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## The Invisible Brats: Bringing Attention to the Unique Experiences of Coast Guard-Connected Youth

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University of San Francisco

**The Invisible Brats: Bringing Attention to the Unique Experiences of Coast Guard-  
Connected Youth**

A Thesis Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Education International and Multicultural Education Department

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in International and Multicultural Education

By

Cameron Aaron Marshall

May 2023

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis delves into the unique experiences of Coast Guard-connected youth, filling a gap in the academic literature by examining their challenges due to their nomadic upbringing. Utilizing in-depth interviews with 14 adults, including seven who grew up in Coast Guard families, the study underscores the effects of frequent relocations, isolation, and insufficient support on their lives. Although comparisons to military-connected children are drawn, the focus remains on understanding the distinct adversities encountered by Coast Guard-connected youth. Participants acknowledge the adaptability and social skills acquired from their upbringing while uncovering the emotional burden and difficulties in establishing a sense of identity. By analyzing their narratives, this thesis emphasizes the necessity of comprehending Coast Guard families' unique and specific needs. In doing so, it seeks to inform the development of targeted support systems that ensure the well-being, stability, and growth of children growing up in these singular environments, ultimately contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities faced by Coast Guard-connected youth and their families.



## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

My path to graduate school at the University of San Francisco has been markedly distinct compared to many others. Owing to my father's Coast Guard career, our family faced frequent relocations, moving between port cities roughly every 2-3 years. In fact, the longest I lived in one place was four years, and that was a singular occurrence. By the time I turned 18, I had already experienced five cross-country moves and had traveled through or lived in 48 states. My education mirrored this nomadic lifestyle, spanning preschool in Connecticut, kindergarten through 1st grade in Massachusetts (across three different schools), 2nd and 3rd grades in California (two different schools), 4th through 7th grades in Virginia (again, two different schools), 8th grade back in California, and finally splitting my high school years between California and Virginia. The day after my high school graduation, staying in a hotel, my family and I relocated from Virginia to Washington, where I promptly decided to join the United States Air Force. Throughout my upbringing, I never considered this lifestyle particularly unusual; it was simply how things were for me and my family.

Coast Guard-connected children/youth develop exceptional resilience and adaptability due to the unique challenges we face. Frequently experiencing our parents' extended deployments and potentially hazardous assignments, we encounter obstacles distinct from those of civilian and other military families. As a part of a Coast Guard family, we are exposed to constant relocation, prolonged family separations, and the inherent uncertainties of our parents' service. We often grapple with the isolation of living in remote areas with little to no access to other Coast Guard communities, or military communities in general. Despite these hardships, we consistently exhibit courage and adaptability, honing our skills and becoming valuable social

assets. This research explores the unique experiences of military-connected children/youth, specifically focusing on those associated with the United States Coast Guard.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Military-connected youth in the United States confront many unique challenges, such as extended deployments, frequent household relocations, and various military-related stressors (Flake et al., 2015). The cumulative effects of these challenges can result in a range of adverse health and educational outcomes, including diminished academic and professional performance, heightened levels of anxiety and depression, and elevated stress levels (Chandra et al., 2010). With over two million military-connected children in the United States, addressing these issues has become a pressing concern (Flake et al., 2015). Although research has long delved into the experiences of military children, there remains a lack of studies focusing on children affiliated with the United States Coast Guard, whose lived experiences significantly diverge from those of their counterparts in other service branches (Air Force, Army, Navy, & Marines) (Ponterotto et al., 2013). Considering the distinct lifestyle of military-connected children, specifically Coast Guard-connected children, a more comprehensive understanding of this population's needs is essential, encompassing their experiences as both children and adults. Throughout this thesis, I will be utilizing both the terms children and youth, but for the sake of brevity, please know that when either of these terms are used they are referring to those aged 0-18.

