport country. Paloma had a number of false starts, beginning college on the West Coast, moving home and attending community college, and finally after a long dance between community college and the local state university, she graduated with her degree and headed straight to a graduate program in the West. Paloma's path was complicated, but so is Paloma. She is a complex individual whose identity was always in question by those who saw her. She is Black, but she is also Latina. She was constantly caught between cultures that were placed on her and those that she identified with—the oddity of not being accepted by the Latino clubs but welcomed at the Black Student Union. Locating herself as a Black Latina was as daunting a task as completing her degree.

“People That You Are Going to Take With You”

A now shut base on the West Coast was the safest place in the world for Macario, whose mother was a Navy NCO who completed her bachelor's degree to become an Air Force officer. Macario is an eternal optimist, happy-go-lucky, the person who could walk that line between playing basketball and being a star student. As a young Black man attending both DoDEA and civilian schools, he could walk into a room a new kid and

walk out with new friends. But he was also a care-taker, a care-giver. He was his mother's prime helper with his young brothers and the house. He did dishes so she would not have to. This sense of care is something he carried along with all those people he took with him—the friends who stayed friends duty station after duty station. Macario turned down an elite university to attend a Jesuit university on full scholarship. While he majored in information systems, he ended up getting a doctorate in a non-related field and working in education.

Opening the Book and Turning the Page: The Handling of Phenomenological Themes

When children open a book, they are often oblivious to the page. It is simply the act of opening that spurs the excitement. The spine creases and the words or pictures appear, popping up from the page, begging to be deciphered, a grown-up language. In opening up the experiences of adult military children of color and their experiences in college, we see open a tattered volume—worn from plane trips in bookbags, from being stuffed in the bottom of a handbag during a train ride, and dog-eared from the revisiting to make sure all that was left behind actually happened. It is a secret book, a private revelation since it is not obvious, but something quiet, beneath the surface, a lens for the eye that is invisible but always present. It is this view of being in the world that this dissertation seeks to open up, to the light, to the public, to a world where military brats are usually represented as benevolent anti-racist White men and women as in *The Great Santini* (1976) or *Remember the Titans* (Bruckheimer, Oman, & Yakin, 2000). But what about the military children of color? What do their books reveal? How do they uncover about the being of a military child of color in college? Why are the experiences of military kids of color so rarely spoken of, explored, opened up? This phenomenological

study seeks not just to bring the lived experiences of military children of color in college to light by opening the lives, the volumes, so generously shared. It is not enough to open the book, but we must also turn the page.

The lived experience of military brats of color in college uncovers the complexities of identity and place. But this is not so simple as previously stated.

Both shift

As each page turns

As each sentence pauses,

With a comma

Or a semi-colon

A jarring / *smooth* halt

To a thought

Because what should be obvious in experience

Is never straight forward –

Experience, identity, and place,

Keeps

moving

Like the turning of the page

(Peralta, 2018)

In Picture Book theory (Doonan, 1993), the action is always moving from right-to-left on the page, urging the reader forward with a Peter Rabbit struggling to remove himself from a net and on to the next page for safety, the reader's anxiety mounting. Will Peter escape? When the Very Hungry Caterpillar starts his journey from egg-to-butterfly, he consistently moves from left-to-right, inching and eating his way to his cocoon.

Action is always forward, the art urges the reader to turn the page to come closer to a resolution of themes. For military brats of color in college, their preoccupations with identity, place, belonging, and their struggle to adulthood also reflect constant forward action, moving (their person, geographic locations), inching, driving, catapulting to the next page, the next thing, the next adventure.

A phenomenological turn begins with a question: **What is the lived experience of military brats of color in college?** After hours of conversation and hours of combing through these conversations, a line-by-line quest for meaning to render a lived experience, we now turn toward these themes. We turn toward a rendering, a painting of a lived experience but without brushes or acrylic. This is a rendering of words that, if adequately done, will spur the reader to turn the page.

CHAPTER 4: A STRANGER IN THEIR OWN HOME: MILITARY BRATS OF COLOR GO TO COLLEGE

The Stories of Home for Military Brats of Color in College

In this phenomenological study of the lived experience of military brats of color in college, seven individuals talked with me about who they were and how they came to be in their journeys to and from home. Here, I reflect on this transition between shared conversations to the act of writing and interpretation. I hope that this text pulls back the veil of the lived experience of military brats of color in college, giving a window into a house unlike others, pushing practitioners to reflect on their practice, and ask more questions of this phenomenon. The writing of this research ensures experiences are not lost, lives are given value, and this small but impressive population is seen. For too long, military brats of color have gone unnoticed while White military brats are allowed their narratives, and are made anti-racist heroes as much as they are pathologized in movies and television (Ender, 2005). In chapter 3 my 7 participants each present a unique view of their lives growing up as military children of color, in addition to sharing generously their experiences in college. They reveal the intricacies of their transitions to and transitions from home(s), and they explain to me and themselves their joys and struggles in knowing who they are through understanding home spaces.

Before going forward, I reflect on van Manen's (1997) statement that phenomenology is a retrospective act. It looks back to recreate and remember experiences that can be communicated viscerally, and with a precise pedagogical orientation to understand the thing itself. In this case, I attempt to bring forward the lived experiences

of 7 military children of color, carefully developing the themes into rich tapestries so that the reader may visualize these experiences and come to a place of understanding.

For the purpose of this dissertation, I do not aim to debunk or confirm existing narratives. I aim to complicate and enrich, uncovering what it is **to be** a military child of color in college. As a researcher, I am both a scribe and interpreter of my participants' lived experiences. I am the conduit from the oral to the written, bringing experiences from the perceived myth of the civilian, as well as the factual, to create a text calling on academia to act on behalf of military children of color at their respective institutions. I also examine the skills military children of color bring with them which may foster resilience and adaption in response to change. I provide a map of themes which reveals the leaving/loss of home, and the coming into self and adaptation. I illuminate a path of understanding for readers as they trace the journey to and from home for military children of color.

Removing the veil of the lived experience of military children of color in college, I examine a map, showing a journey in three parts: departure, traveling between, and the return. This journey with a beginning, middle, and end is nothing revolutionary, but it helps us to see a clear way through the lived experience of military children of color. The themes are many and overwhelming, broad and specific. In examining the themes of the leaving/loss of home, the coming into self, and adaptation in the journey, we must consider how "the very nature of the universe invites you to journey and discover it" (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 28). The universe speaks to each military child of color differently, whispering hard truths and obvious solutions into their ears as they move away from the military community and into the civilian college community. This is a

journey of discovery of community, self, and all the gaps between, which lead military children of color in college away from their old home and to a new home. These homes, memories, and souvenirs which they carry with them smooth their path forward and sometimes, inadvertently, put obstacles in their way. What they have known and what they come to know are two different ways of being, which they must reconcile. This is where the journey can become fraught with obstacles as the familiar culture of the military community gives way to U.S. college culture.

Military brats of color depart from their military family and the military community in which they have resided. To depart the military world, we see an end of childhood, but also the sprouting of adulthood, which is finely conveyed in the word itself “depart.” The Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) describes the etymological origin of depart as old French *departir* or in current French *départ* (Collins Dictionary English-French, n.d.). In some contexts, one would say “*je dépars*” or “I leave,” and there is forward motion, but in a manner of not looking back, or of moving from some condition or place. But in other circumstances, one would say “*Au départ*” meaning “Initially” or “At the start,” to bring a forward motion that is positive, a joyfulness in this beginning (Collins Dictionary English-French, n.d.). In departing, there is both a leaving and a start, two diametric opposites existing together in a bittersweet amalgam. Each start to a voyage is the end of another: stepping onto an airplane is the end of a lived experience in a set geographical space; boarding a ship is the end of a journey on land; and the act of getting into a car and starting it is the end of a visit in a set space. Military children of color may have a sorrowful or even not-well-understood leaving of their military home while they have a joyful start to college. They set out unmoored and untethered on an

adventure to adulthood and their civilian selves. In my mind's eye I see this parting as a sea voyage, which is a bit absurd since military families have not travelled by sea since air travel became more widespread. But as with any sea voyage, it feels perilous in a way that air travel cannot capture as if we are to sail between Scylla and Charybdis (Hamilton, 1998), an exotic dangerous unknown. Sea monsters exist on paths we have not travelled, summing up our fear and expectation of adventure, but also truths about ourselves. What we do not know and we do not understand, we create stories to explain. Whether these stories are true are neither here nor there. They are myths that serve their purpose to explain phenomena. In this way, military children live with myths of the journey, the striking out into the world. They do not always understand where they are going or where they have been, but they seek to understand this cyclical experience just as the Greeks sought to understand the seasons through Persephone's partial residence in the underworld (Hamilton, 1998).

The journey between homes, a childhood home(s)/self and the adult home(s)/self, is fraught with obstacles. The military child of color in college is called to know self in a way that is horrifying and liberating. O'Donohue (1998) writes, "One of our most sacred duties is to be open and faithful to the subtle voices of the universe which come alive in our longing" (p. 28). To be open and faithful to the voices of the universe demands a certain comfort with self and the confidence to take risks. And perhaps here, the constant voyaging, undertaking potentially scary moves from country to country, or stepping into a new school and a new place, gives some grounding in self and familiarization with the act of coming "alive in our longing." But there is also that universal truth that the sky is the same, the earth beneath does not change. It is the magic of time and place that gently

pushes military children of color in college to come into themselves, reject identities that are no longer relevant, and embrace parts of themselves as they blossom into adults.

Finally, military children of color come to the end of college, an end where their return home has been disrupted by the experience of the civilian world, and an understanding that they might never be home despite the fact they can be home in their own skin. There is no neat end. There is no ticker-tape parade. No one is weaving a rug to avoid suitors. There is simply the military child of color with a bachelor's degree, fully entering civilian society.

Steeves (2006) asks, "Can we understand 'home' in a noncapitalist manner, free of mortgages and building codes?" (p. 59). The demands of understanding home without an address are precisely the demands of military children of color who walk across the stage to receive their diplomas. They are not home, but they have adapted to their surroundings, their place in the world. Military children of color are grounded in self, because like kangaroos or turtles they carry so much of what is home with them, on their backs or in their pouches. They pack home in a suitcase or store it in their memories as if everything can be carefully arranged on a shelf in the new location. However, in college, the grounding of self for military children of color is challenged. They must adapt to the immediate demands of their surroundings for the first time completely outside the military community, calling into question whether home is a physical address and house, or something that lives inside a person and outside in the universe as an ephemeral feeling of connectedness to people and places. To put it bluntly, have military children of color built an idea of home that does not remain true in college and becomes a pile of disjointed experiences that leaves them at a loss rather than sustaining them? They leave

the safety of the military community, where racism exists but is not as insidious as it is outside the community. At the worst, they may find that their conception of home is simply false, a childhood dream that was created to psychologically safeguard themselves from the harsh realities of constant moving. What happens when people your family has fought for hate you based on the color of your skin? If we are to uncover these truths, we must first understand the complexity of what it means to be of color in the military community and in the college community.

In the cyclical nature of the lived experience of military children of color in college, the endings and the beginnings themselves become myth. These are stories the military children of color tell themselves and each other about what it means to move, to be of color, and to be in the world. The myth of leaving for college for military children of color and civilian children may ostensibly seem the same, but they are markedly different according to the observations of military children of color. Norman Rockwell's (1954) painting "Breaking Home Ties" depicts a fresh-faced, young man, sitting with his father, waiting to leave for college.

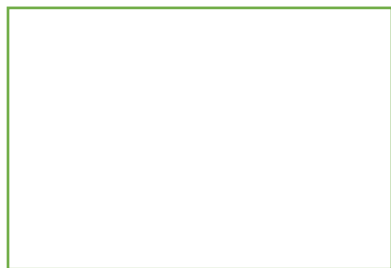


Image Redacted. (Rockwell, 1954)

The young man is White. He is not necessarily economically privileged, as we infer from his father's modest dress, but also not necessarily underprivileged either with his fresh suit and carefully groomed hair. The young person embodies anticipation: his

clothes are new, his posture straight, and his belongings are in a modest suitcase proudly bearing a “State U” pennant. The young man is on the precipice of something altogether new and exciting, perched on an unmoving vehicle. He is ready for action, ready to jump up, climb on to a train, to move away from his father, who is looking in the opposite direction, and family dog, forlornly resting on the son’s knee, toward gilded halls of learning. Norman Rockwell elegantly captures one of the many experiences of a civilian child leaving for college in what was a golden age of higher education, particularly capturing an expectation that a student would leave and perhaps not return with the title of the painting *Breaking Home Ties* (Rockwell, 1954). Rockwell’s title itself conjures questions of what it means to leave home for college. *Breaking Home Ties* seems to envision home as if it were a tether holding one back rather than a source of strength and comfort for the student in question. What are these ties? Are these ties a thing to break? How do home ties break? Perhaps to the student leaving, the ties shatter like a broken glass, falling in slow motion from the counter to the floor. Perhaps to the student, they break like a heart—that ache deep in your bones and the shortness of breath as if you cannot fill your lungs. Home ties are wholly invisible, embedded in familial relationships (father and son) and community (the humble context from which the young man comes). Breaking ties is something that is in addition to the physical experience of leaving home. The painting’s title embodies Tinto’s (1993) ideological ideal that college is about leaving family and community, cutting a cord and completely integrating into a university community, no matter how different or how foreign. But the picture itself—an eager young man, looking forward, ready for the world beyond home, and a father, hunched over and turned in the opposite direction, is showing age, a cigarette danglely

half-hazard out of his mouth. This is not a breaking of ties, but a complicated relationship of an eager young person and an older parent, which is iconic for the truth of the energy and eagerness of young people to start their own lives.

If Rockwell were to paint the same picture but of a military child of color, what would it look like? What would it be called? I draw on my participants as introduced in chapter 3 for context as I contemplate the portrait representative of military children of color leaving for college. For Lynne there would be movers, paid for by the U.S. military, transporting her personal belongings from Asia. While her grandmother came to help “drop her off,” she landed in the U.S. alone, drove to a strange campus, and directed movers through a freight elevator:

That was like a huge deal of independent freedom, and then there where everyone was moving in. I was on the 5th of my building and no elevator. All these kids are moving in the stairwell but actually there was a secret elevator. The freight elevator that no one could use...my spoil[t] self I get a military shipment. I get movers that come to the college campus to move me, and so they get to use the freight elevator, and it was a big coupe. (Lynne, Multi-racial, Christian PWI/Western State School)

Lynne’s coupe was privilege, packed neatly in a box, hauled by military-paid movers, up an elevator, and into a residence hall room. That box of privilege, that access to an elevator, is a fascinating metaphor for where Lynne came from being an officer’s child of color. That boxes elegantly moved with the elevator was the last time her privilege was so public, so tidy, and so obvious enough to be coupe. Once ensconced in the walls of a Christian PWI, her skin color became an oddity since there were only about 30 other students of color. For the first time in her life, she looked different from all her classmates—her dark skin, something that was always beautiful and normal was suddenly “other.” The definition of beauty was narrower and the definition of normal was more

tightly defined. She was alone even surrounded by people who were ostensibly like her in terms of the Christian religion. Her belongings were unpacked and the boxes were gone. A Norman Rockwell painting of a military child of color leaving for college would include boxes, movers, and a military child of color all by herself. It would capture the reality of the separation of individuals by skin color, the racial sorting that happens for reasons too numerous to account for here. With the use of the freight elevator to move into her college residence hall, Lynne, a multi-racial young woman, experienced the one of the last instances of her officer-child privilege and became a woman of color in America.

Being alone and by yourself is a common experience of leaving for military brats of color. Paloma was by herself as well, moving upstate alone. Luz stepped off a plane from Asia/the Pacific with two suitcases. Alone. It was not that families were not involved for most of the participants, but being physically present was not always an option. There are many ways to be alone. Being physically alone is not the same as being spiritually or emotionally alone, even if the separation is fraught with difficulties. Luz's father, while not present partially because of a disagreement they had, was incredibly proud of her, and even in her regret and sorrow at his lack of physical presence, she knew the love and pride he carried with him.

In retrospect, Luz realized that her father had trouble letting go: his strong, beautiful daughter was going to an elite HBCU, a storied place in the history of U.S. Black culture. She made it, so to speak, in so many ways, entering a hallowed place that he had prepared her for with books, trips, straight talk about consequences:

And my father loves everything Black, everything Black. Um, he's a world traveler. He was a soldier. But Black was beautiful, and Black was powerful, and

Black was strong, and Black is ancestral, you know, development, and Black is survival. And he would teach me that I'm on this earth because my ancestors survived. My ancestors survived the middle passage. And my ancestors survived slavery. And my ancestors survived Jim Crow. And I'm here because I come from a lineage of strength, a lineage of internal prosperity, a lineage of emotional balance, and so – a lineage of, um, survival seems too basic, but we – strategic survival. (Luz, Black, HBCU)

Luz made it because she was intelligent, hardworking, and ambitious, but she also made it because she was raised by her father who instilled a pride in the strength of her heritage and lineage. Heritage and lineage can be as much of a place as home, a place where you inherently belong because of a shared experience of survival. Luz had a deep-rooted belief that who she was and where she came from were an amalgam of attributes that culminate in “everything Black.” Her father’s love and pride in their Black heritage planted a seed of pride and sense of self within Luz. That seed bloomed overseas and in the United States, sending Luz to an institution of higher education that is known for Black excellence, educating some of the greatest minds in the Black community and the world. Luz’s father told her explicitly, “This [HBCU] is the ideal place for you, you are excellent, you are of excellence. This education will only further your excellence. This is where you do your best.” Excellence was not a choice or something bestowed, but it was an inground trait, braided into Luz’s DNA. Her education would pay homage to and recognize the talent and strength inside, celebrating the beauty of Black culture. In her HBCU, there was space to cultivate Luz, helping her shine academically and socially. Being Black was not simply survival; it was thriving.

Alone may not be pathological or lonely or even negative. *Breaking Home Ties* (Rockwell, 1954) “the military brat” version may show a young person alone with a suitcase or boxes settling into college spaces. However, it would also show the aloneness

of moving from a diverse school setting to a less diverse school setting; even for the individuals who went to HBCUs. In this absence of diversity, there is an “otherness” that might be experienced for the first time. Home ties for military children are just as much about the diversity of the military community as it is for their families. The ties become tenuous, since military brats of color know that their military ID card and dependent status is ending. From here, they must find their own way in the world.

**Stories of *Color in America*: At the Beginning
There Were Ideas of and Concepts of What it is to Be**

Color in America

Being at [HBCU],
being in these transitions,
living outside of the country and then coming back, and growing up,
it didn't color my perception.

It took away the color that I had. I was able to see clearly. I was able to see America for what America is.

And then, going to an HBCU,
I was able to see America for what America is in terms of race but,
also,
for the things that we do through our military to other countries.
Right?
Like we always talk about through the military,
we're protecting our country.
(Luz, Black, HBCU)

I chose Luz’s name. I did ask what she wanted to be called but I suggested Lucia—Light—and she asked “What about Luz?” Spanish being so special to her, it was a natural fit. She has an uncanny ability to shed light, to create clarity where vision is often muddled and darkened. Luz made sense. Her poetic words, originally spoken in a paragraph, are so eloquent that I could break them up into a poem, highlighting the power of *Color in America* (Luz, HBCU, Black military brat). Living abroad freed her to grow

into a woman, always knowing she was Black, but giving her room to explore what it meant to have “American” as her more prevalent identity. “It took away the color that I had” as if color were something that could fade into the background, and she could simply “be” Luz, who loved sports, travelled via train to explore the foreign country where she lived, and spent time with her father in a setting where he was respected as a senior NCO. Skin color became secondary to nationality. In experiencing freedom of another country, of overseas, Luz returns to the U.S., specifically a HBCU, to learn a bittersweet lesson: “I was able to see America for what America is in terms of race.” America was a place where race was salient. Blackness was celebrated at her HBCU, but Blackness was not always celebrated in America. Coming to America was a complex experience:

But when I look back on it now, that perception was based on my— based on being naïve, right in that I thought that the country understood, and I thought that the country accepted. But now that I’m an — an adult, I recognize that that’s not the case.

