



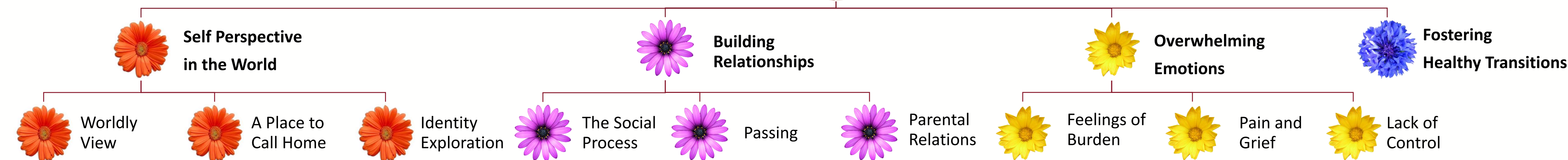
Understanding the Lived Experiences of Highly Mobile Military Adolescents in Search of Their Identity

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Themes



Background and Significance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Approximately 40% of the active duty military population have children ranging from infancy to early adulthood.¹ Childhood experiences, including frequent geographical relocations, can impact identity development in this population.^{2,3} Developmental research relating to active duty military children remains sparse,^{4,5} especially as it relates to understanding their lived experiences. Previous research studies have focused on understanding the relationship between moving and adverse outcomes, as well as outsider perspectives (i.e.: teacher, parent, coach) on transitions and adaption through military life events (i.e.: parental deployments, frequent relations).
Purpose
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This study seeks to understand the impact that frequent relocations have on the identity development of highly mobile military adolescents.
Methodology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An interpretive phenomenological design^{6,7} seeking to understand the experience of military adolescents "being" in the world was used for this study.
Methods
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Population <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusion Criteria: English speaking, between 16 to 18 years old, at least 1 active duty military parent in the US Army, experienced at least 3 military related moves (at least 1 move after 7th grade) Exclusion Criteria: same-sex parent households, single parent households, adolescents were fostered or adopted during school aged years Recruitment: convenience and snowball sampling Sample: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three 16-year-olds and two 17-year-olds were recruited. Number of moves experienced ranged from 5 to 11. All but 1 moved at least once during middle school. All moved anywhere between 1 and 3 times during high school. Active duty military rank ranged from E6 to O6. Data Collection <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Location: place most comfortable for the participant Demographic Surveys: age, gender, number of military related moves, parent's marital status, which parent is active duty, and active duty member's rank and years of service. Interviews: semi structured interview Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value laden Hermeneutic Circles Field notes and immersion in data formed the building blocks of the thematic analysis Data organized in Microsoft Excel Ethical Considerations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informed consent: assent and consent forms Risks: invasion of privacy and potential for psychological emotional discomfort Mandatory reporting procedures discussed Study approved by the Washington State University Internal Review Board (IRB Number #17508-001)

Worldly View: *I'm amazed by how much that I've learned in my lifetime that hasn't been very long. I feel like I have a lot of ... knowledge-understanding of a lot of different cultures.* -Victoria

A Place to Call Home: *"... moving so much ... it's been hard because you're never in one place for too long. Like for me, it's been ... one to two years. I've never lived anywhere more than two-and-a-half years. So, I kind of have to ... get in my mind that I'm not going to be here for that long and that ... I want to ... probably not get ... too attached to like things around me 'cause ... I'm gonna leave. I don't know. It's been hard because we're constantly moving. And ... it's a lot of work to like move itself ... pack all your boxes, say goodbye to your friends, and then ... have to start somewhere new so often. It's been hard."* - Claire

Identity Exploration: *"Because I've spent so much time trying to integrate with everybody else, I kind of just never really knew who I was in ways."* Vendetta

The Social Process: *"So these people are childhood friends and they're not really in the market for a new friend ... And you don't tell them that, 'Oh I'm just moving in nine months. I'm not going to be here very long.' Because then they only see you as temporary and they don't see you as worth their time."* - Victoria