This study seeks to bridge the gap in the literature by exploring the experiences of Coast Guard-connected children and how they might differ from other military-connected children. By examining how the unique stressors of growing up in a Coast Guard family contribute to their development, this study aims to identify potential risk factors and how to support their unique set of needs. This study will fill the gaps in previous studies by exploring how different military-

connected children have tried to cope with the vast stressors associated with their military upbringing, primarily focusing on those who grew up with parents in the United States Coast Guard.

### **Background and Need**

Like other military children, Coast Guard-connected children are an underserved population that often experiences unique circumstances not faced by their nonmilitary peers (Lincoln et al., 2016). Due to the frequent relocations, separations, and deployments of their parent(s), these children may experience psychological, behavioral, professional, and academic difficulties (Fail et al., 2004; Chandra et al., 2010). Studies have found that military children, including Coast Guard-connected children, are more likely to experience adjustment issues such as increased behavioral problems, lower academic performance, and higher levels of emotional distress (Grymonprez, 2021; Flake et al., 2015). Additionally, these children may struggle with social isolation and difficulty forming and maintaining relationships (Mmari et al., 2009). Military-connected students may also face higher stress levels due to the traumatic events they may witness or experience due to their parent's service (Chandra et al., 2010).

The need to study Coast Guard-connected children as adults is based on their unique challenges, which may differ from other military-connected children. These children have often experienced frequent moves, parental absences, and unique cultural and educational experiences (Astor et al., 2010; Ponterotto et al., 2013). They have also faced several challenges related to the deployment of their parents, such as separation anxiety, changes in routines, and decreased parental involvement in their lives (Chandra et al., 2010). These children are often exposed to various social, economic, and educational stressors, such as limited access to quality education and healthcare services (which can vary significantly from location to location) and the challenge

of navigating a new culture/way of life each time they move (Astor et al., 2010). Other challenges these Coast Guard-connected children may have faced include the difficulty of adapting to new environments, the stresses of dealing with a family member being deployed overseas or in a hostile environment, or the challenges associated with the sudden death of a parent (Flake et al., 2015).

Overall, it is clear that Coast Guard-connected children face many challenges that can significantly impact their academic, social, and emotional development. This population has unique experiences that differ from other military-connected children, making it essential to study them specifically so that we might be able to identify strategies that can support their educational, professional, and social success (Ponterotto et al., 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This thesis aims to conduct a qualitative research approach to better understand, explore, and generate knowledge about the life experiences of military-connected children in the US, with a concentrated focus on Coast Guard-connected children. The research will explore the various impacts of Coast Guard life on children, such as their experiences with deployments, moving, and adapting to new cultures and environments. This research will identify the Coast Guard child's strengths, challenges, and coping mechanisms as they navigate their unique lifestyles, and how, as middle-aged adults, these children draw on these experiences and lessons from childhood. The study of these children is of vital importance because of the unique experiences and challenges that they face.

Given the unique experiences that Coast Guard families encounter, it is essential to know how these experiences impact the well-being of this particular demographic. Studying these children can provide valuable insights into the experiences of Coast Guard families and inform

policies and programs designed to support them. Additionally, studying these children as adults can provide a greater understanding of this population's psychological, professional, and educational needs and inform the development of interventions and supports to meet those needs. The stories of those who grew up in the Coast Guard and other military service families will be gathered to examine the overall health, academic, professional, and psychosocial outcomes of growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child. By exploring the life factors associated with these outcomes, this study will provide a better understanding of the challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected children. Ultimately, this study will contribute to the development of effective strategies for supporting the long-term well-being of not only Coast Guard-connected children but children from all branches of the military.

### **Research Questions**

This thesis aims to understand the unique experiences of military children, focusing on Coast Guard-connected children, and their families. It seeks to answer questions such as: What are the unique challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected children? How did these children cope with the unique challenges brought on by their parents' service? What are the long-term effects of growing up in such a manner on a child's mental, emotional, and physical health as they approach the halfway point of their life, and how do these experiences influence their personal and professional development?