Even in America, I’m still not understood as a Black woman, and I’m still based on stereotypes and perceptions that are embedded based on Black people’s history in America through slavery and through our roles in reconstruction and our roles in the wars where we were just used as tools as opposed to value for humans that we are. (Luz, Black, HBCU)

The country Luz’s father fought for and she fought for did not accept her. “I thought that that country understood...” she said, as if the country were a person, perhaps a close neighbor or friend. This country breathed, exhaled and inhaled, and even celebrated birthdays. Luz’s country, the beautiful one she put on a uniform and fought for, was not the friend she thought she had. The betrayal is fraught, the discovery of which is much like a child blowing bubbles, the light fractals creating rainbows where they did not exist, and then the POP, suds exploding in the face of the child. The light

showed the rainbows that otherwise do not exist but are illusions. America is a dream, harkening back to Bachelard's "dreamer of houses" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 27). Luz's America is an artifice to some extent. It was imagined and idealized where Luz was not a stereotype or subject to the bloody history of slavery and reconstruction. In Luz's America, she was not just an HBCU student, a strong Black woman, a child of a military NCO, she was a human. I circle back again to being a "dreamer of houses" (Bachelard, 1994, p. 27). Luz contemplates her love of country, her country being a home-space, a house, a refuge where she thought she would be understood. Luz is confronted with the reality of her dream of America, much like Langston Hughes (n.d.) was in his memorable poem, *Let America be America Again*:

O, let America be America again—
 The land that never has been yet—
 And yet must be—the land where *every* man is free.
 The land that's mine—the poor man's, Indian's, Negro's, ME—
 Who made America,
 Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and pain,
 Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow in the rain,
 Must bring back our mighty dream again.
 (Hughes, n.d.)

Luz's experience at an HBCU brought home to her soul the experience of being Black in America. She knew her father's sweat and blood and faith and pain carried a dream of what the country could be, not what the country currently is. The home that Luz dreams of and that her father fought for does not exist quite yet. It is a hope Luz carries in her soul, a faith that one day her hard work, her education, and her military service (as a military brat and wearing the uniform) will one day directly contribute to the formation of a "land where *every* man is free" (Hughes n.d.). At the same time she takes up Hughes's (n.d.) directive to "bring back our mighty dream again." In her HBCU

experience, she feels charged to give back to a country by joining ROTC, not because of what America currently is, but what America has the capacity to become. Luz is dreaming of “The land that never has been yet” (ibid)—that *yet* is loaded, holding a wish of what might be and what hard work and service might bring about. Perhaps this is a sacrifice that must be upheld, that Luz would learn the realities of race in America at her HBCU. However, she would still believe we can be a light, a city on a hill. Luz would believe in the dream of home such that she would still participate in ROTC, still deploy, and still proudly wear the uniform for her country.

Moving Deeper into Experience: Military Children at the Beginning of their Journey

With this nascent understanding, the Cavafy (1910/2009) poem *Ithaca* uncovers the experience of military children of color striking out on a journey through college and to a place to call home. In setting out, they depart, like an epic hero in search for home.

Ithaca

As you set out on the way to Ithaca
 hope that the road is a long one,
 filled with adventures, filled with discoveries,
 The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,
 Poseidon in his anger: do not fear them,
 You won't find such things on your way
 (Cavafy, 1910/2009, pp. 27-28)

I often imagine military children as wanderers, on a quest for home, a prolonged journey to a place where they can exist as whole persons. However, Ithaca is not home to a military child, but an ideal, an ephemeral thought, a fantasy creation. Ithaca is *Heimat*, the longing for home, the twisted sense of loss that settles in the belly of knowing that a chapter of life has passed. Macario, a Black military child who loved living on an island military base, a Never Land where he weathered natural disasters, sat on the roof of his

house to watch the ocean: “I felt like it was the closest thing to what people would... as like a normal childhood, as I ever had.” Macario had a completely normal childhood by his standards—moving with his mother and brothers from base to base—but “what people would” say is different. Macario’s “adventure story” is one of being a child who was free to roam, a childhood that is not marred by physical or psychological stress that frequently accompanies systemic racism. In this “normal” childhood, Macario was free to be a little boy without the worry of White fear. Never Land was an idyllic adventure, even when a natural disaster hit,

everybody in a very military style banded together. Everything was free. Some of the base restaurants, you could just go and get food because everybody kind of being together for the earthquake...it was just pleasant. (Macario, African American, PWI)

Macario’s adventure story was safe because of the military community. He was never alone or felt alone, but rather felt connected to where he was living and the people on base. To a military child, that feeling of connection, safety, and the warmth of home and community is Ithaca. Macario revels in that sense of security, but it ends not just once, but many times. Never Land cannot last forever, for anyone—the road to adulthood and the road to Ithaca is intertwined with both. He had to depart, have a Permanent Change of Duty Station (PCS) to a new home, and another new home. Growing was a physical journey as much as it was a bodily journey. Even in college, his road to belonging turned and twisted with geopolitical events like 9/11, or domestic events like moving residence halls, or social events like joining a fraternity. These are all demarcations of belonging to groups, and a map of how these groups shift with time and place. Macario’s journey to Ithaca is as physical as it is internal, but he was never alone. Whether he experienced 9/11 as a military brat in college, saw himself as a Black man

who chose to live in a residence hall with all his friends, celebrated the legacy of Black heritage by joining a Divine 9 organization, it was in community. Macario lost as much as he gained in this adventure. But the loss never outweighed the gain since the adventure of seeking *Ithaca* was embedded in his being.

The Journey to College

Marcario was ready for the journey: “All right, let’s go. Friends [New People] are just friends you haven’t met yet.” This is openness to the world, the pilgrim-like attitude that people will come in and out and always enrich your life which leads to both intimate relationships and acquaintances whose company you genuinely enjoy. In old Germanic languages friend can mean everything from lover to relative (OED, n.d.), spanning physical intimacy to a blood-line tie, broadening the experience of the *being* in relationships. Macario’s slip of the tongue calling “new people” “friends,” shows an extraordinary capacity to *be* with others. His family is not restricted to the mother and brothers for whom he so lovingly cares, it extends to his multiple college communities: his Divine 9 Brothers, his roommates, and the people on his residence hall floor. His journey is one of friendships—those that are temporary and those with longevity, and there is room for growth and experiences in this sphere. Perhaps on the road to Ithaca, people, places, and domiciles are “friends you have not met yet,” places you are not familiar with yet, and houses are homes you have not lived in yet. There is also a sense of learning and growing through these friendships and relationships: “The stranger does not come accidentally; he brings a particular gift and illumination” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 18).

There are no strangers in Macario's world. People are automatically friends, and there is an intentionality, an openness to others which also opens one up to worlds that are unlike the home-world of the military community. In his openness, Macario is ready to receive the gifts that relationships give: suggestions from faculty, mentorship, and an illumination of what might come. Only when we come to know strangers do we come to know ourselves, and have an openness to what "might be" rather than insisting on what currently "is." I see this as a journey where the military child of color may feel alone and sometimes indeed might be physically alone, but there are always those who walk with them—temporarily or permanently—into the civilian world.

Moving Through the Transition to College

Casey (2009) would call college "a truly transitional space" which "is often a place of creative action, providing enough protection to encourage experimentation (if not outright exploration)" (p. 122). In this characterization of college as a transitional space, there is in some sense a false dichotomy. There is an undeniable sense of truth that leaving home for 18-year-olds puts them on a path of self-discovery; suddenly young people are a space to exercise agency in a world outside one's home community and family. Transitional spaces are inherently about movement, moving forward, moving in, moving with, and moving through. The movement is dynamic, intellectual, emotional, social, and physical—be it the movement of a body from the family house to a residence hall, or a movement having the rich connections of a historically Black fraternity or sorority.

The origin of transition in Latin is "transit," (OED, n.d.), which speaks to passing, changes, and an evolution that keeps momentum up and a sense of being in a space where

agency exists but only in certain parameters. This is the feeling of being in transit to something or somewhere which you may or may not be in control of, depending on where you locate yourself. There is agency without agency, control over destiny without control, as Macario has surrendered himself to discover, to the structures in place in his fraternity, which has a history of producing top academics and intellectuals. In his exploration, there is a movement towards, or a transition to, seeing what he might become in this structure. Most of all, there is a sense of always moving, moving towards something equally if not more exciting than what came before, a chance to be intimate with new people and new places while holding all the past places close to you, clutching them like talismans of who you are and who you might become.

Ithaca, even in memories, remains ephemeral. That home which can never be reached is wholly comforting and also can be devastating to the young military child of color in college. Military children exist in two worlds—the military world and the civilian college world—and they are validated and invalidated as people and in terms of life experiences in both settings. In the military world, your skin color is ignored by law (Department of the Army, 2012) and in the civilian world your skin color is upheld by the law, dictating demographic outcomes and life experiences (e.g. see research from economist such as Raj Chetty). Military children of color must reconcile these two aspects of self while seeking who they are as young adults. This task is not easy, fraught with doubts about experiences of race and confusion about U.S. cultural mores that do not seem to make sense to young people who have lived in what is essentially a parallel world.

Different Than and Different From: Being on the Outside of Civilian Constructs of Race and Ethnicity

Military children of color can be outliers, different from their civilian peers of color in life experience and demographic outcomes.

Luz, a military child of color, said: "...I would say I lived in [Asian]." Civilian college student responded: "Ain't no Black people in [Asia]." (Luz, Black, HBCU)

In a moment, Luz's own story and experience became a myth. It was a lie, a falsehood, and an impossibility in another person's mind because of the color of her skin. Is someone else's perception reality? She was recognized as Black but invalidated as a Black person who lived in Asia. She exists but does not exist. She is to be believed but not to be believed. Both sentences are true for some people and both sentences are false for others, and then there is everything in between. It is as if the definition of Blackness and the performance of Blackness is on a scale, and living in Asia deviates from conventional ideas of where Black people live. She is marked as different from other Black students because where she lived is different from the expectations of her peers.

In this difference is a voice simply telling a truth, a truth that may or may not be believed. The Oxford English Dictionary (online, n.d.) defines "to believe" as to have "faith" in something. There is no faith in this specific civilian college student that Black individuals can exist outside defined spaces, outside of what and where they were brought up to think of as true. Military brats of color cease to exist for lack of faith—as if they were unicorns or leprechauns, or as if their lived experiences were fictional accounts. There is nothing more powerful than hearing someone say, "I don't believe you" as if you were the tooth fairy when you say something about where you are from and who you are. In the erasure of experience and absence of recognition of diversity of

experience, there is also an absurdity that someone else is going to comment about what is and what is not possible about another person's life. Military children of color are caught in this absurdity of being both of color and a military child—both identities are equally salient and inform each other. Their experiences, like the experiences of many people of color, are pushed aside for stereotypes and sweeping generalizations of who people of color are and where they are from. In a moment, the military brat of color disappears, is erased, and is eradicated. Luz was switched off, blown out, in the darkness of the inbetween, not to be recognized as a military brat who lived in Asia and the Pacific Islands and not recognized as a Black woman.

This is the tightrope that military children of color walk while they are in college. Their lives are fantastic stories, like that of Odysseus defeating the cyclops or outsmarting Circe. How do military children of color live authentically when in college or in the civilian world? How can Luz be who she is in all her experiences without being a liar or a conundrum, a riddle, a Black person whose experiences do not fit neatly in a box? How do military brats of color find homes or create homes in the civilian world if they do not fit preconceived notions of who people of color are and where they live? The denial of lived experience is as uncomfortable for the military child of color as it is for the person who denies it. When something does not fit into our life experience, it is always a struggle to understand, to process. If Ithaca is not a physical place for military children, in what ways do they create their homes? I consider all these questions in the uncovering and discovering the path of military children of color in college.

Fitting in When On the Outside

There is a myth, a feeling that if they just work hard enough, military children of color can just fit in, as if their visible identity as a military child will shield them from everyday racism. It is as if they can create or will themselves to belong equally to the U.S. racial hierarchy, bypassing any difficulties they might encounter in this journey home—

as long as your thoughts remain lofty, and a choice,
emotion touches your spirit and your body
stirs your spirit and your body.
The Laistrygonians and the Cyclops,
savage Poseidon; you won't encounter them
unless you stow them away inside your soul,
unless your soul sets them up before you.
(Cavafy, 1910/2009, pp. 27-28)

In this willingness and wishfulness “to fit,” military children of color in college often seem to believe that if they do not acknowledge or admit to race being a problem, then race will never be a problem. “You won’t encounter” racism, “unless you stow them away inside your soul/ unless your soul sets them up before you” (Cavafy, 1910/2009, pp. 27-28). It is almost as if racism and the experience of being raced is a trap that one can fall into, an excuse for not achieving a goal, or a way to process why something bad happened. Maria describes her approach to racism in college:

And it wasn't a thing for me either. I never made it a thing. I felt that just certain people made it a thing for me. But I would notice, when I was around military families, they didn't make it a thing for me either. But it was when I wasn't around military families that it was a thing that was made for me. (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Women's College)

Racism and the experience of being raced was a “thing.” Maria never actually says the word. It is as if not saying “racism” or “race” will prevent her from negative experiences, protecting her from physical and psychological harm. What is not said, does not exist. Maria, rightfully in many ways, sees the issue as someone else's problem, a

problem they try to pawn off on her because of her race and ethnicity. However, she feels she has the power to ward off the evil intentions—as if she can light a holy candle to make it okay or make it okay by simply ignoring it. She does notice the ease she has around military families, because race became secondary to other social factors like rank. In all of this, it is what is not said, not described, not articulated that strikes me as a researcher. There is a quiet and a sense of un-naming an issue that serves as a protective factor. But is this also because Maria does not have the words to describe racism? What if is she has been so removed or so enmeshed, that any racist encounters were simply people “making it a thing.” Racism is a thing. That is it.

A Thing We Can Not Describe in College

In language we invent words where and when we need them. We have multiple words to describe events and actions that impact us. In Boston, a very light rain is called a spritz or a mist, as if God were a hairdresser trying to *coiffe* the New England foliage. In D.C., the rain comes in summer storms and downpours, but I never heard it to spritz or mist. The vocabulary and the experience are simply different things. Maria’s description of racism is void of direct vocabulary to think deeply about the experience. She knows it is a thing. She knows it exists but has not explored or spoke of the event in-depth to exam it for what it is.

Whether this is a lack of vocabulary or an honest sense of safety from growing up in a diverse and desegregated society, Maria holds both the existence of racism and presence in her life as valid and invalid. There is a repeated “both/and” quality to her experience of racism in the civilian world. Maria’s understanding exists in-between articulation and feeling. She can feel the discomfort of race even if she cannot name it;

and she knows it is violating. At the same time, that sense of violation may be dampened by the shrug of the shoulders of a cultural difference between herself and her peers. This “thing” that people talk about obviously matters to that person, but Maria separates herself out, holding herself separate from the experience and the person. Maria’s self-esteem and sense of security—in who she is and where she comes from—is protective since she does not seem to internalize it, but rather observes that race matters to this other population in a way that it does not matter to her. Maria’s ability to let it not matter and to attribute it as X person’s problem can be empowering, since she hands the racism over to the person who holds that value, washing away the negativity from herself. Their racism has nothing to do with her, and everything about the other person.

Experiencing and Making Meaning of Race and Ethnicity on Colleges Campuses

Empowerment does not erase encounters with racism, but it means you will be able to turn away from them, shield your eyes, keep the demons of your soul at bay. “We all have experiences, but as T.S. Eliot said, we had the experience but missed the meaning” (O’Donohue, 1997, p. 181). Military brats of color in college struggle deeply with meaning making. They often are observing and then excusing or questioning their experiences of racism in the civilian world, and they both bristle at and embrace terms like “activist,” while they wrestle with the intersection of race and their military child identity. Sherri, a Black, White, and Chinese military brat, said, “I felt like I needed to prove my Blackness from an early age because I didn’t live with my dad.” She was dislocated by place and race from not living with her father, a problem she solved by “proving” her race, as if her skin color were something that needed justification, validation, and acceptance. It was as if Sherri’s identity was never simple, never in a

single checked box, which meant she had to choose and then double-down on the choice to prove who she was as if identity were an equation she could solve. However, in college her identity was chosen for her, called out to her from a car window:

It was like people yelling out the window at me, “Get out the way Black b’s. White power,” and then to other people across campus. That was my freshman year and then later on through my four years, it was other things like people targeting the same thing in a car, wearing monkey masks, um, and only screaming out the car [at] African Americans. (Sherri, Multi-Racial, PWI)

Sherri was no longer the child of a senior NCO; a young person who had lived in Europe; nor a college student who would soon prep for the possibility of a potential deployment and guardianship. The racial slurs from the car did not recognize her family’s military service, but they did judge her on the color of her skin. The dehumanization of civilian life is ironic for a military child of color. Is this what their parents fought for? What were the parents of military children of color fighting for? What would happen if these civilians knew they were yelling at the children of the people who protected the U.S.?

Van Manen (1997) states that “Phenomenology is....a...*theory of the unique*” (p. 7) whereas with other methodologies “subjects and samples, like soldiers, are replaceable” (p. 7). Embedded in his treatment of the phenomenological methodology is a powerful statement of how people view soldiers—replaceable. I see tin soldiers in a line and a child disposing of the ones with ostensible imperfections. These nameless and placeless people in uniform were disposable. In this civilian sentiment, the parents of military children are disposable—a thing to be lost, bloody or violent professionals, people whose uniform renders them less than human. The irony lies in van Manen’s thought-less civilian dehumanization of soldiers and the thoughtless racism of the people

yelling at Sherri. For groups of people who see themselves more civilized than others—van Manen and the racist individuals—they are certainly adept at dehumanizing others unlike themselves, whether it be for their profession or the color of their skin. What happens when military children of color experience racism and assumptions about who they are despite of or because of their military affiliation? The military child of color must not just confront adulthood, sexuality, academics, and the other kind of almost mundane growth that occurs in college, they must question who they are in the world and what it means to be who they are in daily life.

Where does a military brat fit in this world that has so many ideas about who they are, where they have come from, and what they have done? Their *Dasein* has been disrupted. Identity is no longer something understandable in the context of the military culture, but there are new social cues, new mores, new cultural implications of what it means *to be* in this new environment. Who they thought they were and what they were moving toward is suddenly all in question: What does it mean to have Black or Brown skin in the U.S.? What does it mean to have people think less of you because of the color of your skin? And it is not the military child of color who is bringing “them,” the unspeakable ills of U.S. society—inside their souls. It is mainstream U.S. culture. For the White military child, the racism may be noticeable, but it does not follow them like a shadow; it does not sit in their soul, nor does it set up barriers in front of them.

What happens when *Dasein* is disrupted? Can *Dasein* be reimagined? Can it be reformed? Does it change or alter? Or is this simply a small course correction in the constant moving towards meaning? The real question in all this disruption, or perhaps the collapse of a world, is this: How do military children of color cope with the realities

of civilian racism in college? How do they cope while they figure out who they are and who they want to be? And how does this relate to where they stand as young adults in relation to their families? What happens when they can no longer go “home” to their families? Does “home” cease to exist? Or does it evolve? This questioning does not exist in a vacuum. It lives in the soul, the gut, or the pit of the stomach. It is the nagging sensation that quietly dogs a person as they walk down the street or sit at a stoplight. These are often big questions that do not have simple or easy answers. Rather they are revealed to a person in increments, small realizations that lead to a better understanding of the world. For military children in college, the most uncomfortable questions seem to include, “Was that racism?” or “What are you?” Military brats of color process in their own way with the undeniable fact that military service does not erase issues of race and racism in the United States.