Passing: *"I feel like a social chameleon. I - the mentality I've taken on is if I'm with unfamiliar people, then I sort of have to change my colors. Change the way I hold myself up, talk, and act to kind of attract their attention with all these bright colors and then slowly dim it down to a point where they like me for who I am by easing them into the facts. Like slowly getting into pool water because it's really cold and slowly start to warm up to it."* -Jack

Parental Relations: *"I didn't really build up a strong connection... or be able to tell him [dad] about my day. Be able to tell him about things that happened at school. How I felt before he was like off to work again. Because my mom was working when I was younger, I didn't say anything to them ... I grew up keeping my feelings to myself. Which was stressful because ... there were a lot of times where I was sad. There were a lot of times when I was angry ... specifically then and now."* - Vendetta

Feelings of Burden: *"So it's like I don't want to ... you know, put myself first ... I don't want to just complain to my mom about something she can't change - and make her feel like she's the reason ... I try not to do that. So, I don't really talk to her about most of the things."* [At this point Alyssa takes a moment to gather herself, then continues stating]: *"... you can't really just say how you feel 'cause I don't really want her to feel like she's the reason why I'm suffering. You know?"* - Alyssa

Pain and Grief: *"Every single move, the most devastating part was not that we were moving again...it was just losing people. And I feel-as if that's probably the hardest thing on all military kids. After a while - after you move like two, three, four times and so on and so forth, you just kind of numb yourself to it. You get used to it and you're just like, okay, moving on. And I think that's one negative impact that, um, being part of a military family has had on me is that I've become numb to moving and to, um, losing my friends."* -Vendetta

Lack of Control: *"Just it started to become very lonely, mainly because as you start to go - like I face this trouble, too -- and I know a lot of my military friends have -- where you're just like what's the point. We're just going to have to move again."* - Jack

Written and Rapped by Military Children

"..... a doctor has never asked me how I'm feeling unless it's physical." -Victoria

"I think if kids are like really sad and like depressed or - or like anxious about like having to start school and make new friends, I guess I think they can help in that." - Claire

"... I feel as if... nurses and doctors... at first, try to communicate to people who don't really understand... what military kids are going through, um, and just try and build those connections. Try and - like not force people to be open-minded-- but kind of look at things from a new perspective. I feel that's an important thing for everybody. Look at things from multiple different perspectives. Not just gain new perspective. Multiple perspectives. Nurses and doctors should try and tell... individuals within military families that instead of looking to others, try and learn more about yourself." - Vendetta

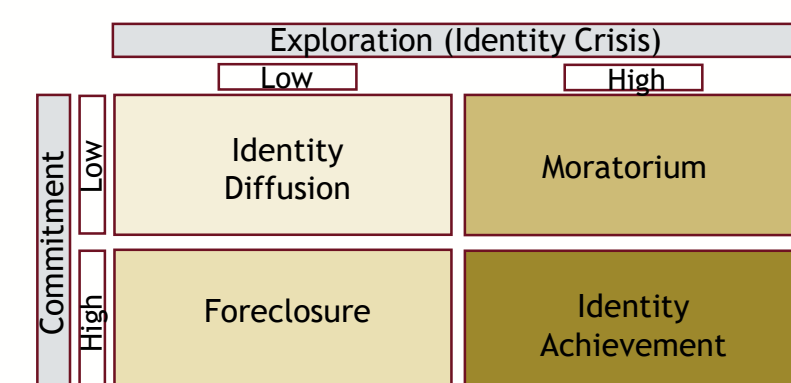


Figure 1. Explanation of Identity Statuses in Marcia's Identity Status Theory⁸

Implications for Future Research

- Future studies should focus on:
 - Understanding the adolescent-nurse/provider relationship
 - RCT involving interventions that support military children during a time of transition
 - Theory development

Limitations

- Sample Size
 - PI's will be expanding on current research by recruiting five to 13 more participants.
- Adolescents represent only one of the military branches

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A BRAT's Life

Scan this QR code for a YouTube video about frequent military moves from the point of view of a military child.

References

Scan the QR Code to access to the references used for this presentation.

Point of Contact

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