### **Theoretical Framework**

To fully understand the unique challenges Coast Guard-connected children and military-connected children face, the theoretical framework for this thesis will be based on the literature surrounding Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and Abraham Maslow's theory on the Sense of Belonging. From Schlossberg's Transition theory, one

could conclude that military children's frequent transitions can be challenging. Also, a significant challenge arises when most of these children must make many transitions at once (Sullivan et al., 2019). As Abraham Maslow's Sense of Belonging Theory suggests (1995), the success of these children in college and the professional world significantly depends on the connection and attachment that the basics of life offer, which contributes to the overall child's success as an adult. Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel, can also provide insights into how Coast Guard and military-connected children develop and maintain their identity as part of the military community, which can contribute to their sense of belonging and success in the future (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Nancy Schlossberg developed a theory that deals with an individual's ability to transition through different life changes. Schlossberg's Transition Theory deals with four types of changes: situational, developmental, transactional, and transformational (Sullivan et al., 2019). Situational changes are changes beyond the individual's control, such as weather changes. Developmental changes are changes the individual has some control over, such as a change in their job. Transactional changes are changes that involve some exchange, such as a change in a relationship. Transformational changes affect a complete change in the individual, such as their identity. Schlossberg explained three critical concepts of transition theory. The three key concepts are self-concept, environmental support, and coping ability. Self-concept is how individuals see themselves. Environmental support is the support that the individual has from their environment. Coping ability is the individual's ability to cope with change (Railsback, 2019). For instance, an individual with a positive self-concept and much environmental support is likelier to cope better with change than an individual with a negative self-concept and no ecological support. However, even if an individual has a negative self-concept and no

environmental support, they can still cope with change if they have a high coping ability.

According to Schlossberg's Transition Theory, military-connected children undergo four transitions: social, emotional, intellectual, and physical. Social transitions involve changes in their social environment, such as moving to a new town or starting a new school. Emotional transitions involve changes in their emotional state, such as feeling sad or anxious about a move. Intellectual transitions include differences in cognitive abilities, such as learning to read or write in a new language. Physical transitions involve changes in their physical environment, such as moving to a new climate or living in a new country (Sullivan et al., 2019). For instance, a military family who moves from Virginia to Alaska may experience all four transitions. Military children often must deal with frequent moves, which can be challenging. They are forced to make new friends, learn new things, and adapt to new surroundings (Sullivan et al., 2019). Their parents may also be away for long periods, which can be hard on the family. However, military children often develop a strong sense of adaptability and resilience, which can help them in their future lives.

Military-connected children and their experiences at all school levels through adulthood can be explained using the Sense of Belonging Theory (Maslow, 1995). The sense of belonging theory states that individuals need to feel connected and attached to others to thrive and succeed. This theory can be applied to military children and their success in college/university and the professional world because these children often move around during their formative years and may not have much of a sense of stability. This can make it difficult for them to form attachments and feel connected to others. However, military-connected children who are successful in college/university/professionally have found ways to form attachments and create a sense of belonging despite their unstable upbringing.

Military children can find a sense of belonging in the military community. They can develop strong bonds with other military families and learn to value teamwork and cooperation (Johnson et al., 2014). These skills can help them succeed in all levels of academia and into adulthood. This sense of belonging and support can help military children thrive in college and university. In addition, many military children go on to have successful careers due partly to the skills and values they learned while growing up in the military community. Skills such as teamwork, adaptability, and resilience are highly valued in the workplace, and military children tend to have these skills in spades.

As Maslow's Sense of Belonging Theory suggests, the success of military-connected children in college and the professional world significantly depends on the connection and attachment that the basics of life offer, contributing to the overall child's success as an adult (Maslow, 1995). Despite the challenges of frequent moves and instability, military-connected children who are able to form attachments and create a sense of belonging can thrive academically and professionally. The values and skills they learn while growing up in the military community can also contribute to their success in the workplace. It is crucial to support military-connected children and help them form attachments and a sense of belonging within the military community and beyond to set them up for success in all areas of their lives.