Passing of Home Spaces: When Places Cease *to Be* for Military Children of Color in College

According to Heidegger (1927/2008b), *Dasein* is both universal and understood, as well as completely taken for granted in its meaning. He says “The sky *is* blue” (p. 23). But what is blue? Is the sky always blue everywhere? Are there shades of blue? If we see nothing but clouds, is the sky still blue? Or is the sky shades of grey? If I stand and look up at the sky in Arizona, is it the same as if I stand and look up at the sky in Korea? We have a problem of movement, not with the sky, but the earth moving beneath the sky. Even the constellations change with the seasons. This movement, the constant urging forward, means that even if we stand in the same spot, after an hour, the sky is altogether different—cloud formations, sunlight, stars. But this is also a characteristic of *Dasein*—outside of tradition, outside of grounding, outside all things. It exists in and of itself.

Being is always moving towards self. These snippets of time and place for the military child are distinguished by natural changes of the body and passing of days, growing into an adult-self. But just like the sky, military children cannot “go back,” not in the ways civilian children can return home. Military bases close, houses are demolished, towns grow or shrink, and people find themselves no longer compatible or welcome in spaces which used to be theirs.

Memory and Loss of Home

Maria’s story is one of loss, constant loss, re-losing—losing is an art that she had to master, and re-master. In response to the question of what it feels like to not be able to find one’s house, she said:

Oh, it was kind of sad because I was like, oh – it wasn't so much the home itself that I absolutely loved. It was just more, like the memories and the – like memories of family that were there. (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Women’s College)

Maria lost at least one house and her college. Her house in the Midwest simply went missing, no record on Google, no physical building to be found. It vanished as if it never existed. Without a record, a street number, a vacant lot, her house was simply snuffed out like a flame. People remember the flame from the candle, the light it threw on the wall, the friendly shadows surveying the room, but there is no record after the smoke from the snuffed flame fades into the air.

Maria’s college, a woman’s college where she grew into herself, where her confidence was solidified, became a co-educational institution. And she has not returned since, knowing that profound change and the traditions seemingly lost would be painful to try and re-encounter. Is it better to have a place exist as it does in your memory, knowing that you can never go back, or is it worse to have a place simply no longer exist

as if you were never there at all? The house, a physical manifestation of family, has memories embedded in the walls, lingering in doorways—the stairs, the closets, the cupboards all sighing in bittersweet remembrance of children and adults muddling through daily life. The pain of this loss is perhaps first startling—how can a house simply be gone? Perhaps it was so happy that the house could no longer exist in such an imperfect world, or is it better that it does not exist in this imperfect world? This pain is, in some ways, dislocated, seemingly removed from reality, as if someone cut off a hand or removed an organ—the phantom memory of place still lives within the body.

The things of memory *remain with me*, within me. They occupy interior psychical (and doubtless also neurological) places and are the determinative loci of my life. I remain *with them* as well by returning to them in diverse acts of remembering. (Casey, 2009, p. 129)

Maria knew the house. It was not an extension of self, but something altogether internalized. The recollection of shape, size, and idiosyncrasies pump through her veins, passing through her heart and fueling her breath. The house, while physically gone, now lives in a network of neurons, living-matter pathways of memory. Maria's sense of house and home, particularly her lost home, dwells within her as tender and bittersweet souvenirs of life; the place is physically gone but alive inside her and inside her family members, all of whom carry these memories within. The shared memories, the gathering around at holidays, the talks late into the night clutching a cup of tea, reminiscing—suddenly that is all that exists of this home. It lives and does not live. The place where it was built holds the experience of that house, small bits of which could be excavated hundreds of years from now. The shards of wood, the forgotten and built-over foundation, the buried half-broken toys are fragments of the earth's memory of a house

that once lived there. Even in living memory, we cannot help but wrestle with the new emptiness of the physical space.

Mourning of Home(s)

In this sense, the memory of a house gone is perhaps the memory of the death of a loved one. Casey (2009) says, “*We mourn places as well as people*” (p. 198). After all, Bachelard (1994) describes the house as a living being in and of itself: houses keep vigil, they wait, they have lights on acting as a guide, they protect their inhabitants from the world. A house inhales at the opening of a door, sighs with the opening of a window, warms itself with the closing of curtains on a winter evening. It lives with us as another creature, a family member, quietly collecting memories in its walls, thresholds, staircases, halls. When the house is no longer waiting for you, when you are no longer able to visit, there is a grief, a pain, a sense of self that is gone. The house vanishes and a small piece of the world that existed in spite of the world (Gadamer, 1975) is gone, and mourning is all that is left.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.) mourning’s etymology is derived from a “Cognate with Old Saxon *mornon*, *mornian* to be sorrowful or troubled, Old High German *mornēn* to sorrow, Gothic *maurnan* to worry, concern oneself.” Sorrow, worry, concern all live viscerally in memory, flashes of events that have taken up residence in our neurological pathways. The doors and windows in our minds are flung open, letting the grief of memory spread through our bodies, sometimes making our limbs heavy, like lead, and sometimes leaving us exhausted, as if the emotions which sat like perspiration on our skin have evaporated, emptying our body and passing into the air. As the military child grows older, even when the loss is no longer potent, receding into a

fond recollection, it is carried. Maria's memories feel lost, razed with the house, but they still reside inside her, and inside her family.

The loss of a house did not prepare her for her loss of her college—a girl's school with a unique history. For Maria, the women's college was a place for dwelling—"to be engaged bodily in a built place is already to dwell in that place" (Casey, 2009, p. 179). In dwelling, she danced, learned, sat in intellectual communion with other women, peers she respected. The college was built as a women's institute. Intentional in its purpose, it offered an authentic place for being a woman. There was no pressure to be anything other than what she was—and being a woman was celebrated, a sisterhood that was chronicled in something as symbolic as the graduation robes. The white robe bore the name of every woman who had received her diploma; in that garment, the names were lovingly embroidered on the sleeve, a list of those who came before. The robe carried a knowing that others would come after, linking women together in an elegant line of succession. The white cypress robes were replaced with a clean-cut lawn of green robes without history or context. The loss of the white robe was a family tree, cut off, strangled, and rendered infertile. No other women would descend from that line.

Mourning a College Home

The public and private nature and complex relationships of a women's college are difficult to convey to outsiders. Maria recommended I watch *Mona Lisa Smile* (Newell et al., 2004), a movie that chronicles the lives and bonds of young women in the 1950s, to understand better what her experience was like. The importance of getting married and having a family may have pervaded the movie, but Maria commented that "...a lot of the tradition, that closeness and the things the professors said and the conversations you had

with them still happen.” The movie seems to be the closest depiction of what it means to attend a women’s college. Within the 1950s setting, the movie uses *Number 1, 1950* (*Lavender Mist*) (1950) by Jackson Pollock to show how the world is moving into new understandings of art, which is also a reflection of the social upheaval of the time. *Lavender Mist* (Pollock, 1950), seen below, is striking.



Image Redacted. (Pollock, 1950)

The chaos of the dripping paint mirrors the inner turmoil of the Wellesley women—torn between their own academic and professional desires and the conventions of gender roles in the 1950s. Will the world open to them as it does to their male counterparts? Is the maelstrom of soft lavender, white, and black theirs to tame? The freedom of the chaos may allow them to be who and what they want to be after a lifetime of believing that they had a set path that guided them through a set of motions. Their world has exploded.

In the chaos is also a sense of a world that is unpredictable, exploded from its previous norms, which reflects Maria’s sense of loss, her own sense of chaos, at the disappearing of her house and now the disappearing of her college experience, which is also caught up in the chaos of this mist. After Maria graduated, her women’s college went co-ed, abandoning intellectual sisterhood.

I was definitely hurt and upset that they allowed males into our school. I always joke with people that I’m still bitter about it just because going to an all-women’s

institute, academic institute is just, I think, are really sacred experience[s]...And it's funny because my ten-year college reunion is coming up in May...It's just the first time that I will be going back in May to see my sisters from my class. (Maria, Black & Mexican American, Women's College)

The loss of the intimacy of the all-women's school is palpable, but it perhaps is compounded by this underlying feeling of impermanence in home-spaces. Maria already lost her childhood houses, razed or not. Colleges and universities are not conventionally places to lose. We lose keys, pens, and pencils as small annoyances of the *vie quotidiana*; we do not lose houses or colleges. In all Maria's losses growing up a military child of color, the sacred experience of a women's college added insult to injury with the constant moving. The sisterhood has been shattered, an experience disrupted by the introduction of the male presence. Expectations have transitioned from clearly defined lines which contained forms and created solid objects that were easy to understand and process. These expectations have exploded on the canvas of memory, embodied in the random lines of paint. With the introduction of men, Maria is going home to a college that is no longer the place she experienced. Casey (2009) says that "Just as every place is encultured, so every culture is implaced" (p. 31), but *Lavender Mist* perhaps demonstrates what happens when culture is ripped from place, forcefully and devastatingly dis-placed. Maria, in her grief, protested. She resisted and raised her voice against the stripping of an all-women's college culture. There is a powerful statement in "...this place is no longer *my* place: indeed, my place has become other to (and other than) me" (Casey, 2009, pp. 307-308). Perhaps *Lavender Mist* (Pollock, 1950) is also her sense of sorrow, a mix of self-deprecating humor, an inkling that she can go back to her college home, but it will never be the same—it is "no longer *my* place" (Casey, *ibid*). The paint randomly flung on the canvas will always be disjointed in the same way her

memories of her all women's college will be forever dislocated from what the college is now. Loss is messy.

Losing a Home, Losing a College, Having a Seat at the Table?

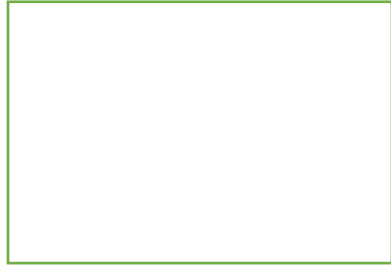


Image Redacted. (Chicago, 1974-79)

What did Maria lose when she lost her women's institute? Her home? A woman's college experience should resemble, in some sense, Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1974-1979). In a women's college, each woman has a seat at the table, interacting and conversing with the feminine giants who came before them—a glass of wine with Hypatia or a laugh with Rosalind Franklin. The presence of men wrecks the table, pulls off the tablecloth, smashes the china, and overturns the chairs. The meeting of great female minds is rendered into fragments, shattered, waiting to be swept up, and disposed of in a receptacle, neatly and tidily removed, as if the place was never any different. The experience, like many of the military child homes, will fade into a mist—documented by history, preserved in pictures, described in a website text—and cease to exist in the physical world.

"I Don't Know What Took You So Long.": Being at Home in Who You Are

Alongside our myths we have epics, which are stories that legitimize civilizations, celebrate cultures, and explain how people and places came to be. *The Aenied* (Virgil, n.d.) is particularly salient for military children of color in college because it chronicles

that journey from a home where you can no longer be to the establishment of a home elsewhere. This journey from and to who you are as a person is embodied by Aeneas who walks out of the ruins of Troy to establish his own home, what would become modern Rome (Virgil, 1990.). In this journey he is constantly “becoming” who he is meant to be while carrying his hearth gods, his past self, the remnants of his old home with him. In this journey there are natural breaks, turning points, decisions—striking out on his own, leaving Dido, navigating the underworld. At each point he must make decisions about who he is and who he wants to be.

Gadamer (1975/2004) describes *bildung* as the formation of an individual within a social and historical context or culture, giving us a concept to uncover how young people, like Aeneas, are formed by their cultural upbringing and experience in the world. Military children of color make formative journeys in college, turning away from their families, physically and socially, and turning toward themselves as young people. The decisions they make are about their identity, “becoming” who they are meant to be in the world. They leave relationships that are no longer healthy, or which no longer feel authentic. Alternately they make decisions that ostensibly derail future plans because they have discovered those plans are no longer desirable. The formation of an individual is never simple. Gadamer (1975/2004) observes, “If all that presupposes *Bildung*, then what is in question is not a procedure or behavior but what has come into being” (p. 15).

For perhaps the first time, military children of color are not held to a script, a way of being in the world. They have no formula or direction for how to be in college—there is no “PCS” or set move after college. There is not necessarily a “hometown” or place to return to after college. College is not just a hoop to jump through so they can resume

their lives, but rather college becomes a place where they sort through all the things that contribute to their identity to figure out their “becoming.” This does not mean that military children are abandoning who they are: “*Bildung* is not achieved in the manner of a technical construction, but grows out of an inner process of formation and cultivation, and therefore constantly remains in a state of continual *Bildung*” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 10). Military children are essentially questioning all aspects of their Being and of their *Bildung* in an attempt to define previously undefined parts of themselves. For example, Maria was able to dance, and dance as her full self, with pride in who she is and how she looks:

...In college I did not want to dance and the dance instructor, I was in her yoga class. She's like, "You're really flexible. I know you were a cheerleader. I think you should look into my modern dance company." I was like, "Listen, I'm not your jazz, ballet girl. I'm not the size of a jazz or ballet dancer. I really don't want to do it." She was like, "No, I've changed the company." Before they used to weigh you. She's like, "We don't weigh you. It's not that way. I want all my dancers to look different. I want you in my company." I auditioned and got it. (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Woman's College)

Maria could come from her cocoon, and experience mentorship from a dance instructor and comradery from a dance group, who accepted her for who she was. College is a place of emergence. Sometimes the military children open like a trumpet tulip, letting the world in and announcing themselves. At other times, the military children pop out of a cocoon, quickly spreading their wings, and simply leaving.

Stepping Outside the Fortifications of Home

O'Donohue (1998) observes that being open to change is essential for growing into who you are: “When you open your heart to discovery, you will be called to step outside the comfort barriers within which you have fortified your life” (pp. 27-28). The irony is that military children have always had to be open to discovery, but their previous

experiences of living in and thriving in other cultures had the “comfort barriers” of the military community and their family. Sherlock states, “I would say I was on a base my entire high school life. Even in Camp [Stateside], I didn't really go out to [the City]. We stayed on base most of the time.” The military community and culture acted as fortifications from the outside world, a buffer, a way of removing or keeping one apart. The act of transience meant you knew you were going to leave, so while there was investment, there was also corresponding freedom from investment in the surrounding non-military culture. These fortifications can be grandly built and constructed to keep out non-military influences and individuals, while carefully curating which aspects of civilian or other cultures and individuals make it past the walls. However, these barriers also “fortified your life.” The military community was a cocoon that nourished and protected military children of color, shielding them from so many of the ills of the civilian world: lack of access to education, lack of access to health care, lack of access to community resources and the overall of lack of safety (Kaslow, 1993).

As Aeneas is taught and brought up behind the fortified walls of Troy and then ventures out from behind those walls, so do the military children of color grow in a sheltered environment. They are not violently forced out as Aeneas was; it is a softer rite of passage. Military children of color are being pushed out into the world through the mechanism of college, which has practical and real value in the military community.

Lynne excitedly observed:

When I found out the difference between being an officer and being enlisted was a college degree, that kind of rocked my world. And it really revealed that education was the way to get ahead and be respected. And it wasn't solely dependent upon color. It could be based on my getting an education. (Lynne, Multi-Racial, Christian PWI/Western State School)

The discovery of the realities and truths of the military world in relation to the civilian world are sometimes muddled, as muddled as the attempts at discovery. For Lynne, and for other military children of color, education is an avenue to respect and promotion, not a place of any sort of search for identity or discovery of self. Rather, it is a practical way to earn more money or live in a nicer house on base or have people salute you. The power of rank in the military is not to be under-estimated. Every soldier with a car has a sticker that allows him/her on to base. The sticker indicates rank—a symbol so powerful that a military police person will salute a car according to its sticker and not the person actually in the car. This power is not confined strictly to who can afford college, especially with the new Post 9/11 GI Bill (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.), or based on race and/or ethnicity. Education is the secret but not so secret to success in the military, with a general feeling that one is judged by rank which is inextricably linked to education.

Opening Doors and Closing Doors

Military children of color in college seem to have a sensitive point when they are in a place to leave, join, close a door, or open a door. For many it is after the sophomore year of college. Luz, for example, decided to join ROTC, a decision which helped her to finance her last two years of college and earned her a commission in the U.S. Army just as the Iraq and Afghanistan War began. She is now a veteran. Lynne, feeling increasingly alienated at her predominantly White Midwest Christian college, transferred to a large state school in the Rockies region of the U.S. She had slowly been feeling divorced from the Christian faith, and today she no longer identifies as Christian. Sherlock changed his political affiliations, came out publicly as a gay man, and left

politics behind to pursue theater. Today he still enjoys politics, but it is not his career.

Macario pledged a historically Black fraternity, which he credits in helping him navigate the graduate school process. I consider these turns in relation to Bildung and Dasein: how does identity formation co-exist with the act of “becoming” and “being”? In exploring these turns, I seek to capture aspects of these lived experiences that teach us how adult military children of color navigate college and nascent adulthood.

“Go Back into Yourself”: Finding Who You Are in the Horizon

“Saint Augustine advised: “Do not wish to go out; go back into yourself; truth dwells in the inner man”” (Casey, 2009 p. 302). In college, without a home with a literal rock foundation to ground the military child to place, there is a unique space for military children to go back to themselves and see the truths of who they are, who they want to be, and who they feel they are meant to be. In all this, there is no pressure to be anything other than who they are. For once, the absence of home is unencumbering, and the decisions to be made are deeply personal and deeply difficult, often meaning that military children are giving up something in order to live in their truth—be it community, ritual, or a sense of comfort. These are brave acts of emergence from an all-encompassing community and a turning toward self.

I miss having a tribe and a community which I got through multiple ways of my childhood and now do not [have]...in fact deciding to become not a Christian was huge. That rejected so much of my community and past culture. I have cut ties and I don't go back and tell everyone that I'm not a Christian to like ruin their memory but that's really difficult for me. I pull off the Christian so what I'm [am] I left with? Adjectives. (Lynne, Multi-racial, Christian PWI/Western State College)

Lynne is pulling off her Christian identity as if it were a sweater or a dress that was soiled. She is balling it up and tossing it aside. Perhaps she is putting it in the trash,

getting rid of it for good, or perhaps she is boxing it up and putting it high in her closet where you keep your childhood knick-knacks, stored in a memory box next to your high school graduation program and your middle school science fair ribbon. This identity is stripped off and relegated to a memory, a past place. She is turning away from one cultural horizon, struggling with what it means to turn away and lose the safety, familiarity, and beauty of that old “tribe” in order to walk toward a cultural horizon that feels authentic, accepts her in-betweenness of color and cultures, parentage, and identity. I guess the main question is: are identities like sweaters, a piece of clothing to remove? Or are identities like clothes in general? We dress for the identity and sometimes a sweater just does not feel right anymore. We also must wonder, how are we caught by our historical horizon, and is there a choice?

Just as the individual is never simply an individual because he is always in understanding with others, so too the closed horizon that is supposed to enclose a culture is an abstraction. The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 303)

If Lynne is not caught by her historical horizon, how is it that she feels she cannot go back to her Christian community for fear of sharing she is no longer Christian? She effectively turned her back on a horizon, physically moving from a Christian college to a large public university. The Christian culture is still accessible to her because she grew up in it—she knows what to say and what to do to blend in. She can look at that horizon and know all that is expected of her in that context. But the Christian community itself is closed to her because memory is sacred. People have visions of who she was, and to return (even with loving intent) would potentially upset the horizon of those who were

her Christian peer group. However, if not subject to a closed horizon, in shedding identities the theory of the horizon would demand that Lynne be dynamic, move and grow. Lynne's movement is as spiritual as it is physical, but her ability to move and change her horizon may lie within her military child cultural horizon where nothing is static. Everything changes for the military child of color. Lynne was physically mobile for her entire life, forced to make new friends in a cyclical nature resembling a circadian rhythm. Perhaps it is this experience with changing horizons that prepares her to step away from identities and step into identities, particularly as she makes choices about who and what she wants to be during her time in college.

Gadamer (1975/2004) speaks of what it means to be in physical, psychological, and emotional motion in relation to a horizon. Horizons are entrenched culture. The truth of the sky above, the clouds overhead, the view ahead are contingent on where someone locates himself/herself on a developmental scale, but that person is almost always subject to his/her history. As a person grows, travels through time and space, the horizon gently sways and pivots, or sometimes not so gently turns. In this relationship with our horizons, we are constantly dancing, a partnered pair, where some stay perpetually in place, wrapped in their culture. For military children of color in college, these dance partners are both beloved friends and strangers. While the horizon shifts, colors swirling like a skirt, military children of color in college must make choices to turn left, stay right, or step forward as if they were a toreador in a Pasodoble.

Sherlock chooses to turn, abruptly almost, repositioning himself in his horizon, no longer following the historical protocols of the prescribed waltz that was to be his life. He has a catalogue of steps, which alter his position: he intentionally chose a college that

would help with a political career, but turned away from that career and toward other identities and other senses of self. In a short period of time in his sophomore year, Sherlock left the College Republicans and auditioned for a university theater production. His movements may seem unexpected and unanticipated to the naked eye. Sherlock observed, "If anything changed, it was getting to know myself a little bit better and started to see how other people think and move in that direction." For those who knew him in college, though, these movements were no surprise. Democratic friends responded, "I don't know what took you so long." He did not have to leave a place physically to wrestle with identities, but he did have to move to a new place of psychological well-being, a readiness to assert his identity while looking onto a horizon that is both unfamiliar and exciting. How can one be a gay African American man in a historical horizon that is the U.S. military? The historical horizon merges with the present horizon. Sherlock is emerging from a military cultural horizon and understanding of who he is, and where he might locate himself in the civilian world. In his dance, there is pleasure in understanding the horizon and moving from the historical horizon of who he was into a horizon that has room for a full-self. His movements are as joyous as they are tentative, as if we are seeing a fusion of horizons, where "In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for the old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other" (Gadamer, 1975/2004, p. 305). Sherlock has spent so much of his life in calculation, looking at the promotion lists in the military times, that this dance into understanding is a bit of freedom, his chance to forge an identity that is "something of living value".

At this moment in time—his sophomore year—Sherlock sees himself as something of living value. His worth is not tied to his father’s rank, nor does it hinge on a specific construct of success like being elected to office. Rather, he continues to grow into himself, and this journey to self is a constantly evolving point to continue to walk towards. Never arriving at the cusp of the horizon is not a failure, but instead a testament to Sherlock’s rich wanderings and re-examination of self.

Military children of color wrestle with their horizons in college, pivoting from the horizon of their childhood, moving toward horizons that are more authentic and in line with who they are. Sherlock removes the metric of what he thought he was supposed to do (spend college grooming himself for public office). Lynne also turns away from the metrics of success imposed on her by a conservative Christian college culture and strikes out on her own at a state school. This is scary and liberating and full of grief for the loss of something that was so precious. But in all of it there is a sense of finally setting out toward a horizon that is authentic to who one is and who one strives to be. In the sense of abandonment there is also a sense of coming into self, reaching out into the unknown, as if military children of color are sun flowers turning and re-turning toward the sun, until their stalk, meters long, is twisted and gnarled from the experience of *being*.

“White People Don’t Have to Adapt”: Coming Into Self as a Military Brat of Color

Maria describes this deep sense of knowing who she is and not caring what other people say, a sense of resistance to being put in a box. A Peace Corps representative asked Maria, “What made you decide to come to a lily-White school?” As Class President, Maria was one of the few women of color at her predominantly White women’s college. She observed her own sense of security in herself:

What is interesting is that it didn't bother me at all and I credit that to the military. I was so used to being around different people that me being the only Black and Mexican American female in a room of 50 other Caucasian females did not bother me. I could find something in common with them and I knew what to talk to them about, or I knew that I could be their friend. (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Women's College)

Maria knew how to make friends, how to laugh, how to be the “new kid,” and all of these experiences made college easier. She knew she “had this,” particularly because she knew how to move. Maria had faith in her own abilities to adapt and move within the world. These skills, or toolbox, did not detract from having a sense that her identity is no one thing and not hinged to what some others might value. The paradox of her identity is how complicated her journey to identity was. “There was no race necessarily that I saw,” she said.

Not seeing race or not letting race define you is a fraught statement. The military is color blind by order and has been since integration in the post-Korean war era (Department of the Army, 2012). This is not to say there is no racism in the U.S. military (Burk & Espinoza, 2012) or that color blind racism leads to good or equitable outcomes (Bonilla-Silva, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004). However, there have been tangible steps taken by the U.S. military to mitigate racism in the U.S. military. For example, the Department of Defense created an entire school system to circumvent Jim Crow (Smerker & Owens, 2003). Color-blindness that functions to cover-up and bolster stories or narratives that reinforce structural-racism in the U.S. civilian world (Bonilla-Silver, Lewis, & Embrick, 2004), could easily function the same way in the military. However, there is an element of moral superiority in the thought that the military is wholly better than or that color blindness is necessary for cohesion. We could say the color blindness in the military is functional, a tenet of soldiers who might find themselves depending on another soldier—

that fabled Band of Brothers. In this way, we live refusing to see what racism we live daily. Toddlers will close their eyes or put their hands over their eyes to hide. To shut their eyes, in their mind, means the world cannot see them, precisely because they cannot see the world. The logic is similar for a military child of color who fails to see the issues with the colorblindness of the military.

Sherlock states, “I’m sure that a lot of my friends have gone through pretty tough.... where they have been racially profiled for something or they’ve been called something....that’s never happened to me in my face.” The silence is deafening in terms of what is implied. Racism was something private, held close, and there were lines that were never transgressed such as making a racist statement to the faces of military children of color. However, skin color is not binary in the military, but complicated by inter-racial marriage (Lundquist, 2004), rank and gender, complicated in a way that is very unlike the literal Black and White overt and quiet racist structures of the civilian world. Rank is a much more powerful influence on how someone is treated and perceived. In the military, rank must be seen.

While White people do not have to see race, they do not have to adapt. Military brats of color must learn to see race and that others see race in order to navigate their world. The shades of grey begin to show. Maria said: “There was no race necessarily that I saw” when speaking about her experience as one of the only women of color at her women’s college. This sentence sits with me because of the modifier “necessarily.” Necessary, as a word, finds its origins in French, meaning “intimately connected,” “inevitable,” or “existing by necessity” (OED, n.d.). Maria, subtly, is not denying the presence of race differences but rather did not see them as being “intimately connected”

or that race was seen as “existing by necessity.” However, what Maria saw was powerful to her: a group of individuals who were bonded by the military. The military bond may dampen it, subdue it, or rarify it to something else in the bonfire. It is there, even if not always seen by military brats of color.

“Black and Mexican Equals Puerto Rican”

Maria stated, “When I was younger I thought I was Puerto Rican. I thought Black and Mexican equals Puerto Rican.” Maria held a profound confusion as to where and how race fits into her identity as a military child. Her identity is in flux, not necessarily Black, not necessarily Mexican, not necessarily White. Growing up, no one talked to Maria about her skin color and ethnicity explicitly. Race was something she had to learn, and then the understanding was murky. If it were an equation, then race plus ethnicity does not equal a completely different ethnicity. But it does demonstrate that Maria grew up in a world where race and identity were simply not talked about, even though they were ever present. How do you learn something that is not even named? And how do you navigate race and ethnicity when people make racist remarks, about you, in front of you? Maria’s race and identity were topics of conversation: the comments people would make about mix-raced couples and then pause and say “no offense to you.” However, the lack of race talk on military bases meant that Maria’s identities were all encompassing, subject to critique, but then erased with a flippant “no offense to you.” Her identities were no-one-thing and every-thing, but on a trajectory that led to more and more sophisticated understandings that no one is ever one thing while struggling with race in the U.S.

In wrestling with this theme, it strikes me that my metaphor of home and the journey is not sufficient unto itself, because the experience of being raced in college or of

not being raced in college is strange and alienating. Suddenly other people are telling you who you are, who your family is, and what your role is in the world. You are defined by a yard stick that is altogether foreign. Racism does exist in the military. There are racist incidences, but for military kids of color their homes are relatively safe spaces, sometimes with a dab of color blindness, precisely because when you grow up in a diverse environment, difference is normal. In the military, people acknowledge race and ethnicity, sometimes in very negative ways, but race is largely like someone has black hair or blond hair. It is a trait that is on your military ID or a passport. It is a record of how you look, not a record of who you are. This means the cultural aspects of race and ethnicity are not in the forefront, especially when living abroad. When you are living in a country where another language is spoken and another culture is dominant, it somehow makes differences in skin color appear smaller. There is no intrinsic judgment of someone's mother because she is Korean (from Korea; not Korean American) or someone's father because he is from Jamaica or Panama. Because kids are thrown together, race is noticeable but not noticeable. The normalcy of interracial marriage (Lundquist, 2004) and the integrated schools (Smrekar et al., 2001) means lives were never intentionally socially divided by race or ethnicity like in civilian life, where race and class are often sorted neatly by zip code (Krysan, Couper, Farley, & Forman, 2009). Perhaps the real question here is what happens when you find out your life has been a lie, a parallel universe, an illusion where military kids of color have been taught that something does not matter in a way that it actually matters in the U.S.? What happens when you run into a wall and realize that the colorblindness in the military does not serve

them well, but a complicated morass of good and bad and upholding of structural and institutional racism? Military children of color learn these hard lessons and they adapt.

“We Have to Find Little Ways to Fit In”

I don't know. But, at the end of the day, I think the one takeaway that we all experience is the adaptability outside in the real world, whether or not you're a minority or not. I mean, maybe if this was a different – maybe if you side by side compared a White military brat experience to our military brats, maybe we have to network a lot more as minority military kids. Or maybe we have to adapt more as minority. That's probably something that you might find if you did a completely different study. Because I don't think White people have to adapt to anything. They're just kind of there. Whereas we have to find little ways to fit in. (Sherlock, African American, PWI)

It is in the sorting of tools, the description of technology, bound by skin color, systemic racism, military upbringing, and the college experience, that we find cognitive dissonance, the holding of two truths of the lived experience of military brats of color in college. Sherlock affirms his status as a Black man and what he does to “fit in,” while simultaneously affirming he has the power to not let “his minority status dictate” life choices. He declares this, daring the world to say no to him as a Black man, a military child, a professional, an actor, a college graduate, a world traveler. He holds both out, examining them, in the palms of his hands, perhaps not realizing they are incompatible, precisely because they are his lived experience. However, there is an undeniable dichotomy to fit in as an action. I think of pieces of a puzzle, all regularly formed, gently placed together, creating a picture or pattern. To fit in is to conform, and blend, as a blue puzzle piece loses definition when it is fit in to a skyscape. The curves disappear, and that puzzle piece is like every other puzzle piece. Sherlock observes that if you are White, you fit in without question, much like a puzzle piece. To fit in in this way is perhaps White privilege, or that ease of moving through the world and being accepted in

the world because of White skin color. However, military children of color must work to fit in, they must adapt, conform in different ways—they cannot depend on skin color alone.

The lived experience of race for military children of color in college reflects two sides of the same coin, the ugly truth of racism in the U.S. and the self-efficacy of people who have spent their life adapting. The positive is being a military child of color and having the ability to adapt, but being White is null, it is nothingness, it is a status-quo. The act of adapting while a military child of color is an altogether different experience.

Adapt (OED, n.d.) means to “make suitable” or to “adjust”—which people of color must do anyhow, with education, clothes, “respectability” or tokenism or being the stereotype of “the nice” Black person (Fries-Britt & Griffin, 2007, p. 516). One could say military status makes a difference in skin color more palatable or acceptable to White society. Home and Garden Television recently ran a commercial for a show set in Texas, in which a nice Black couple was featured in the announcer’s first sentences that told us the couple both were veterans. In that moment, they were made suitable. They fit in to or adjusted to White standards of what is “okay.” In making themselves suitable to White society, be it at a high school or predominantly White institution, how do military brats of color adjust? They are not veterans, but what techniques, language, and skills must they learn and use to adjust to White settings and expectations? Most of all, we must ask, what happens when you live in a world where race is not salient until it is?

Down a Rabbit Hole of Racism “Because You Are Black”

She [the teacher] thought you should say this and she said that it was because you are Black...she thinks that you would say that she’s discriminating against you.”
(Paloma’s Principal)

Paloma stared at the principal of West Coast High School, baffled. For the first time teachers were not on her side as in the Department of Defense Schools. A teacher had told Paloma that she “just wasn’t smart enough to be in her class.” There is a first time for everything, and this was the first—but not the last—time that Paloma was told she was Black and that she was not smart enough. Paloma is Latina and Black, but was not aware that her skin color meant anything until she moved back to the U.S. from overseas as a young teenager. There is nothing stranger than to be told who you are, to have your identity as a student and as a person simply stripped from you. Paloma knew who she was when she lived overseas: she was Latina, a daughter, a sister, a friend, a good student, an American, a military child. She had the run of the military base on which she lived, but the White U.S. culture had no room for understanding a Black Latina.

And herein lies the confusion—just because you have Black skin does not mean you have a Black identity. Such an identity, when forced upon a person, seems to be something that grows and is explored and realized. Paloma is almost a foreigner in her own country, unsure and confused: “What do you mean I am Black? I’m like I’m Latina, but okay.” How does it feel to have your identity announced to you, as if you were supposed to know about the existing power structures in a country you have never lived in despite the fact your father signed up to fight for it? Paloma was Alice down the rabbit hole, facing a yelling Queen and her minions (Carroll, 2010). Paloma, like Alice, had to leverage who she knows and what she knows to find her way home—home to what though? Alice had a home, a house, a cat, and parents, and a child existence and future that was, in some ways, decided for her based on gender and class. Alice knew those

expectations in the same way she knew her home. Alice was also White. Paloma, in her own strange Wonderland where her skin color dictated so much of her life, was not going to wake up from a dream or navigate her way out. This strange, racist place where someone failed a math course because of skin color was home:

I had no idea that racism was not eradicated in the 50's, and 60's. I thought it was something we read about in Black history month. I didn't realize it was still a thing. (Paloma, Black Latina, State College)

Paloma's Wonderland was previously mapped by systemic racism, which she thought was a myth or fairytale told out of history books. It was a vanished creature, a dragon that terrorized villages or ogres who terrorized homes. These were stories from long ago of heroes who marched against oppression, fought for equal rights, and broke down barriers for people of color. However, there was a stark realization that these very scary conditions of oppression had not been vanquished by our civil rights heroes whose pictures are dutifully taped on the walls by teachers one month a year. Rather, the oppression was quiet, subtle, subject to denial before an accusation ever arose. It crept up and encircled you like a boa constrictor, slowly squeezing the life force from you.

Paloma perceived racism as a disease that was eradicated like smallpox—a plague that was solved with hygiene or an inoculation. Paloma discovered she had an illness that was supposedly wiped from the earth, existed only in level-5 labs, locked away from the world. And this illness was not something that could be cured, because there was nothing wrong with Paloma. However, there was something wrong with the teachers, principals, and students around her. They suffered from an ignorance and hate that eventually impacted Paloma, physically, socially, and emotionally. Paloma did not know who her allies were, because the people who she previously depended on now judged her,

implicitly and explicitly, by the color of her skin. Suddenly, Paloma was confronted with a Cheshire Cat, in the form of her assumed identity, who has ever since appeared and disappeared depending on who she was talking to and who they thought she was. He pops in and out like a hallucination. Paloma is never sure if he is there, until he makes sure she knows he is there. In college, it was a Mexican American Student Association that

didn't want a thing to do with me. I was like, "But I'm Latina and there's no other Latino groups, so MECHA is posted up." They're like "Nope." BSU [Black Student Union], I walked in, they didn't give me a second glance. (Palmona, Black Latina, State School)

Skin color speaks before Paloma ever opens her mouth. Alice, being White, was perhaps baffled, curious, and scared (Carroll, 2010). While Paloma was all those things, she was also settling into her new reality. Once she had moved Stateside and outside the sphere of base, the military could not protect her anymore in the same way. She had a one-way lifetime ticket to Wonderland where she had to adapt and adjust in a way Alice, who could just go home, never had to. O'Donohue (1998) explains, "When we allow dislocation to control us, we become outsiders, exiled from the intimacy of true unity with ourselves, each other and creation. Our bodies know that they belong; it is our minds that make our lives so homeless" (p. 4). The wonder of Wonderland is the very definition of dislocation. Alice's location is apart, down a rabbit hole, foreign, confusing, with social mores of the Mad Hatter, a dormouse, and the Queen of Hearts (Carroll, 2010). There is wonder in this alienation. The body also becomes an object or thing that is no longer known, and skin color becomes a more defining factor in how one moves in the world. Paloma was not acknowledged in Latino circles because she was too dark. She did not fit an image of what a Latina looks like or should look like. Our bodies know they belong, walking the earth, underneath the shifting constellations, a part of an

ecosystem larger than us, our mind is not what makes us homeless, or our lives homeless. Instead our minds help us set the course to find spaces where we can exist as ourselves, not as outsiders. The mind seeks intimacy with others and creation. Such seeking can come at a cost, taking on identities and adapting to spaces that were never before conceived of as “ours.” It is as if the alienation and process of finding space to be as a military child of color in college renders them constant migrants or immigrants, always learning other cultures and social mores to find some peace and connection.

Home Spaces as Spaces of Acceptance in College

Paloma begins to seek out spaces where she could be Black and spaces where she could be Latina, drawing on both identities, and strategically learning about the Black community. “I molded my identity,” she said. Wonderland was not going to change for Paloma, but she could play with the cultural conventions of Wonderland. The surrealness of being told what she was, led Paloma to grab a brush and paint the roses red or “drink tea” with the Mad Hatter and his dormouse. She leveraged the racial boundaries to finance her education at all levels:

I’ve earned it. I have earned all of this. It is enough that I’ve dealt with all of... [the] negative repercussions of me being me. Now I am going to reap every single penny of benefit I can reap. (Paloma, Black Latina, State School)

Alice in Wonderland (Carroll, 2010) addresses the absurdity of grounded birds, baby pigs, narcoleptic dormice, and half teacups in a way that resonates with the experience of the military children of color as they confront the construction of their own racial identities. If a cake or a drink make you too little or too big to enter a door, how do you make your way in and how do you survive and thrive once inside? Paloma worked through the absurdities and injustices of U.S. racial constructs with anger and sorrow, but

also a deep understanding that her identity was something dictated, in some ways, and thus, outside her sphere of influence. Once she understood the fluidity and the non-fixed nature, she could drop in and out of her identities—she could be a Black woman, a Black college student, a Latina, a Latina college student, bond with a Chicano faculty member, speak about the Afro-Diaspora to an African faculty member. She became adept in her ability to shift in and out of all her identities: “What would you like me to be, that’s who I am right now. I’ll be that when I’m in your presence.” Paloma was a woman of many masks, down a rabbit hole, surviving, but at what cost? The adapting, the being who people expected based on external looks, and the stress of not being able to relax in your own skin: there is a cost to this savviness in Wonderland. Paloma only heard later from her cousin, that she is LatiNegra—a Black Latina or Afro-Latina. The term resonated. That is who she has been all this time. Paloma is no one thing. Her hyphen, the pause between the two identities, bridges two worlds that Paloma is alternately a part of and not a part of. She is a whole person, a complex individual, a scholar, a student, a Latina, and a Black woman in the U.S.

Paloma, after the initial bafflement, adjusts, adapts, and comes to accept that people will give her labels to which she herself might not ascribe. She used this fluid identity to leverage scholarships and organization memberships. She went where she was accepted. Is a White person ever told they will fail because they are White? Are White people ever told who they are because of the color of their skin? And what does that mean for them as they adapt? Paloma was told who she was, and that identity would dictate facets of her life such as academic opportunity. She struggled for a decade to earn her bachelor’s degree. A decade journey of thousands of miles, numerous transcripts,

multiple majors, and many A grades were a result of her confusion over racism in the U.S. and how her skin color impacted her interactions within the education system. Her ignorance of outright racism may have been protective. Coming from the verb “to protect,” a Latin and French word of origin meaning “to cover,” ignorance or a misunderstanding of cultural contexts can sometimes act as a rain jacket when racial encounters are falling like drops from the sky. The lack of explicit knowing of the circumstances can keep your clothes dry even or minimize how wet the bottoms of your trousers become. This initial cover may also give someone enough stamina to open an additional umbrella, casually, since that is what is done when it rains. Protective gear—whether physical or psychological in nature—is not always safe or even adequate in shielding the person in question from harm. However, it can make enough difference to keep self-efficacy and self-esteem intact when military brats of color are faced with racism.