Social Identity Theory, developed by Henri Tajfel, focuses on the individual's understanding of their identity within a particular social group and the impact of this understanding on their behavior and emotions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the context of military-connected children, Social Identity Theory can help explain how these children develop and maintain their identity as part of the military community. Tajfel's theory suggests that individuals have a need to identify with groups that share common beliefs, values, and experiences (Tajfel &



Turner, 1979). For military-connected children, their shared experiences of frequent moves and parental deployment can create a sense of identity as part of the military community. This identity can provide a sense of belonging and purpose, which is particularly important for children who struggle to form attachments and feel rooted in any place.

Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals are motivated to maintain a positive self-image as part of their social identity group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). For military-connected children, this may involve emphasizing the unique experiences and skills they have gained from their upbringing in the military community. This positive self-image can contribute to their college/university and professional success, as they bring a strong sense of identity and purpose.

Coast Guard and military-connected children face unique challenges due to the frequent transitions and instability that come with their parents' service. However, theories such as Transition Theory, Sense of Belonging Theory, and Social Identity Theory can provide insights into how these children can successfully navigate these challenges and thrive in their personal and professional lives. These children can overcome adversity and achieve their goals by developing strong coping skills, forming attachments and a sense of belonging, and maintaining a positive self-image as part of the military community.

### **Methodology**

Data collection was mainly conducted through the use of interviews. The participants included 14 adults aged 40-50, who grew up in a military household (seven from the Coast Guard/seven from other military branches) and came from various backgrounds. These participants were interviewed individually and remotely via Zoom. The data collected was analyzed using qualitative analysis techniques. These techniques help identify key data themes and patterns to better understand how military-connected children experience life from early

childhood to current times. The analysis also considers the context of each participant's experience, such as their family dynamics, environment's cultural and social aspects, and other relevant factors. Along with these experiences, the theoretical frameworks mentioned previously (Transition, Belonging, and Social Identity) were also drawn upon to help get a deeper understanding of the data.

The findings are broken down into separate themes, better to provide an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences. The results of this study are used to examine the experiences of military-connected children, including how their military upbringing impacted them, the challenges they faced, and how their experiences shaped their lives. It also explores the effects of family dynamics, support systems, and other military-based life factors in the development of these individuals.

Protecting human subjects was of the utmost importance in the execution of this project. Participants were engaged in the informed consent process by explaining the research project and its goals, ensuring that they understood their rights as participants, and provided with a copy of the consent form to keep. All participants were informed of the study methods and asked to present any questions before the interview began. Confidentiality of records was maintained throughout the project. Names of participants were not used to protect the participants' identities, and contact information was stored in a separate file from the raw data. All data is password-protected and stored in a secure, encrypted location. Potential risk factors, such as uncomfortable topics and emotionally charged conversations, were identified and discussed with the participants. A plan for minimizing these risks was put in place. Potential benefits, such as the potential for increased understanding of military-connected children and the opportunity to shed

light on the experiences of a typically underrepresented population, were also discussed with the participants.

### **Limitations/Delimitations of the Study**

The small sample size means that this study's results cannot be used to define/articulate/illustrate the experiences of the population of either Coast Guard-connected children or military-connected children as a whole. Data was collected through research and interviews, which may impact the accuracy and validity of the responses given. The study's reliance on self-report data may introduce a bias, as participants may not accurately recall their experiences or feel uncomfortable sharing certain information. The focus of this study includes a delimitation because it is limited to a specific period in life and may not capture the full complexity of the experience of military children over a more extended period of time (i.e., past middle age). Characteristics of the sample could be different from the characteristics of the larger population of both Coast Guard-connected children and military-connected children; as this study will focus solely on children currently between the ages of 40-50, their upbringings will differ vastly from generations that came before and after them, so this would also be a delimitation. Additionally, the study's use of Zoom interviews may limit non-verbal communication and may not accurately capture the nuances of in-person interactions. Finally, the study's focus on American military-connected children may not be generalizable to military-connected children in other countries or cultural contexts.