Paloma never viewed herself as less than as if Paloma’s skin color subtracted from her worth as a person, divided her intellectual ability, or decimated her desire to succeed. Teachers, peers, and the society she encountered on the West Coast tried to reduce Paloma to a variable to plug in to whatever algorithm they were using at the time. European Americans have a selective memory that a person of color is, indeed, a whole person with multiple identities and rich life experiences. The richness of the lives of people of color do not make them so simple as to place them into whatever box is convenient. Paloma’s ability to adapt, to be what people wanted her to be, allowed her to survive, even at the expense of using those formative years to figure out who she was and

how she wanted to be in the world. She was never “less than” in her mind, simply what others wanted her to be.

Never Less Than because “Everyone Else Was Dirt”

Perhaps this way of viewing the world, this oddly immune horizon (Gadamer, 1975/2004), is protective, allowing military children of color to focus on what matters—getting a college degree. They are in college to achieve a tangible good, a diploma. This arrogance in the process of adapting might be key to military children of color navigating the U.S. education system, especially college. Lynne, in all her adapting, never felt less than. If anything she was better than, a confidence instilled in her by her family, but that did not make her trip down the rabbit hole any less confusing or painful. After years of living abroad with her father, an African American Officer, and her mother, an educator, Lynne did not know what it meant to be of color in the U.S., and had no understanding of systemic racism. What she did know was that she was an officer’s daughter and “everyone else was dirt.” I pause at this statement—the elevation of the officer status, of the military status, of the military child abroad status. Not just a few people, but every one was dirt, to be tread upon, inferior. Every last one of everyone. This arrogance made adapting as a person of color a wholly different experience. Whatever individuals may have thought of her, she perceived White classmates in college were obviously less well travelled, less cultured, less privileged. The White classmates came up short on experience, so any thought of superiority was simply unfathomable. The arrogance, while to some astounding, is perhaps protective—another layer to cover oneself during racial encounters. If everyone has treated a person as someone of worth their entire lives,

they will not feel less than overnight, particularly when they are directly exposed to racism at an older age.

Subverting Racism in College and Opting Out of Racially-Charged Settings

Self-esteem and assuredness of status gave Lynne the mental flexibility to make fun of the White narratives on racial purity. Commenting on her own mixed-race background, she told a fellow student at her White Christian college that she agreed with racial purity ideals: “I absolutely do not believe in interracial dating...I am holding out...[for a] half Black half Chinese man because it’s important to be pure.” She knew the absurdity of what she was saying, that some people absolutely believed it, and that she could play with their discomfort with their own contradictory beliefs. While Lynne initially chose her White Christian school because a number of her teachers at her mission school in Asia were alumni, Lynne, ultimately, chose not to adapt to the White Christian school. She did not want to adjust to their lifestyle or be deemed suitable by their values. Here we see powerful agency at work, a will to create healthy boundaries in terms of the steps a military brat of color will take to adapt to new space, especially in college. Lynne tried to adapt, to blend in, to be like everyone else. Within the down-the-rabbit-hole metaphor, we might say that she played croquet with her flamingo and drank her half-cup of tea with the Mad Hatter. She attempted to converse with the dormouse, his little narcoleptic-self abruptly falling asleep in his teacup. Lynne could only play at the nonsense for so long. She did not belong. She was not everyone else. She deserved better than the sense of displacement, a knowing that it was all absurd.

In a group interview to be a Residence Hall Advisor, Lynne grew ill and threw up. When she did not get the position, it gave her the resolve to transfer, a decision she

carefully considered and researched, selecting a place where she could get a math degree and a teaching credential in a large public institution. What does it take to say “This is not who I am”? How, in all their efforts to adapt, do military brats of color make healthy choices? I frequently think of the Mary Oliver (1986) Poem *Wild Geese*, and the line— “You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves...” (p. 14). The body says, “I cannot do this,” and the mind responds by letting go of the expectations of both others and self, by relaxing into being. Whereas Paloma “fell” in the Heideggerian sense, letting others take her authenticity for the sake of survival, Lynne pulled away, and struggled to reach into herself and let herself be exactly who she was. Lynne could not be a Christian, and did not want to exist within the confines of her White Christian school. She needed to migrate, to travel, to have that freedom to begin her journey to herself and to home. There is something epic in “let[ing] the soft animal of your body love what it loves” (Oliver, 1986, p. 14). A sense that finding yourself only happens if you have left everything you have ever known; it is particularly difficult as military children when leaving or moving and adapting is all you have done.

The Bravery of Listening to Your Own Voice

The question, particularly in college, is when do you stop leaving and stop adapting when an ideology or lifestyle is no longer compatible with who you are or who you want to be? What does it mean to adapt or leave a potentially hostile environment? When can you simply “be-in-the world”? “O’Donohue (1998) responds to such a question declaring:

The sacred duty of being an individual is to gradually learn how to live so as to awaken the eternal within you. Our ways of belonging in the world should never be restricted to or fixated on one kind of belonging that remains stagnant. If you listen to the voices of your own longing, they will constantly call you to diverse

styles of belonging which are new and energetic and mirror the complexity of your life as you deepen and intensify your presence on earth. (p. 5)

Lynne listened to the voices of her own longing. Displacement and the subsequent longing gave Lynne space to figure out first how to belong to herself, and honor who she might want to be, even if it was something or someone completely unknown—even to herself. The complexity and mystery of identity manifests itself in the ways Lynne chose to belong, knowing that there is no one way, but that the White Christian college life was not for her. It would be stagnant, weighing her down as though she were slogging through a swamp, the trees oppressive and the mud like cement, keeping her feet in place. There was little freedom for Lynne. Instead of accepting her conditions, and whether she was completely aware of them, the internal voices that rationalized her movements in relation to major, career, teaching programs, cost, and even love granted her the strength to listen to the call.

Lynne may have decided to stop adapting to the White Christian college and world, but she still adapted to her big state university. And she adapted to her teaching positions and the moves she made for them. But the stories of her big state school do not have the racial hostility that undergirds the stories from the White Christian college, which perhaps is an indication that it was easier to blend in at a big state school, where there were other students of color, a chance to get lost in the mix, fade into the surroundings, and find a peace in work.

“I Never Feared for My Safety When I Was in Asia, Even in Being a Black American”

In terms of the psychological impact, safety was a concern in West Coast State, but of course not in Asia, and subsequently not in South Asia. I never feared for my safety when I was in Asia, even in being a Black American. (Luz, Black, HBCU)

What happens when a person of color can move through the world without fear, without thinking about if they are being followed in a store, profiled on public transport, stopped by police for a broken taillight? The falling away of fear and the peeling off layers of protection allow a young person to grow. Fear demands energy, sapping away the cognitive concentration from school work, friend work, and the work of being human. Without the mind constantly being alert and in-tune to danger, the mind can allow the body to exhale the fear, expelling it into the atmosphere, watching it dissipate as warm breath fades into the crisp winter air. Luz blossomed as a young Black woman living with her father overseas and in the non-contiguous United States. Not only was she surrounded by books rich in Black culture and history, she also was physically safe, safe enough to challenge her teachers in school without fear of retribution. She pushed them out of their comfort zone with her thoughts on race, but they never told her she was “less than” or that she would fail their class because she was Black. Luz could be who she was overseas and then again in College since she elected to attend a Historically Black College and University (HBCU). But in college, she was Black in a Black majority; she was still altogether different from her peer group. Luz could converse easily and fluently about geopolitical situations in Asia from having lived in the region, lording her knowledge, not always intentionally, over her peers in her classes. There is power in saying, “I lived there, so I know.” Power feeds the ego, amplifying curiosity, self-esteem, protecting the military child from microaggressions. Whiteness is power but there is cultural and social capital also in that equation. Without experience, qualitative (climbing Mount Fiji or climbing up to Neuschwanstein) and quantitative (3 years in X country and 3 years in Y state), the privilege of skin color seems archaic. Military brats

of color might actually believe they should be judged for their lived experience and not the color of their skin, which does not match the reality they encounter.

The dissonance reverberates, as if the power of military children of color is found in their race/ethnicity (facing systemic oppression), it is also found in their adaptability, resilience, their “technology.” I use the word technology strategically. In chapter 2, I proposed that military children used culture in the same way that Heidegger spoke of using technology. It was an apt metaphor since this wielding of culture became a tool that they could manipulate: it was a hammer, a dinner fork, or a light switch, the everyday objects that make our experience uniquely human. What if military children of color use their ability to adapt in the presence of racism as if it is a type of technology?

Heidegger (1954/1977e) writes:

Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology “intelligently in hand.” We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control. (p. 313)

For military children of color (Sherlock, Luz, Sherri, and the others), adapting is a type of technology, “fit[ing] in” is their hammer, their computer, their light switch, which they wield for their own well-being. They wield it competently from years of moving, when they begin living in predominantly White spaces. Military children, in general, adapt to various cultures as if adapting to culture itself were a technology; in adapting to a different culture, they endeavor to “get” technology “intelligently in hand.” If they can control their process of adapting, their fitting in, then they have succeeded in their mastery of adapting as technology. With military children of color, we see a further complexity in the use of adapting as technology. For Sherlock, the mastery is something he hears from Lynne and Maria. He might be projecting his own skill on to them, but

each had their struggle and turning towards themselves in college, as they used their toolbox to discover who they were in the midst of adapting to their surroundings. They adapted in college and because of that adaption they persisted to graduation, even in the case of Lynne who transferred schools.

Consequences of Adapting to College Homes

Two contrasting consequences of “adapting” are at play here: the efforts of military children of color to master systemic oppression by their intentional working through the system and the danger of adapting at the expense of losing oneself. Both are ways in which the mastery of technology can slip away from human control. Systemic oppression is institutional⁸ and it is easy to just do, not think, and to stay in the survival mode of adapting and re-adapting. I often think of a cog in a clock, turning so easily rather than resisting the pull. When the cog finally turns, it is not of its own volition, but it is pushed and turned by forces outside itself. Systemic oppression is just that, working within a system where everything is dictated by someone or something else. The question is: can a military child of color in college really adapt while denying systemic institutional oppression? A cog does not know that it is subject to all the forces around it and it can still function and move easily as part of a system. Are military children of color in the same situation in college? Perhaps military children of color adapt because it never dawns on them that they can resist.

⁸ Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (2013) define institutional oppression: “As with behaviors and attitudes at the individual level, institutional policies and practices that maintain and enforce oppression are both intentional and unintentional. Examples of the less visible systems include the structural inequality of school funding in the United States, or tax benefits, health care benefits, and similar privileges that are available only to heterosexual couples through the institution of marriage.” (p. 28)

In thinking of this, we can start at the micro-level, under the microscope of what it means to be of color in the U.S., a marked identity onto which people transfer their own prejudices. I can hear Lynne describing the poor service she received in a college town jewelry store adjacent to her predominantly White Christian institution. Her brown skin may have been the reason for the poor service, as she said, "I don't know." What she did know was that anything but 14 carat gold would not please her officer-wife mother, who would know the difference. The truth is, she did not adapt to that institution. She refused. A White Christian institution did not work for her. And she left for a large-state school, which suited her needs. School was a function for her, a check box. So perhaps in this sense, she did not adapt in a functional way, but then again not all technology is functional. Lynne still worked the system, refusing to conform to institution A, leaving her Christian community behind to strike out into the world. Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention would have classified her action as "suicide," breaking away from a school, choosing not to stay in a place that was not built for you. The irony is that it was in her leaving that she began to live; her transfer was an anti-suicide and anti-foreclosure on her identity. She felt she could not navigate the systemic racism of the White Christian institution. She had few options for dating, and she had limited opportunities to engage in the community after being passed over for the Resident Advisor role. For Lynne, it was a death of sorts. She died as a Christian to be resurrected as a being who could explore her identity as a multi-racial woman of color in the U.S.. Lynne took control of her adaption process in transferring, but she drifted through her time at her large state school, getting her degree but never really connecting with her surroundings.

The Military Brats' Manifesto on Race: "We Do Not Let Our Minority Status Dictate Where We Live and How People Perceive Us in Our Location"

But from this group, it's definitely, in the back of our heads, we do not let our minority status dictate where we live and how people perceive us in our locations. (Sherlock, African American, PWI)

Sherlock, in his assessment of our conversation in the gathering with Lynne and Maria, gives a declaration I will not soon forget. At the time it was an observation, but now I think of it as a military brat of color manifesto—a declaration that White people, many of whom have not served in any capacity, will not dictate or influence the way military brats of color live their lives, nor the choices they make. When Sherlock came out as a gay man in college, left the College Republicans, and auditioned for a university musical, he wondered if he would not get a part because of his race. He pushed those thoughts aside, and was surprised when he was cast in a bigger role than he had anticipated, and that they even cast a Black woman. He has his moments of doubt, and perhaps even fear, but he actively and strategically lives in a way he wants to live and in places he wants to live. He observes the ability of himself and his fellow military brats of color to move in White spaces. Why and how are military brats of color equipped to navigate White spaces in the world, and especially in college? Even when Lynne transferred schools she still went to a predominantly White institution; it was simply a large state school rather than a small Christian private school. How do military brats of color come into themselves in environments that are not always friendly to them because of preconceived notions and/or the color of their skin?

Sherlock, whether he realizes it or not, is resisting U.S. racism, the hate embedded in institutional structures. He may think he is declaring race as irrelevant in the way he lives his life. However, in refusing to let it dictate his life, he is standing up to the

structures, and living his life despite them. His methods of war seem innocuous. He is ambitious and successful and savvy in all spaces, but particularly in White ones. He resists racist structures while working within them, which takes fortitude and strategy, leveraging his understanding of structures from his father's time in the military. He was always very aware of where his father stood in terms of status and even checked the promotion list when it was published. He may have learned how to navigate the social structure of the military from his father, but it is a skill that he could apply to civilian structures with success. War is not always made with guns and tanks. Sometimes it is diplomatic, sometimes economic, sometimes ideological. Sherlock mastered the diplomacy necessary for a Black man in America.

Being Who You Say You Are

There are identities the military brats possess and others that are put on them, but this uncanny security, the forcefulness to say “no” or in some cases “yes,” is remarkable. In my conversation with Sherri, she described the protests/vigils she attended for justice in the case of Trayvon Martin, and how she was active with the Multi-Cultural Student Center. Even myself as a brat, unthinking, I asked about her activism and her response was this:

I don't really wanna use the word activist because I don't, I'm not that active. I just kind of like, I just, I like to support. (Sherri, Multi-Racial, PWI)

She resisted that box, asserting she attended events not organized them. I understand why. Activism is taboo, a break from the odd non-political collectivism⁹ that

⁹ “Per longstanding DoD policy, active duty personnel may not engage in partisan political activities and all military personnel should avoid the inference that their political activities imply or appear to imply DoD sponsorship, approval, or endorsement of a political candidate, campaign, or cause. Members on active duty may not campaign for a partisan candidate, engage in partisan fundraising activities, serve as an officer of a partisan club, or speak before a partisan gathering”. (Department of Defense Office of General Counsel, 2016)

characterizes so much of military life. You cannot be a political officer or non-commissioned officer. And you cannot be a political military brat. Whether or not Sherri has an activist identity, she engaged in activism on campus. But she would not call herself an activist as she stated: “I enjoy going to the marches. I enjoy going to the discussions they have even now, um, about it but I’ve never been the one to lead it so...”

Activism and leadership are intertwined and inseparable. Someone with an activist mindset or who joins marches is not an activist, but something else completely: A concerned citizen? An involved community member? Sherri may not want to call that caring and marching for social justice and the lives of Black men an act of activism. The gathering in a group, the chanting, the holding of a candle at a vigil, and the public mourning for U.S. men of color whose lives have been cut short due to policy brutality are all “acts.” These are all action verbs, processes, and doings that take a stand against violence against Black men. However, act[ing] against a system that you have always loved and that seems to have always been there for you is a hard mental shift. The violence against young Black men may have also been from the civilian world. Sherri never spoke about any young Black men murdered on base, so the death of Trayvon Martin and the need for activism simply did not exist in the same way during Sherri’s childhood.

Choosing Who You Are

Sherri’s choice to not identify as an activist and talk to me as a participant in my study reveal her views of activism and leadership. She is very clear about choosing her identity. Is it perhaps that in all the aspects of military children’s lives that are set in stone, made up for us, we police how we identify and how others identify us because it is

our one place of power? Sherri has been powerless at times in defining who she is and who she wants to be. Everyone wants to provide an identity for her in relation to their own experience and identity, and it is so easy to fade into the expectations and ideas of others. It is when people put a label on someone, she ceases to exist outside the labels:

When I lived in Hawaii my mom said that people used to always think we were Somoan or Hawaiian. Now when I'm outside of Hawaii, I guess people don't really associate it but while we were there, people associated with that all the way. And then in my dorm, freshman year, the cleaning ladies, they were Hispanic so they always used to speak fluent Spanish to me. I'm like, "I don't know what you're saying. I'm not Spanish." (Sherri, Multi-Racial, PWI)

What does it mean for others to place identity upon someone? Is it an act of violence, erasing the personhood of someone with assumptions of identity? In what ways do we fabricate someone else's identity based on our own experience, even if that fabrication has no basis in the reality of the other person? Given the complexity of identity, there is a fatigue of erasure by others. I often think of Leo Lionni's (2000) *A Color of His Own*, a picture book about a chameleon who longs for a color of his own. The chameleon desperately asks, "Won't we ever have a color of our own?" (Lionni, 2000). He observes that everything in nature has a color of its own (red, pink, green, gray) but his color always changes, and this is a cause for mourning. If the chameleon keeps changing colors, then he can never simply "be" one color. His identity cannot be grounded in what he looks like because the perception changes from where he is standing and how people perceive that current color. Perhaps this chameleon feels blue when he is actually green, but he has no say, and in that absence of choice there is despair.

Military children of color in college ask the same basic big questions that everyone does: Who am I? Where do I belong in this world? And with whom? However, these answers are not simple for anyone, especially military children of color

in college. They are who they are and they are not who they are: even if the identities they possess are ones others put upon them. To be put upon is a feeling of intrusion, violation, and discomfort, which seems to be what military children of color struggle with in college: “I am not Spanish,” Sherri says, even though other people may think she is. When people assume she speaks Spanish and begin to speak to her, there is a sense of being “put upon” since she never even indicated she spoke the language. However, Sheri only had this experience in college, which was located in a place with a high Latino population. Like a chameleon, who Sheri was at the time was defined also by who was around her.

For military brats of color, identity is the one place we can say—“That is not who I am,” or “Don’t call me that,” or simply “I am a military brat.” What is it about being raced that is so violating? Does a military brat identity normalize the difference of skin color? Does the military brat identity make the military child of color less threatening to White peers? I ask these questions as preparation for the rendering of settling or the creation of a new home space on the college campus and what it means for the identities of military children of color.

“I belong where I am”: Creating Networks of Belonging for Military Brats of Color in College

People change from place to place, but some things are consistent. Hobbies and personal interests are particularly grounding and serve as avenues for a concrete identity in an otherwise identity-fluid world. What is more, these interests provide ways to belong:

The concern is that minority students entering college campuses are going to have problems with belonging, because they expect you to assimilate into this culture that is different from your own. I never thought of it as assimilating because it

was just what I did every couple of years. I'd come to a new place, and I'd learn how to be me there. That made me relatively consistent across social spaces because I'd learned how to go from here, to here, to here, to here. I'd changed schools with a lot of frequency. I never really struggled belonging. I belong where I am. Wherever I drop, wherever my mom moves me, wherever my brothers are, wherever some family members are, wherever there are teachers in the schools, and there's books and there's basketballs, that's where I belong. (Macario, African American, PWI)

“From here, to here, to here” Macario plays hopscotch with time and space in imagining his belonging. Or perhaps, like a child, he is playing leap frog or a game of imagination where one crosses a street and finds oneself in a new space. But in all these spaces and in all these games, Macario belongs. In these scenarios, Macario has tangible things and people that translate into belonging. If belonging were a language, Macario would be fluent in it. He would take his experience with basketball in the Southwest and translate it into friendship in the Mid-Atlantic. He would take space, where his mother moved him, and learn how to be there. He acquired the language of belonging, painstakingly studying what to do and say. I see this sense of belonging as fluid and true to self, particularly since Macario’s ability allows him to see himself and be seen by others as a whole person. As O’Donohue (1997) states, “One of the deepest longings of the human soul is the longing to be seen” (p. 25). Macario has facets of his identity which are seen, facilitating his sense of belonging. He may be switching between languages of belonging, but firmly grounds himself, his family, and his hobbies which he loves.

However, if he assimilates, there is a pause: did he compromise himself in that process? What is the difference between assimilation and belonging? There is a general feeling that assimilation is forced and uncomfortable, as if the language that Macario is learning is not his mother tongue and never will be. It leaves a foul taste in your mouth.

But belonging is something a person does, it is not done to them, which leaves Macario's chosen identities intact: a basketball player, a son, a learner, a reader. It is a choice to learn the language of belonging, and that ability enables Macario to establish meaningful relationships and a home in his college setting.

“We Were Like their Daughters”: Creating a Family in College

I got to see a lot of the United States, and I was exposed to so many different people from different walks of life that it's opened my eyes to who can become family, and your family isn't just people that are blood related to you. It's those people that are also in the [same] place as you that don't have anyone around them, and how they become family as well. (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Women's College)

Family is no simple thing, straightforward, or easy for the military child of color in college. The conception of family for the military child is far more fluid—not defined by blood or lineage—but family is something one can “become.” Family is formed, earned, built, and cultivated, falling under a definition that is similar to its Latin etymology, which includes: “household, household servants, troop (of gladiators), personal servants, retinue, group of persons connected by blood or affinity, school (of philosophy), estate” (OED, n.d.). The fluidity of who and what makes family is both a blessing and curse for military children of color. There is the military family, the military culture that they leave, for the “real world” as Sherlock calls it. Set adrift in a world they do not know, military children of color must find the people who will care for them as family for whom they can care in return. If college is a story about anything, it is the story of how military brats of color gain their first “real world” family.

For Maria, choosing her family was tied to her women's college: “We were very close to our president of our school. Her [sic] and her husband had no children...so we were like their daughters.” Our President. Our school. The absence of “the” and the

presence of ownership is salient—there is a mother figure in the President, a powerful, knowledgeable figure who knows that soap is being put in the fountain on a certain day by the seniors, who oversees the graduation gowns with the names of the previous graduates who have worn them stitched into the fabric. She was a figurehead, a matriarch, and her husband was a father figure. It is a family, not one that is born of blood, but of academic tradition and the feeling of carrying that tradition forward. In this presentation of the President and her husband as parents, as college parents, there is the absence of biological children. The students are children by proxy, a family created out of love of students, student development, and the bloom of academic curiosity.

College presidents are not the only important people who become family in the lived experience of military brats of color in college. Sherri had a special connection with staff in her dining hall:

So that was really helpful, as well as one of the dining halls had a lot of staff who were just really nice and personable to the point where when my mom [was on] campus, I brought her to that dining hall to meet them because they were just so helpful and every time we come in, "Hey, how's your family doing? How's this doing?" So those two were really helpful just knowing people cared about me. (Sherri, Multi-racial, PWI)

The simple act of asking how someone is and the showing of sincere care is powerful for anyone far from home. As commented before, Donohue (1997) states, "One of our deepest longings of the human soul is the longing to be seen" (p. 25). To be seen is to feel connected to place and to people, and it is in that connection that belonging blossoms, and familial relationships began to form. The staff in the dining hall made such an impact in their care that Sherri brought her own blood mother to meet them, a coming together of family and types of family.

Sherri's college family extended beyond the dining hall staff and to a mentor, a student affairs administrator:

My mentor.....I felt such a relationship with her and I'm still close to her so she really helped me. She used higher terms to challenge and support. She didn't just say "Here, you're doing great." She was like, "Hey [name], you need to get it together. You're not doing what you need to do." So that was a really good one because she kept it real with me and she was like a mother away from home because that's how my mom is. She's very loving....She's like, "Hey you need to go out and get stuff done." (Sherri, Multi-Racial, PWI)

The other mother relationship described fits so well with previous research regarding student success (Guiffrida, 2005). However, this familial love, a parental love that dispenses both knowledge and encouragement, motivates as much as it helps Sherri feel a sense of home. After all, one could rather rightly say that home is where people show care and love for you. That care and love enables Sherri to become a part of a larger campus community as an engaged student. O'Donohue (1997) observes, "In love, you grow and come home to yourself" (p. 7). Sherri grows as a person, figuring out who she is and what she would like to do with her life in this love and mentorship. In this, she is able to create a family, create a home in college.

In what ways is the college family important? We could return to classic Tinto (1993) and talk about belonging and social suicide or we could ruminate on Astin's (1993) peer effects. We have retention theories in higher education that could be threaded together in support of what I have called a "college family." However, while illuminating, these theories have yet to address the lived experience of establishing and creating families in college. Military children of color seem to frame their relationships with non-related adults as family relationships even before college, particularly in their perception of who cares for them.

That was all from that bubble, like being in the bubble of the base and knowing that people, whether they're black or white or whatever, that there was some kind of shared commonality where you wouldn't have to worry about it. I would say that moving into the college space that's one of the things that I could feel a loss of that, like the loss of attention. Particularly it manifested itself for me a lot along racial lines like; oh – you can't trust these white people. But on the base these were the people I would have turned to and I would have asked the question or I would have asked for resources, but here it's just this different environment.

[In College] Like; you don't have my best interests at heart and I can feel it like almost very quickly. And yeah; so it was like I was not really accustomed to it. That was probably one of the major adjustments that I had. (Macario, African American, PWI)

Macario always had people who actively cared for him and were not his parents.

The high presence of other parenting is salient in the military community, especially since the individuals who other parented him were most likely not Black, but from a variety of different races and ethnicities. This care was disrupted in college, mainly based on his experience with White individuals who didn't have his best interest at heart. The sense of care shifted. Family became less diverse and more homogenous, but not because of what Macario wanted. What does it mean to have one's best interest at heart?

Interest is a form of care, a pause a family member takes to listen to and process something a child says or to retrieve something at the child's request. But it is not simply perfunctory, an obligation to be fulfilled. Interest also comes from a place of empathy, and genuine care, if it is to be judged as genuine. How are such salient relationships formed for military children of color? Macario formed his college family at his PWI and it was comprised of predominantly Black individuals: Black Fraternity members and Black friends who lived together in a residence hall. While Macario can easily move between Black social circles and White social circles, there was a sense of loss of diversity since his experience with White individuals in college seemed to lack warmth

and care toward him. The mother of African American military brat poet Marilyn Nelson (2016) warned. “Be careful: Don’t like them [White people] more than your own” (p. 17). What did Dr. Nelson’s mother know then, that Marilyn did not know at that time? Is it a process that military children of color go through when they transition from the military community? Perhaps there was an invisible line that Marylin was not to cross: the “White” line of White military peers and their families. Were there lines of familiarity that military children of color may not have perceived, but their active-duty parents understood?

In my own experience on a remote base in Italy I purchased shampoo and conditioner meant for African American hair. Someone discretely approached my mother about it. I never knew, but as a White Latina, I had crossed a line and was quietly corrected. Now as an adult, I understand that finding hair care products for an African American woman was probably next to impossible outside the small shoppette. Is it that matters of race are handled so quietly in military communities that being confronted with them are perceived as completely new experiences? In all of these questions is an undeniable truth that linkages between military families, in some ways, cross lines of race and ethnicity that are observed in the civilian world: military families live side by side and must act neighborly.

In mulling over formation of family in college and belonging with family, I want to go back for a moment to Maria, who described taking a non-military friend home to a military event. Her friend said, “I don’t think I have ever seen that many random people together.” To which, Maria responded, “And we’re all family” (Maria, Black and Mexican American, Women’s College). Maria sees family in randomness. There is no

such thing as actual randomness in family formation. Yes, people are different in terms of race and ethnicity, but commonalities do exist: living in a single place, in a short span of years, only having each other as a peer network, and depending on one another to figure out how to navigate systems. While that is a laundry list of commonalities of military families, it is also a list that can be applied to military children of color in their college experience. The isolation of time and place in college as I describe in chapter 3 is parallel to the isolation of military communities. The randomness of family in college is the ideal of the throwing together of diverse roommates, such as the formation of living and learning communities, and the bonds developed in honors college or smaller seminar classes. In these spaces a college family is established in the odd randomness.

Moving from Themes to Pedagogical Insights

In chapter 4, I explored a number of ways military brats of color in college experience their transition to college, the leaving of home, the adjustment to college in light of issues with race, and the sense of home they eventually find in creating college families that foster a sense of belonging. Military children of color in college do not always have an easy time reconciling who they are with who they are perceived to be on college campuses, which can create confusion on their part and on the part of those with whom they are interacting. However, military children of color find and create spaces that help them thrive on campus—these campus families help them feel at home. In chapter 5, I explore the pedagogical insights of these many themes. How do the themes extend and challenge phenomenological philosophy? How can these themes provide support for practitioners working on college campuses and with military children of

color? And how has the writing of these themes and this work transformed me, as a researcher and as a military brat of color? Chapter 5 is a place to reflect.

**CHAPTER 5:
FROM QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY TO QUESTIONS OF BELONGING: GOING
HOME FOR MILITARY CHILDREN OF COLOR IN COLLEGE**

Home in a Different Place: The Journey to Pedagogical Insights

Military brats of color in college seem to live in a constant state of paradox, being of and from and not being of and from. *Being* becomes fraught because of their skin color, which seems more salient to some of their peers than it is to them. There is knowing your race and then there is *knowing* your race. In my pedagogical insights, I examine the larger phenomenological implications of being for military brats of color in college. I first ruminate on the larger philosophical implications of the lived experience of military brats of color in college; I then contemplate the practical implications of the lived experience of military brats of color in college; and I reflect on my own transformation in the writing of this dissertation. There is nothing simple about lived experience. In fact, it is inherently messy. As humans, we try to create coherent taxonomies to categorize and place lived experience, especially in relation to identity, into neat boxes. But it is entirely evident in the shared lived-experience of military brats of color, the rules do not apply. There is no algorithm. There are no numbers. We are left, rather, with the honoring of the hermeneutic process of interpretation and re-interpretation to gain a richness of multiple truths of what it means to be military brats of color in college.

Phenomenology has allowed me to work my way into the lived experience of military of children of color in college, first accessing my own experiences, and then by accessing the lived experience with seven other military children of color. Seven military children of color graciously shared powerful insights and stories pertaining to growing up

a military child, their transition to college, their lives in college, and then the aftermath of transitioning into the civilian world. Each military child of color brought various parts of the mosaic of experience to light. The phenomenon led me to some complicating insights about identity in relationship to home for military children of color in college. Military children of color were confused by who they felt they were and who others felt they were—it was an experience of an almost schizophrenic U.S. culture when it came to identity, in that no military children of color could fit into a nice neat census check box and were constantly questioned for who they were and how they came to be.

However, in all this writing, it was not only identity that was the crux of what military children of color in college were experiencing. Identity was too superficial, a mere map of their everyday experience on campus or a record of the daily micro-aggressions. As with any journey, it is easy to get caught up in the packing check-list and not attend to larger philosophical questions, or even simply sit with the realities of the trip to be taken. It is altogether too easy to become preoccupied with the physical journey of home, home-coming, and home-finding for military children of color in college. While identity and experience of identity were just one small piece, it was a symptom of something simple, yet essential, to human life and society. Underneath the cultural frustrations, understandings, misunderstandings, and revelations was a deep visceral need to belong in their home—home defined as a physical house, a college campus, a residence hall, a student organization, a major, an ethnic group, a racial group, a gender/sexual identity group, a city, state, or even their own country. This journey has been slow and methodical, and chapter 5 will hopefully give substantive philosophical and practical insights to the phenomenon.

With and In but Never Of: The Quest for Belonging for Military Brats of Color in College

In chapter 2, I contemplated how military brats work with a culture and in the parameters of culture but are always a part of this culture. It is as if there is a disconnect from their historical horizons (Gadamer, 1975/2004). They walk in the horizon, and follow with the horizon, but are they ever truly of the horizon? What does it mean to be *of* a horizon, so completely enmeshed that separation is unthinkable and almost impossible? To be *of* a place or culture is similar to the enmeshment of place and family names. In Dutch or Flemish, individuals are “of” a place such as Vanderbilt (van der bilt), van meaning *of*. We encounter these naming conventions frequently in the manner of prefixes, attached to names. There is a visceral sense that person and place cannot be separated. However, the *of* can also signify a contractual familial tie.

In Puerto Rico, traditionally, when a woman married she attached her husband’s name to her maiden name with “de” or “of.” My own great grandmother was Carmen Julia Castillo de Peralta. She was *of* my great grandfather. Canadian author Margaret Atwood (1986) took the *of* from a fairly traditional contractual agreement to a sinister fascist control of women’s reproduction. To be *of* a place or a horizon can be comforting and joyful, until it is not. Sometimes horizons are as safe and comforting as they are terrifying and heartbreaking. However, military children of color are never *of*, which leaves them in an odd limbo, on the outside even when they might seemingly be on the inside. Here is where military brats of color exist in college, *with* and *in* but never quite *of* in terms of systemic and institutional oppression.

Military brats of color in college learn the complexity of the mainstream U.S. cultural horizon, where at one time, the same individuals who served in the U.S. military

were designated three-fifths of a person. While hate exists on military bases, none of the military brats of color described encountering overt racism until college. Sherri's freshman year introduction to college resonates: "It was like people yelling out the window at me, 'Get out the way Black b's. White power,' and then to other people across campus." Sherri always loved Black culture and always felt pride in her Blackness, but the U.S. mainstream historical horizon, without the overlay of the military culture, was a baptism by fire. She may be *of* her alma mater, a place she loves, but at the same time she is not *of* her alma mater. She will never be White in America.

Race is not the only barrier to being *of* inside the horizon. Maria's loss of her single-sex institution is another example of being *in* and *with* while being divorced from *of*. Maria cannot be *of* a place that no longer exists in the same way. She can be *with* the new institution but not *in* or *of* the new institution. Lynne's lack of Christian faith prevents her from being *of* a cultural group she loved so much. Lynne's skin color also meant she could not be fully *of* the predominantly White Christian college she attended. There is a list of loss for each participant. These losses are easy to list, as if I were preparing for a trip to the grocery store. These are factual experiences that are demonstrative of the barriers for diverse individuals in the mainstream U.S. horizon. However, it remains that the fusing of horizons and the experience of diverse cultural horizons have made demands of military children of color; they must adapt. These diverse experiences prepared them to work *with* and *in* shifting horizons—finding opportunities for substantive growth, personal satisfaction, and a sense of agency to be in the world despite historical failings. At times, *with* and *in* seem to be enough to belong in college even when military brats of color do not belong, making us think critically about

the impact of horizons and working with-in systems of White supremacy, misogyny, homophobia, and other-isms that plague society. Horizons might be more malleable than we realize, as culture evolves, and as we evolve. There are infinite possibilities for positive growth and development.

In Choosing Identity and Home to Belong

One of the surprising aspects of this dissertation was when identity and belonging came front and center in a way I did not anticipate. These ideas did not displace the concept of home, but the concepts became twisted together, their own double helix of lived experience for military brats of color in college. O'Donohue (1997) states, "Identity was not offered for your choosing" (p. 83). In chapter 1, I contemplate the statement in light of Morten Ender's (2002) sea voyage to being an American military brat. His identity as a military brat was chosen for him, not by birth, but by marriage. There was a place for him in the military brat world because of his step-father.

Only after writing through my phenomenon does it strike me as how true and how fundamentally socially conscious this statement is: "Identity was not offered for your choosing" (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 83). No one chooses his/her race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender. These are bestowed on us at birth, an acknowledgement that we are all tethered to identities and even to the horizons of those identities. As described in chapter 4, Sherri struggled with individuals putting identities on her, as if she were a doll they could dress up for their own purposes. Specifically, Sherri struggles with asserting who she is and how she wants to be viewed as a whole person, rather than who and what others want her to be. In the same way, Paloma plays with her Blackness, an identity she never even knew she had until her civilian school principal informed her.

Even Lynne's father informed her, "You're Black too" when Lynne was forced to examine her own internalized racism against the African American boys at basketball camp while living in Asia. Identities are sophisticated social constructs that are subject to culture. Military brats of color in college are suddenly not in control of how people see them or what identities are ascribed to them. Even when those identities are not owned or recognized by the individual, it is an identity with which they must contend. It is not offered up, but forced on them, sometimes ruthlessly.

If identity is socially constructed and the salient features of identity do not always reside inside the individual's perception of self, what does that mean about identity? Does it exist if the individual in question does not have it? Should the individual own an identity that is not theirs? How does the act of forcefully putting an identity on someone create dissonance, disrupting the healthy growth of an individual? Since identity is not something offered, perhaps we need to think carefully about the fluidity and cultural implication of identity in light of the inherent neat categories that scholars create. Identity development theories often locate the identity within the individual, as if identity were an organ and can be categorized like the pulmonary system or gastrointestinal track (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For example, if we were to analyze the participants according to Phinney's model of ethnic identity development, a number of them would fall into the first stage "Diffusion-Foreclosure" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 29). The nuances of culture would simply be glossed over, the participants would be categorized, and the discussion would be myopic to the full-lived experience of the participants as military brats of color. However, recent literature pushes the boundaries of these categories, recognizing that identity development theories need to be more

holistic in their approach to cultural constructions based on geographic region and their histories. In the shift for more complex and holistic theories, we see that researchers, such as Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, and Peralta (2014) in *Learning Race in the U.S. Context*, are starting to take into account multiple cultural contexts in which an individual or group might operate. Building off the recognition of complexity, Johnston-Guerrero (2016) and Haywood (2017) examine the inherent messiness of identity in relation to society.

Fries-Britt, George Mwangi and Peralta (2014) discuss the implications of culturally imperialistic expectations that a student born in Africa or from the non-U.S. African diaspora would understand and deftly navigate the complicated history of being African American in the U.S.. Their home country context is far more salient to their own cultural understanding of what it means *to be* in this world. When transitioning to U.S. colleges, their *dasein* is disrupted by foreign expectations placed upon them by Americans. The confusion and racial encounters move them toward an understanding of the U.S. racial contexts and preliminarily toward an activist mindset. Military children of color are like their foreign-born peers in that transitions for military brats of color to college contexts are not necessarily much different. The initial incredulity of existing racism often gives way to a questioning of the system and how to move through it. This happens at varying degrees. Maria speaks about not seeing color, but Luz is very aware and very proud of her Blackness, while Lynne struggles with grief over racial implications of the 2016 presidential election. Or as Paloma says:

I had no idea that racism was not eradicated in the 50's, and 60's. I thought it was something we read about in Black history month. I didn't realize it was still a thing. (Paloma, Black Latina, State College)

However, Paloma also struggles with the experiences of race that could threaten her academic achievement as with her encounter with the Principal described in Chapter 4. Her incredulity at being told she is black falls in line with the confusion foreign-born students of color feel when they are informed of their race in addition to the reluctance to examine the incident. Students only have so much energy to invest such that race talk and examination is almost deemed a distraction: “rather she [Sylvia] chooses not to examine the ‘black and white world’ in the United States in order to remain focused on what she wants to achieve as a student” (Fries-Britt, George Mwangi, Peralta, 2014, p. 5). Unexamined racial identity and the introduction to U.S. culture is very similar in both populations.