### **Researcher Positionality**

Finally, it should be noted that I, the author, hold my own positionality toward the topic, which may have shaped the data collection and interpretation process, causing me to possibly overlook certain aspects or focus too heavily on other factors. I did my best to be aware of how

this positionality shapes the research in ways that limit it. The study focuses on the various aspects of Coast Guard-connected children's lives, such as their challenges, resilience, and the unique opportunities a military-connected life can offer. I have personally experienced military life as a child and an adult, having spent my first 18 years as a child whose father was in the United States Coast Guard, then another 18 years as an active duty member of the United States Air Force. I provide a unique perspective on this topic more than many of my peers. My positionality is also an asset in terms of gaining access to participants, and having credibility and trustworthiness with them. I am passionate about uncovering more about the experiences of fellow military-connected children and discovering the impacts these experiences have made on their overall way of life. My work will provide an understanding of these experiences (both positive and negative), how they cope with them, their opportunities, and how they contribute to their ways of being. I believe I have a solid understanding of military culture and its impact on family and self dynamics, which will add to the overall breadth of this research.

### **Importance of the Project**

This thesis may help many current students, their families, teachers, professionals, researchers, professors, and administrators in the Coast Guard-connected child's life and the children themselves. It may be necessary for students and families because it offers insights into the unique experiences of being a Coast Guard-connected child and how they can be better supported. In addition, this research may also interest authors of legislation because it provides a basis for additional insight for creating policies that support military-connected children, particularly those in Coast Guard families, both during their years navigating school and as they enter the world as a professional. It may also hold significance for practitioners like teachers and counselors because it provides evidence-based resources for helping Coast Guard-connected

children and their families. Finally, this study may be necessary to researchers in these children's lives because it offers a window into the current state of knowledge in the field and identifies gaps in the research, which can provide direction for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **The Long-lasting Effects of Military Life on Children: A Literature Review**

Growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child presents a unique set of advantageous and challenging experiences. Unfortunately, there is a scarcity of literature specifically targeting Coast Guard-connected children, necessitating that this literature review focuses primarily on military-connected children as a whole. Numerous studies and reports delve into the multifaceted lives of American military-connected children, examining the effects of their upbringing on various aspects, such as education, leadership skills, and relationships. This literature review aims to synthesize these existing studies, forming a solid foundation for the current research. The review is divided into three sub-sections: the advantages and disadvantages of military-connected childhood, the impact of this upbringing on the transition to college life, and its influence on the transition to adulthood. By exploring these themes, we will better understand the complexities Coast Guard-connected children face and identify areas for further research and support.

#### **Advantages and Disadvantages of Childhood as a Military-Connected Child**

Growing up as a military-connected child offers distinct advantages and challenges. Recognizing that these experiences are not easily summarized as solely positive or negative is essential. For example, the most significant aspect of a military-connected child's upbringing is frequent relocations, a double-edged sword. On one hand, these children are exposed to diverse cultures and environments, fostering adaptability, resilience, and strong social skills. On the other hand, they face the struggles of constant adjustments to new schools, rootlessness, and a lack of stable relationships. It is crucial to recognize that the experience of the military-connected child is not easily characterized as solely positive or negative. This section will

provide an overview of the main benefits and challenges faced by military-connected children, to better display a balanced perspective that acknowledges the complexity of their childhood experiences.