A number of military brats of color had racial encounters like their foreign-born peers. Sometimes these encounters were nebulous in the intent of the person making the racist comment or action in question and sometimes these encounters were sometimes overt. As discussed before, Sherri was called the n word on-campus. This is an example of the overt racism that one cannot refute. However, Lynne recounted an experience being followed in a jewelry store while in college, which she was not sure if it was racism or something else. There was an element of not knowing fully if it was a racial encounter. The experience was marked with similar discomfort as was recounted by participants in the Learning Race in the U.S. Context group. At the end of the day, the foreign-born students of color used their racial encounters as a form of motivation, to prove themselves academically. There is a divergence here with military brats of color. In the case of Sherlock, he says he has not been called any racial slur to his face. The nuance here is “to his face”—he knows it happens and it could easily happen behind his back,

but the respect he commands is protective. At the same time, Sherri was called a n word to her face on campus. She knows her campus was not perfect but it did not stop her from putting down roots and making the campus home, becoming involved in the student affairs unit and co-curricular activities. There was embedded resilience in their approaches to these encounters.

It remains that students from Africa and the African diaspora have an entirely different shared lived experience from military brats of color, particularly because in many cases, the individuals from Africa and the African diaspora in question can return to their home countries. They may choose to stay in the United States but they have options that are not necessarily open to military brats of color. However, the presence of an overlap signals that we need to question and understand the lived experience not simply of race as it is perceived in multiple contexts, but how it might impact identity as individuals move across and between contexts. There is also an element of co-construction of identity that extends past ethnicity to race. Five of my 7 participants were multi-racial or bi-racial meaning that some had darker skin while others had lighter skin, translating into very different experiences of being raced. Sherri grew frustrated when the Latin@/x staff members at her university continually spoke Spanish to her when she was not Latina nor did she speak Spanish. Sherri was also always proud of her Blackness, which is not always obvious to others given her lighter skin tone. Paloma stands in opposition to this since her skin color is Black but she always identified as Latina and specifically with her father's country of origin. This begs the question: what does it mean *to be* of color in different contexts? And how does the act of existing in specific contexts impact identity development? In general, a more holistic approach to

identity will expand our theoretical and practical understanding to support the development of young people in college.

What Brats Carry: Military Brats of Color and Community Cultural Wealth

Let me be clear: the military brats of color who participated in this dissertation are all highly successful individuals, the majority holding advanced degrees and working in industries that make a positive impact on people. They are your highly educated next-door neighbor with the beautiful family driving a BMW. They are the well-coiffed man or woman with a suitcase boarding a plane for a professional conference. And they are the person who waves you into their spot as they leave a crowded parking lot. My dissertation ruminated on the singular experience of being a military brat of color in college, experiences which are rich and varied as they are joyful and painful. I say this because military children of color are not a monolithic group nor are their experiences. Rather, this research is meant to move the reader to a nuanced understanding of the simultaneous joy and loss of coming into oneself as a military brat of color. This is a coming of age story for the military brat of color in college, a story of coming into a space where you can belong as a whole person.

In unpacking the lived experience of military brats of color in college, we examine how those lived experiences helped them belong in an entirely new space outside the military community. The learnings and resilience from these lived experiences are what military brats of color carry, like a small sewing kit absently stuffed into a jacket pocket or a item of information that can be conjured from the back of their minds when needed. In all that military brats of color carry, they bring unique cultural and social capital coming from their military communities, where the demands of daily

life were marked by moving and living in different geographic locations, adjusting to different cultures (American sub-cultures and cultures across the world), linguistic demands of living abroad, etc. This is all in addition to social and cultural capital derived from individual family cultural contexts. Their unique background may best be examined using Yosso's (2005) theory of community cultural wealth.

Yosso (2005) operationalized social and cultural capital using a CRT lens, expanding euro-centric definitions to a more comprehensive theory of community cultural wealth. Community cultural wealth examines specific types of capital such as linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital, and resistant capital (Yosso, 2005). Military brats of color have capital in spades. For example, familial capital is very much embedded in the concept of the military family, a connection with other individuals with a military background and the mutual care that is routine when everyone is far from home. The military family, as discussed at the end of chapter 4, is replaced in college with a Historically Black Fraternity or Sorority, the Black Student Union, mentors, university staff and Multicultural offices. This feeds into the rich social capital Yosso (2005) describes as young people of color find support in the form of community resources and individuals. For example, Sherri's relationship with her mentor in the university multicultural office is a form of social capital and familial capital. Finding connections on campus is also part of the previously learned resilience and coping that is part of navigational capital described by Yosso (2005). These relationships are formative for military brats of color, who find they have to adjust their expectations of relationships given the differences between the college community and the military community.

In addition to social, familial, and navigational capital, military brats of color possess unique linguistic capital (Yosso, 2005). Military brats of color have a keen ability to step into a new context and pick up new slang terms and jargon because that is what they have always done. There are some stumbling blocks for a few of the military brats of color. For example, Lynne's cousins often make fun of her for her inability to code switch and will play "white" music for her. Lynne also possessed some ability to speak an Asian language from her years abroad. On the other end of the spectrum, Luz can code switch too well, moving from formal academic language to the language of a young person who had lived years abroad, and finally to the language of a young person who spent time in a majority black community in the West Coast. Fellow students at her HBCU would find themselves confused as her *mélange* of linguistic capital.

Yosso (2005) can also shed light on the journey to understandings of resistant capital and how it plays out when young people are differently equipped to navigate racist systems and structures. Resistant capital, as operationalized by Yosso, are the specific oppositional behaviors to oppressive systems. For military brats of color, we specifically see these behaviors in their efforts to assert their own identities when encountering racism on an individual or systemic level as depicted in Chapter 4 in the section titled a military brats of color manifesto on race. For example, Sherlock's assertion that he is not going to let his race dictate where he lives or what he chooses to do with his life is a form of resistance. Sherri's effort to construct and assert her identity as a woman of color is a form a resistant capital. Resistant capital for each military brat of color is a bit more complicated since each is so different, and there is a risk for maladaptive forms since military brats of color have been living in a color-blind

institution. This is something that practitioners and researchers should take into account when working with military brats of color.

Military brats of color have an uncanny ability to belong because of their community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005), which also has implications for practitioners. Military brats of color are adept working with people and inside systems, bringing together bits of experiences and understandings of culture to facilitate their own adjustment and belonging. Student affairs practitioners should make use of the military brats of color natural inclinations to create an inclusive and welcoming environment on campus through their leadership. Military brats of color should be encouraged to take student leadership roles in orientation, student affairs 101 transition to college courses, multi-cultural offices, residence halls in addition to student government. In addition to helping military brats of color adjust through campus engagement, military brats of color can share their hard-earned community cultural wealth with their peers.

Belonging in the Military Cultural Context: History of Race in the Military and How the DoD Can Prepare Military Brats of Color for their Transition to College

In first years of the 1970s, my grandfather Col. Roberto Peralta, then an installation commander in Panama, worked with another ranking officer to calm racial unrest on the adjacent fort. In my father's reflection, it was two men of color (my grandfather and the officer in question) who were conservative, so their strategies in navigating a race riot may not have been the best. No one was trained to talk about race then, at least not in the U.S. Military. In that same year, the military responded to persistent unrest inside ranks and established the Defense Race Relations Institute (DRRI) at Patrick Airbase (Webb & Herrmann, 2002). In 1975, my father was trained at the DRRI as a race relations officer and then spent the next year in Germany teaching

courses on race in the United States. Just as race is fraught in the United States, it is fraught in the U.S. military. However, the U.S. military has its own story and own history, an understanding which may help shed light where military children have grown up and what race means to them as they transition to college.

A Short History of Race in the Military

In earlier chapters, the history Department of Defense Education Activity and the Department of Defense Schools were discussed. This section will give a brief overview for the benefit of practitioners and researchers. In the mid-1940s post-WWII, the Army decided that racial integration would be an ideal outcome, but it maintained that African American service members should continue to serve in a support capacity, a capacity that meant heavy labor for a majority (Moskos & Butler, 1996). Shortly after, in 1948, President Truman integrated the armed forces, opening the door for integrated units in the Korean war, and leading to what Moskos and Butler (1996) call “organization integration” (p. 31). Yohalom & Ridgely (1974) notes that even while organizational desegregation occurred—housing, schools, and units—there were persistent issues with equity and promotions; the issues regarding promotions persisted according to Burk and Espinoza’s (2012) review of the literature on race and the U.S. military. Burk and Espinoza (2012) also critique Moskos and Butler’s 1996 analysis on racial integration of the military, particularly in light of their lens of contact theory which was touted as the panacea for racism in the U.S. military. The consensus seems to be that the military made strides but improvement is still necessary (Burk & Espinoza, 2012; Webb & Herrmann, 2002). The Vietnam war marked a dark time for the military, recruitment increased organizational issues with leadership and morale complete with poor

recruitment and training practices (Webb & Herrmann, 2002). The outbreak of riots and troop unrest as African American servicemembers demanded improved career opportunities, assignments, and promotions. In response to deteriorating conditions, the military created the Defense Race Relations Institute in 1971, which brings us back to the young officer David Peralta, who in 1975 relocated my mother and older sister to Coco Beach near Patrick Airbase. This is where my father and countless other officers learned to talk about race. Race desperately needs to be talked about, especially given the history of the U.S. military, to prepare young military brats to go out into a world and understand the water they have been thrown into. Military children must understand what their race and ethnicity means in the military context as well as the U.S. college context.

Toolkits and Strategies: Preparing Military Brats of Color for their Transition to College

Preparing military brats of color to transition to college may be easier said than done. How do you teach about race in a context where race is not necessarily discussed openly? Military children of color would benefit from understanding the world they are about to step in, a place that may be rather different from the military cultural context. White military brats need to be included in any preparation, since they will themselves be willing or unwilling participants in a system that privileges whiteness. While it would make sense for the Department of Defense to offer such a transition program, it could also be under the purview of independent associations such as the Military Child Education Coalition. A toolkit curriculum would include:

- History of race and racism in the United States, including the present-day ramifications of that history and U.S. military history

- Race is a social construct, which is why it can mean something different in different places.
- What is Diversity and Inclusion? Diversity and Inclusion will have to be operationalized with visible and invisible identities: race, ethnicity, generational status, LGBTQ, class, differently abled, immigrant, undocumented, veteran, third-culture/transnational.
- Facilitated Dialogues on identity and U.S. culture

Such a program would be tempting to implement as a cost-effective and rather passive model of learning such as a webinar. However, just as an identity is co-constructed by the individual and society, military brats must have a learning process that facilitates deep thought about identity and diversity in the U.S.. This transparency is necessary given findings from Park and Chang (2015) that even if young people attended a diverse school, they may not have engaged with or reflected on issues of diversity. Military brats must have a place to reflect on their identities and what those identities mean inside and outside the military community. I propose facilitated dialogues to help young people process their high school experiences and their identities to prepare them for the U.S. college experience. These dialogues would be based on intergroup dialogues, a long-used technique to assist young people in colleges and universities understand systemic oppression in its various forms as it pertains to their own identities (Lopez & Zúñiga, 2010). I am using the intergroup dialogue because military children are diverse racially and ethnically in addition to having significant difference in rank of uniformed parent. The facilitators must be specifically trained, and the program should run a series of scaffolded sessions for optimal processing and reflection on the part of the participants.

The largest problem would be the logistics for such an undertaking, since military brats can be concentrated in Department of Defense Schools or near bases, but a number can be dispersed into public schools with very little visibility or access to a base. For example, military individuals stationed in the D.C. area often live off-base and are intermixed with civilian children in public schools. Sharing the knowledge with that population of military brats maybe just as important as sharing the knowledge with military brats attending Department of Defense Schools. School counselors in DoDEA schools would be well-equipped for training and facilitating such a program. However, there is a nagging question of what to do about providing military brats stateside with similar services. Making a military community service office the administrators for the program may make the most sense, since every base should have such an office. In addition, a school liaison, who may be housed in the community service office, may also be the best person to receive appropriate training to teach the curriculum and facilitate the dialogue as part of their work with social-emotional learning and well-being. These sessions should last roughly a semester, preferably spring, and could possibly be part of other offerings to prepare military children to go off to college. In addition, this would be a wonderful initiative for which to write a grant, there are any number of philanthropic and social justice focused organizations who could contribute to the development of the curriculum, training, and implementation.

Moving Toward Belonging: Being with Military Children of Color in College

Moving toward an understanding of the experience of military brats of color in college, means that we must consider what practitioners need to know to work effectively with this specific population. Military brats' conceptions of home and belonging have

been largely operationalized as something wholly concrete, a physical place, a tool, an instrument. Returning to chapter 1, Bishop's (1999) *One Art*, explicates loss in the form of concrete "things": houses, keys, continents, people. The feeling of loss and the longing that remained was manifested in concrete items such as places and objects. These are objects and places that were known intimately and integrated into a sense of self to some extent. Objects are easier to know and the loss of them is tangible, since it is a stark absence.

However, there is also a part of loss that is wholly abstract in its feeling and description—hence the power Bishop's (1999) work—that lives inside the intimate knowing of a person, place, and thing. With that thought, I return, as discussed in chapter 2, to *connaitre* versus *savoir*, the French language sense of knowing something/someone intimately and the knowing of a fact. Bishop's (1999) poem is referring to the *connaitre* in that loss, more appropriately that visceral loss of something known intimately, a grief that acknowledges bodily experience and the experience of time in being in the world. Practitioners must consider that loss, even intimate loss, is grief about places and objects as well as people. While the objects were integrated into identity, they were not the source of identity in the way the military as an institution may be. The loss of the military is a transition not just of location but of identity, a profound example of the *connaitre*. Military brats of color no longer truly know cultural norms in the same way, and the cultural norms of their families may not apply, in addition to the cultural norms of the military as an institution. What does such a loss mean for military children of color since it cannot be touched, and it cannot be taken on and off like a t-shirt? And how does a practitioner sit witness and provide guidance? I often think of it as if military

children of color have been playing in a stream all their lives; they know the water-levels, temperature, and wildlife in and around that stream. And one day, at a certain age, in their transition to college, the stream suddenly has a fence, and it is no longer accessible. They have been, in some respect, cut off from their familiar cultural norms by a fence. Practitioners must be sensitive to this shift in contemplating how to *be* present with military children of color as they make the move to college and toward belonging.

In considering a move to any location as an object to be manipulated, military children of color were attempting to “get” the process and the feelings in hand just as Heidegger (1954/1977e) referred to humans attempt to “get” technology in hand. This is something I have considered repeatedly, in chapter 2 and in chapter 4, first as a way to understand how military children manipulate culture, like a hammer or a saw, and how military children manipulate identity, again, as it is were an object outside them. Practitioners, in considering work with military children of color in college, must understand this urge for military children of color to “master” their home-spaces for the sake of belonging. In this, practitioners must ask:

We must ask: What is the instrumental itself? Within what do such things as means and end belong? A means is that whereby something is effected and thus attained. The end that determines the kind of means to be used may also be considered a cause. Whatever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality. (Heidegger, 1954/1977e, p. 313)

In chapter 4, I showed the ends and the means as military children of color worked their way into college spaces and fashioned homes within these spaces. However, practitioners must examine the “instrumental itself” or technology employed itself, sitting with the fact that military children of color may be culturally savvy, having lived abroad and cultivated comfort in outside cultural spaces. But they may be

encountering culture shock in college precisely because they expected to be “home,” when indeed they are not. Sometimes, the military children of color in college may not be aware that they are sub-consciously playing with identity in an attempt to belong. The military children of color also may not be aware, at a more fundamental level, of the value of affinity groups on campus even if they may belong to one. Some will engage with multi-cultural offices, and some may avoid them altogether; this is not predicated on skin color but rather a conscious or sub-conscious choice as they navigate belonging. While it is not always evident what students know and do not know, this uncovering may help practitioners in the act of *being* with military children of color in college as they process their surroundings and campus/U.S. culture. Ultimately, how do practitioners use these understandings to gently encourage appropriate development and belonging? I offer insights in this section.

Military children of color in college may not be developmentally ready to talk about their various identities (racial, ethnic identity, invisible identities) because some of them have never had to wrestle with it in the same way some civilian young people have. Beverly Daniel Tatum’s (2003) *Why Do All the Black Kids Sit Together in the Cafeteria* lays out racial identity development for young African Americans, considering social mores and structures within U.S. society. She also addresses bi-racial identity development. However, Daniel Tatum’s (2003) theory, like many identity development theories, does not fully account for the complexity presented by the unique military culture where academic outcomes are not predicated on race/ethnicity in the same way as they might be in civilian life (Smrekar et al., 2001; Smrekar & Owens, 2003; Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974; Winerip, 2011). It is present but not present, and in some cases a

confusing and difficult topic for military children of color who are often bi- or multi-racial (Lundquist, 2004). In addition, historically, African American military children were high achieving products of integrated schools (Smrekar et al., 2001; Smrekar & Owens, 2003, Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974). Data going back to the late 1960s and early 1970s examining the effects of desegregation on Air Force African American children (Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974) found college-going at a higher rate for African American Air Force NCO children than their civilian peers when controlling for socio-economic status. This tradition of achievement still exists as recorded in NAEP data (Smrekar et al., 2001; Smrekar & Owens, 2003; Winerip, 2011). Military children of color have a somewhat different journey than their civilian peers, with detours to foreign countries and into spaces where they are both American and of color. Nothing is straight forward or neatly applied when someone is not necessarily raised in the civilian U.S. context.

Practitioners must respect the process that military children of color in college go through for appropriate development. I use the words “go through” intentionally, because the journey is integral to identity development. There is no walking around, under, or over identity development; it must be walked through, each twist to be encountered and processed, each hill climbed, and each river crossed. *Being* in the world, in a way that is connected deeply to who you are, means one must travel into what it means to be who you are in the world, learning the vocabulary and customs that are attached to various identities. This is not easy at any age, let alone when you leave a cultural context.

However, what does it mean to show respect for such a journey?

Rather than push young people toward developmental milestones, which can be appropriate in some circumstances, practitioners should provide tools and opportunities

for self-discovery. Such opportunities might be invitations to affinity groups, leadership positions in student groups, suggestions for courses where race and ethnicity are discussed, and information about majors such as anthropology, sociology, American or ethnic studies. Courses and spaces to discuss race and ethnicity will give military children of color safe spaces to learn about and process U.S. culture. In addition, affinity groups and social justice student groups, which address issues of race and ethnicity, may provide essential heuristic knowledge from their civilian peers of color, which we know can enhance retention and success (Padilla, Trevino, Trevino, & Gonzalez, 1997). Military children of color in college will grow at their own pace, just as a toddler moves from unsteady steps to a break-neck run in their own time. As any intentional educator and parent, the student affairs practitioner must respect this process.

Telemachus, who has been spoken of as military child in previous research (Cozza & Lieberman, 2007), was the first young person on a journey to have a “Mentor.” The goddess Athena, who so favored his father Odysseus, dressed as man named Mentor to guide Telemachus on his quest to find his father (Homer, n.d.). University faculty and staff function as the famous “Mentor” in college, not just for military children of color, but for all young people enrolled. Astin (1993) cites a faculty relationship as an essential part of the college experience for young people. Tinto (1993) addresses the need for faculty connections. Participants spoke of their relationships with faculty and staff as pivotal—whether they are faculty, food service staff, or dance instructors. Other mothering or other parenting may also be a positive outcome of faculty and staff involvement, which can increase student success (Guiffrida, 2005). Faculty, student

affairs professionals and other staff have essential roles to play in witnessing and creating safe spaces to belong for military children of color in college.