Military life presents numerous advantages for children, contributing to their overall development and skillset. Military-connected children often have the opportunity to live in a wide range of places, exposing them to different cultures and customs (Grymonprez, 2021). This exposure fosters adaptability, flexibility, and appreciation for diversity (Pinchart, 2018). These children frequently travel, enabling them to experience unique parts of the world and gain a broader understanding of cultural differences.

A significant advantage of a military-connected childhood is the development of resilience and adaptability in new surroundings (Grymonprez, 2021). They often exhibit strong values (de Vroedt, 2020), which along with their unique characteristics, contribute to their multicultural leadership skills. Military life exposes them to diverse people and cultures, travel, independence, resourcefulness, innovation, and self-reliance, valuable qualities in adulthood (Hunt, 2018).

Another advantage is the development of strong social skills. Military-connected children often interact with individuals from diverse backgrounds, which enhances their communication abilities and empathy (Hunt, 2018). They learn to connect with others on a deeper level, understanding and valuing different perspectives. This skill set benefits various aspects of life, including personal relationships, academics, and future career opportunities.

There is also the positive aspect of being a military-connected child concerning the opportunities to develop robust support networks. Military families often form tight-knit communities, offering encouragement and assistance to one another during times of need

(Grymonprez, 2021). This sense of camaraderie and belonging helps children build strong connections and lasting friendships, providing a solid foundation for emotional well-being. In saying this, military-connected children also show strong independence, which is another crucial advantage, as they learn to be self-sufficient and resourceful, developing innovation and self-reliance due to their parents' periodic absence (Hunt, 2018). They often acquire valuable life skills, such as resilience, perseverance, and problem-solving abilities (Pinchart, 2018). These children adapt to various challenges and uncertainties, learning to overcome obstacles and thrive in a range of situations. These essential life skills contribute to their success in both personal and professional endeavors, setting them up for a bright future.

Despite the numerous advantages, military-connected children also face various challenges. Frequent relocations often result in difficulties in making friends, adjusting to new school environments, and coping with the stress of their parents' deployments (Grymonprez, 2021). Military leaders and educators must collaborate to provide the necessary support for these children and their families.

Military-connected children also tend to fall under the category of "Third Culture Kids" (TCKs), who have spent most of their childhood living in a culture different from their parents or passport country and face unique challenges (Fail et al., 2004). They often struggle with rootlessness, disconnection, and difficulties forming long-term attachments due to constant relocation (de Vroedt, 2020; Moore & Barker, 2012). TCKs may also have trouble identifying with any culture, leading to feelings of not belonging anywhere. In international schools' multicultural settings, students may experience a sense of isolation or confusion as they navigate their place in a new community (Mmari et al., 2010).



One of the significant disadvantages military-connected children may face is the interruption of their education. Frequent moves can result in gaps in their academic studies, and they may struggle to catch up or adjust to new curriculums (Grymonprex, 2021). This can lead to academic setbacks and difficulties in reaching their full potential. The literature relating to the academic experience will be further explored in the next section.

Another challenge for military-connected children is the emotional toll of their parents' deployments. Children may experience anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues related to the stress of their parent's absence and the potential danger they face (Grymonprex, 2021). This can impact their overall well-being and academic performance.

Military-connected children may also face discrimination or prejudice due to their family's affiliation with the military, or because they might not look or act like anyone in their constantly changing and distinct environments. They may be labeled as "military brats" or face negative stereotypes from others who do not understand their unique circumstances (de Vroedt, 2020). This can lead to feelings of isolation and difficulty forming meaningful connections with peers.

The military child experience is a complex blend of advantages and disadvantages, characterized by constant changes, relocations, exposure to diverse people and cultures, having a parent away for long periods of time, and lacking a parental role model in daily life (Grymonprex, 2021). These children develop unique characteristics and values contributing to their multicultural leadership skills. However, these same experiences expose them to intensified challenges, particularly in the realm of education. As we transition from the advantages and disadvantages of childhood as a military-connected child, we delve deeper into the educational

experiences these children face and the impact of their unique circumstances on their learning journey.