Astin's (1993) findings on the impact of peer group on development are salient: *"The student's peer group is the single most potent source of influence on growth and development during the undergraduate years"* (p. 398). College fraternities and other student organizations provide social and emotional support, and in essence, belonging for military children of color in college. It helps them find a physical or a social home-space where they can be. In addition, peer groups may also help with the transition to the U.S. context in terms of racial encounters. Having a peer group with whom they can identify, and certain conversations can be broached may also help military children of color in college process their racialized experiences.

Military children of color, like any other group, will better navigate the college space with conscientious support from faculty and staff. College campuses and administrators are equipped to facilitate transitions and assist individuals through the pipeline. While several support systems exist on campus, substantive human relationships with faculty, staff, and peers make a true difference. It is these relationships that foster a sense of belonging and give the military brats of color in college a home-space.

The Challenges of Belonging: The Difficulty of Identity in Home-Spaces for Military Children of Color in College

Tinto (1993) observes that to integrate into a college setting, one must withdraw from one's old life. He uses the word "disassociate" because "Such communities differ from college not only in composition but also in the values, norms, and behavioral and intellectual styles that characterize their everyday life" (p. Tinto, 1993, p. 95). This is a

vast assumption about anyone walking on to a college campus; as if every place is so alien to a college campus that there is not possibly anything in the way of a transferable skills. How is a college campus different from a small town in the U.S.? Why is it impossible for people to live in more than one world? Is this thinking a form of cultural monolingualism, the privileging of X over Y, because of a misguided belief that X and Y cannot exist concurrently? If a person cannot possibly manage two cultures and two places, then how is it that two people from two different states fall in love and get married, let alone two people from two different countries or of two different races/ethnicities? In reading this sentiment I am taken back to my civilian school in Northern Virginia in 4th grade, where I had to explain to adults and my peers that you can live in a country but not be from that country. This is a simple concept: to live in a place but not be from that place. Thirty years later, at my own childrens' school, another mother was explaining her military brat husband to me. She said, "He was born in Japan, but he is not Japanese." This is just as Sherri lived in Europe but was not European, and Luz, Lynne, and Sherlock all lived in Asia but only Lynne is part Asian. Belonging in or to a place is an absurd notion unless we are talking about the U.S. as a passport country, to which we belong because our parents served. As in these lived experiences and found in Tinto (1993), the idea of disassociating from your old community and life has ramifications for military children of color. What does disassociating from a community look like for military children of color? Which community would military children of color disassociate from to integrate in college? In addition, what role do practitioners hold in working with military children of color as they move from the military community to college?

“What Do You Mean I Am Black?”

College can be a place where military children of color can explore their identities and perhaps even play with their identities in order to have a better understanding of themselves. Tinto (1993) observes that “As a result, the process leading to the adoption of behaviors and norms appropriate to the life of the college necessarily requires some degree of transformation and perhaps rejection of the norms of past communities” (p. 95). Given that military children of color are coming from multiple “past communities” and “norms,” how are we to understand this statement? Would Tinto say the military community was the “past community” from which military children actually come from? What would that say about the individual family unit? Tinto conflates the cultural norms of the family unit with those of the community, which may or may not always be the case, especially with military children of color. In addition, Tinto is taking for granted that there is an alignment because how a community perceives an individual and how the individual perceives themselves.

Tinto’s (1993) theory is too simple and fails to capture the psychological nuances of young people in college, particularly military children of color in college. Bean and Eaton’s (2000) psychological model offers a more sophisticated lens through which to contemplate what it means for military children of color to know themselves in college as complex individuals: race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, political ideology. Bean and Eaton include both self-efficacy and attribution theory as part of their psychological model. Both theories are salient for military children of color in college. Specifically, military children of color may have more of an internal locus of control which may keep them motivated throughout tough academic and social situations in college leading to

success (Bean & Eaton). A strong internal locus of control, coupled with a strong self-efficacy when it comes to moving and making friends, should translate into a better experience with transitioning to and persisting in college (Bean & Eaton).

The strong potential for good psychological outcomes does not mean that military children of color will have an easy time adjusting. For military children of color, this may be the first time in their lives that they will have to start navigating how they are perceived by skin color and culture, rather than by their uniformed parents rank or their own sense of identity. Finding that you are perceived as something other than you perceive yourself can be as startling as it can be traumatic. Paloma, as described in chapter 4, perhaps says it best, “What do you mean I am Black?” For this reason, universities should advertise and make an effort to create spaces where young people can assert their identities and explore their identities without fear of punishment or reprisal. There are a number of such inclusive places on campus be it an academic center for Latin American studies that holds a colloquium series or a Multi-cultural Office that may celebrate holidays not observed or known in the U.S. These spaces encourage inclusivity and dialogue and are excellent examples of spaces where military children of color can go, perhaps see something familiar from a country or region in which they have lived, and not feel as if identity is placed upon them for that specific period of time.

However, this has to go deeper—student of color spaces and groups must ask themselves hard questions about boundary policing in communities of color. Haywood (2017) found that colorism in Latin@/x organizations were a source of stress and harm for young individuals identifying at Afro-Latin@/x. The research echoes the experience of the Afro-Latina in this study. The Mexican American student group that questioned

Paloma's Latina heritage because of her Black skin is problematic. In recent years with the shifts in understanding what it means to be Latin@/x versus Hispanic and the rich heritage of Latin America and the Caribbean has opened or is opening spaces for being LatiNegra (as Paloma spoke of) but also the recognition of indigenous individuals. Student Affairs professionals and administrators must acknowledge the complexities of identities and specifically work with student groups to recognize and celebrate the cultural contributions of Afro-Latinos and indigenous populations, while also discussing the harsh colonial histories that have led to the disenfranchisement of non-light skinned Latin@/x populations.

There is also an element of caution here. Tinto's (1993) assertion that the "rejection of norms of past communities" (p. 95) is necessary is dysfunctional for civilian children and non-sensical for military children of color who are used to adjusting to different countries and contexts. There is a binary of assimilated/non-assimilated from which researchers like Tinto seem to operate. But like identity boxes, they are false friends, fine for a cursory analysis but ignoring the individual experience of the phenomenon, the complexity of culture and race.

Affinity Spaces and Learning Race

There is no good time to learn about racism in the United States context. However, the presence of U.S. mainstream culture, coupled with some theoretical safe spaces, allows for growth and understanding. Affinity group spaces can be a place where military children of color can process the racial encounters and micro-aggressions with individuals who might be *savvier* or more experienced with them. While military children of color may not always seek out these spaces, the more processing opportunity

that is presented to them, the better their understanding might be of what it means to be of color in the U.S..

Practitioners must be sensitive that other identities may need to be sorted before or after racial identities can be navigated. Affinity groups should not be restricted to racial/ethnic groups; identity is complicated and should not be predicated just on skin color. For example, Sherlock came out as a gay man in college. His exploration of his sexual identity may have meant that exploring what it means to be a Black man in the U.S. may not have been as salient to him during this time. Development does not happen in a vacuum and everyone has their own timeline. The presence of other identities may speed up or slow down the process of understanding oneself.

What It Means to Belong: Military Children of Color in College Reflect on Home(s)

At risk of being tautological, we must also take into account what the definition of home for military children might be and what it might mean for them in college. If home is belonging, then, practitioners must contemplate the question: What does it mean for military children of color to belong in college? Military children of color have spent their entire lives transitioning such that they belong, so how is this transition different in college? If belonging is an essential component of home, then military children of color will deftly create their space by integrating themselves into the fabric of the community. This is done. Military children of color found ways to belong even when they were out of place—joining student groups even if they did not previously identify with that group; joining historically Black fraternities and sororities; and taking on student leadership roles. However, higher education practitioners must realize that while integration is ideal, it is possible, as seen in the case of Lynne, to be successful without actively

participating in co-curriculars, if the demands of a program provide other ways for meaningful engagement with a community. When Lynne transferred from her predominantly White Christian school to a large state school, she was engaged in an intensive education major to prepare for a career as a middle school math teacher. The rigor and engagement required of her within the middle school community and in her academic department replaced the classic campus co-curriculars that have previously been deemed necessary for success. While Tinto (1993) and other retention theorists may place campus at the center of the experience of belonging, this is not true in every case.

In these experiences military children of color in college seem to be excellent advocates for their own needs; this translates into positive action for academic and social success. However, despite the fact they make their way through college blind, that does not mean they are growing optimally. Everyone needs a community, a person to turn to with questions, and a place where they can simply *be*. Practitioners are charged with finding these spaces. It could be something as small as involving military children of color in service-based work on campus, or simply letting them talk about their experiences growing up without judgment. What is more, practitioners should be attuned to the fact that even if the military children of color are asking for help for class X, what is it they might not be asking for help with? This is where practitioners should be asking substantive questions about background and well-being. Everyone needs a little bit of help sometimes and that is okay.

A Small Way to Serve My Country: Transformational Research and the Researcher

The third part of my chapter 5 is about how I was transformed by the research and writing process. In the last years of conversations with participants and writing and re-

writing, the country I have been writing about has changed. In some ways, this dissertation was and still is a love letter to the only home military brats of color have ever had—the United States. This is sentimental and perhaps glib, but when a passport or military status is your comfort and a sense of safety, there is always the fact that your uniformed father or mother is part of something bigger, greater than themselves and their family unit. In this love letter are also lessons I have learned about what it means to be patriotic and love your country. Growing up, love meant never critiquing. Now that I am adult, I understand that love is all about pushing our country to honor and celebrate its citizens, ensuring quality of life, and working towards equality.

Our parents protect a country that deserves love and protection for the freedoms it affords and its singular status in the world. But that America they fought for is still an idea—“The land that never has been yet” (Hughes, n.d.). There is a certain amount of grief to grow up and to see your country as a whole, imperfect, and cruel to people of color—enslavement of African Americans, Tuskegee experiments, genocide of Native Americans, a claim to land that was colonized and brutally taken all leading up to children being put in cages because they are not U.S. citizens. Growing up, my mother would say that it was un-American to shoot and ask questions later; only other countries did that. With the blood of Black men soaking into our ground because they were shot by police without questioning, it was hard to write this dissertation. My country is a foreign country that I must get to know as an adult. And this is a condition for each military child. We have to grow up sometime, and it is hard to move from a child’s unconditional love to a love that is drenched in sorrow. For all the love and sacrifice of our families, there is no equality. We enter a society we built in our minds of an idea; the U.S. as we

imagined and our parents fought for it is not a place. There are ideas and aspirations of what America could be; this America is not yet a place. What gives me the most hope was talking to each participant and seeing the good work they are doing in the world: in their communities, with their families, with their education, and with their vocations. While only one was a veteran, all of us are doing work to make the lives of individual people better.

Military children of color in this study felt that their identity was so much more than their race/ethnicity. They sought to be seen as a whole person—a dancer, a teacher, a mathematician, a politician, an actor, a scholar, an ROTC cadet, an involved student who loved her school. Sometimes this need played out positively, and sometimes it did not. In my own life I have sought to be seen as a complex person and to never be reduced to one thing. However, this is hard and I have yet to master it. I found comfort that other military children of color faced similar challenges.

In all this, I am not adequately writing about the experience of writing this dissertation. For one I am still processing it and perhaps will be processing it for a long time yet. This is not research anyone wants to hear. We have had consistent data that military children of color have a significantly different experience academically from NAEP data and from the handful of studies I cite (Smrekar et al., 2001; Smrekar & Owens, 2003; Yohalem & Ridgely, 1974; Winerip, 2011). However, researchers, academia, and the general public are not paying attention. Why aren't they paying attention? Why don't they care? Knowing that you dedicated 9 years of your life to something that no one seems to want to hear is hard. I was a mouthpiece for my participants. I hope I did them justice. I hope I did not fail them.

As a silver lining, I leave knowing that while military children of color are alone in many senses of the word, we seem to do well no matter what we decide to do. We complete a task and we move (states, apartments, jobs) on to the next thing. I know nothing is static, not the soil we walk on or the trees that are felled or even trees that are left to grow. And perhaps next year or a decade from now, a person with resilience and tenacity will read this work and take up the call for research on military children of color. Meanwhile, this is my handprint in drying cement. I was here. I did this work and my tour of duty is done.

This is my small way of serving my country. For a moment, we sit and celebrate the achievements of my 7 amazing participants who shared their lives so generously with me. Let us celebrate the countless military children of color, our doubly invisible tribe, who are surviving and thriving through college and into their adult lives. Let's celebrate the lives of the trail blazing men and women of color taking leadership roles in our military. Without them, we would not be where we are today.

An Epilogue or A Starting Point

There is still work to be done in understanding the experience of military children of color in college. For this work, the definition of home should be exploded, expanded, and extended to include conceptions such as belonging. Home is a dwelling place, a straight forward etymology of a structure where people live the banality of the *vie* *quotidian*. Again, I return to the “I am from” scenario that is part of the formal getting to know someone banter. Being from a home or a hamlet or village where people dwell is routine. The metrics of what home—duration, address city, state—are confounding, and do not elicit a direct answer. How do we expand and explode the definition of home we

ask? I answer with another question: What if home were not a place to be from or a destination to reach? What is home were something bigger and more complex, woven into our souls, threaded into the neuron firing in our brain, fed from the nutrients we ingest or have ingested that keep our bodies functioning. Home might not be a thing we can see; we are not vintners who can tell one patch of soil from acre 10 from a patch of soil from acre 55. Nor can we lovingly trace a part of town from our memories as a 5 year old, 10 year old, or 13 year old. There is no family place to return to and if there is a family place we have never lived there.

The hard part of home is not knowing where you belong as a military brat of color. There is an intersection of identities that do not match up neatly enough for a seamless cultural adjustment. There is no fading into the background but there is the work of fitting in, finessing relationships, the work of being with people. Belonging is work. There is no way to belong truly if it means that part of you is always held at bay—be it ethnicity, skin color, gender, sexuality, your experiences abroad, the languages you speak, or the way you present yourself. This is all the more complicated for the military brat of color going about the work of being an adolescent and a young person in the U.S. cultural context, outside the military context. There is an effort or a quest for belonging.

For military children of color, I use the term belonging because there is a sense of *longing* in the efforts military children of color make to belong, to make a home. In all these efforts though, there is a point where there is a recognition of self and recognition of belonging, and a reassurance that it is all going to be okay. This is the only reassurance from the results of this study: military children of color go to college, coming

from their isolated military cultural context, attempt to figure out who they are, and graduate to become good citizens. The kids are alright.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Email Protocol

Online Solicitation for Forums, List-Servs, and Facebook

Hi, My name is Alicia Peralta, and I am a PhD Candidate in Higher Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am currently recruiting Military Brats of color who are currently in their 20s/30s and who have completed a Bachelor's degree for my dissertation study: "There is No Place Like Home: The Lived Experience of Military Children in College." This study aims to explore the lived experience of military children of color in college. If you would like to participate in this study, please email me at aperalta@umd.edu. In addition, please feel free to pass this to individuals who might be interested in participating and meet the above criteria.

Email Solicitation

Dear INSERT NAME:

My name is Alicia Peralta, and I am a PhD Candidate in Higher Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. I am currently recruiting 8 Military Brats of color who are currently in their 20s/30s and who have completed a Bachelor's degree for my dissertation study: "There is No Place Like Home: The Lived Experience of Military Children in College." This study aims to explore the lived experience of military children of color in college. You are receiving this email because you showed interest in taking part in this study.

This study will have 3 phases that will last between 5 and 8 months. Should you wish to participate in the study, you will receive a consent form and a short questionnaire. We will schedule a time to meet for our initial conversation about your background and college experience; you may bring your completed form and questionnaire to the first meeting. This meeting will last between 1 and 2 hours and will take place in a public place, such as a café or library. For the second conversation, I will ask you to bring a picture of a house or city where you lived and a picture of your college campus; I hope that both pictures would be meaningful to you in some way. We will discuss these pictures in relation to your college experience, perception of home, and your military childhood. This conversation may also take between 1 and 2 hours. The third conversation will be a gathering of participants during which we will discuss the experience of being a military child of color in college. All three of these conversations/group gatherings will be recorded with your permission and may be done over skype.

If you would still like to participate in this study, please email me at aperalta@umd.edu. In addition, please feel free to pass this to individuals who might be interested in participating and meet the above criteria.

Best regards,

Alicia Peralta

Appendix II: Consent Form

Consent Form
University of Maryland College Park

Initials _____ Date _____

Project Title	There is no place like home: The lived experience of military children of color in college
Purpose of the Study	<p>This research study conducted by Alicia Peralta, a University of Maryland doctoral student in the Higher Education doctoral program under the direction of Dr. Francine Hultgren. This study will explore the lived experience of adult military children of color in college.</p> <p>The ideal research participant will be an adult of color in their 20s/30s who grew up in a household with an active duty military parent. The adult will have lived abroad at least once as a military child and/or attended at least one Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA) school.</p>
Procedures	<p>Once you have decided to participate in the phenomenological research study, you will be emailed a consent form and a questionnaire. These should be returned to the researcher at the time of the first conversation or via email/mail if the first conversation is to take place over skype. The research will take place in three phases. All conversations and the gathering will take place in a public place or via skype at a mutually decided time and date. All conversations and the gathering will be audio-recorded. The participant may choose to not be recorded or stop the recording at any time. If the participant does not wish to be recorded, the researcher will take appropriate notes. The first conversation will last one to two hours. The initial conversation will cover life up to college, motivations for going to college, and experiences in college. For the second interview, participants will ask to bring a picture of a house or city you lived in and a place on your college campus. We will discuss the meaning of home and how it applied to the college experience; this is an unstructured interview. Each participant will be asked to write a reflection on this exercise. The third phase will be a gathering of the adult military children of color. During this group meeting, the military brats will discuss their college experience, ideas of home, and identities as military children. All questions for the gathering will be derived from themes that surface in the first and second interview conversations. All in-person conversations will be conducted in public spaces such as the library or a café and last approximately one to two hours. If the conversations and gathering are held in an appropriate local such as a</p>

	<p>cafe, a refreshment will be offered. Interviews will be transcribed and coded. Follow-up questions will be asked as necessary. Participation will take approximately 8 hours to complete; that includes all email time, time to fill out the questionnaire, and time for in-person conversations. Questions will include inquiry into places lived, experiences moving during the primary and secondary educational years, how you chose which college to attend, and the college experience.</p>
Potential Risks and Discomforts	<p><i>There are no known risks associated with participating in this research project</i></p>
Potential Benefits	<p>You may not directly benefit from this research. However, understanding how adults of color who grew up as military children process their identities and college experiences will be invaluable to military sociology, and education, especially since there is long term research that indicates little to no achievement gap in DoDDEA schools.</p>
Confidentiality	<p>All data will be kept on a password protected laptop in my home office. All transcripts and data will be password protected electronic files. The participants' names will be disguised, and identifying details removed from data. The interview responses will remain on my computer indefinitely, and I may use them for other research projects in the future, but I will not give them to anyone else without disguising your name and removing identifying details. All files containing identifiable data about you will be password protected. Files with identifiable information about you will be securely deleted and thoroughly destroyed before my computer is donated or discarded.</p> <p>For coded identifiable information, no name will be included on the surveys and other collected data; a code will be placed on the survey and other collected data; through the use of an identification key, I will be able to link the survey to the participant; and only I will have access to the identification key.</p> <p><i>If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.</i></p>
Right to Withdraw and Questions	<p><i>Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you decide not to participate in</i></p>

	<p><i>this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.</i></p> <p>This research is being conducted by Alicia Peralta (aperalta@umd.edu), a doctoral student in the Department of Counseling, Higher Education, and Special Education at the University of Maryland, College Park. <i>If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact: Dr. Francine Hultgren, Department of Teaching, Learning, Policy and Leadership, 2311B Benjamin Building, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742, 301-405-4501</i></p>	
Participant Rights	<p><i>If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"> University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 0101 Lee Building College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail: irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678 </p> <p><i>This research has been reviewed according to the University of Maryland, College Park IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.</i></p>	
Statement of Consent	<p><i>Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.</i></p> <p><i>If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.</i></p>	
Signature and Date	NAME OF SUBJECT [Please Print]	
	SIGNATURE OF SUBJECT	
	DATE	

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