### **The Educational Experiences of Military-Connected Children**

Military-connected children encounter distinct challenges throughout their K-12 educational experiences (Grymonprex, 2021). Frequent relocations often lead to inconsistent academic progress due to variations in curricula, state standards, and teaching methods (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Despite these obstacles, research has demonstrated that military-connected children typically perform as well as or surpass their non-military-connected peers in all areas of academia (Bradshaw et al., 2010). This resilience may be attributed to their adaptability and exposure to diverse educational environments.

Transitioning to new schools can be daunting for military-connected children, but schools can facilitate this process by offering counseling services, orientation programs, and academic support systems (Burrell et al., 2006). Extracurricular activities are valuable avenues for fostering social connections, personal development, and a sense of belonging. However, frequent relocations may limit military-connected children's involvement and long-term commitment to these activities (Chandra et al., 2011).

The social-emotional well-being of military-connected children is paramount, as they may face emotional challenges due to their parent's deployment and frequent family separations (Grymonprex, 2021). Schools can address these concerns by providing mental health services, peer support groups, and programs designed to build resilience, coping skills, and emotional intelligence (Huebner & Mancini, 2005).

Military-connected children with special education needs may encounter difficulties accessing consistent support and services due to frequent relocations (Davis & Finke, 2017). This may include disparities in available resources, evaluations, and accommodations across different schools and districts. By understanding and proactively addressing these unique challenges, schools can create an inclusive environment that enables military-connected children to achieve academic success and personal growth.

After navigating the challenges of K-12 education, many military-connected children continue their academic journey by transitioning to college or university. As these students enter higher education, they carry the skills, experiences, and resilience developed during their formative years. While some challenges may persist or evolve, military children's qualities and strengths can help them adapt and succeed in college or university. This next section will explore military children's unique experiences and successes in higher education settings.

Military children often face challenges in college, but their intelligence, adaptability, and maturity contribute to their success (Grymonprez, 2021; Hunt, 2018; Johnson et al., 2014). Due to their military upbringing, these students may exhibit more discipline and organization than civilian students. Success in higher education is often attributed to their experience with authority figures, self-reliance, resourcefulness, and exposure to different cultures and lifestyles. Military children's strong leadership skills, sense of duty and responsibility, work ethic, positive outlook on life, self-reliance, and resourcefulness are essential for success in college and university (Grymonprez, 2021; Hunt, 2018; Johnson et al., 2014).

Hunt (2018) states that over half of military children attend four or more schools before completing high school, exposing them to frequent moves, deployments, and even the loss of a guardian or parent. Consequently, these students are more likely to experience anxiety and stress

(Johnson et al., 2014). However, military children often develop a unique sense of strength and resilience, enabling them to overcome these challenges (Grymonprez, 2021). Their greatest strengths are adaptability and flexibility to new environments and changes (Hunt, 2018).

Growing up in military families, these children typically experience frequent relocations, making it challenging to form long-lasting friendships and a sense of belonging (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Railsback (2019) suggests military children may be emotionally disadvantaged in college education. Nonetheless, studies have shown their success in college due to their adaptability and maturity, which comes from dealing with responsibility at an early age (Pinchart, 2018; Railsback, 2018).

The success of military children in college compared to civilian counterparts depends on various factors, including individual abilities, motivation, support systems, and the college they attend. Military-connected children may have advantages in college, such as being accustomed to change and having more discipline and organization due to their upbringing (Railsback, 2019). On the other hand, some may find the transition to college life more difficult due to their strict lifestyle or difficulty in making friends (Railsback, 2019).

Successful military children in college and university often exhibit self-reliance and resourcefulness, knowing how to find information and support when needed (Grymonprez, 2021). Exposure to different cultures and lifestyles helps them understand and appreciate diversity (Fail et al., 2004). Their independence and self-reliance, developed while caring for themselves and their households during deployments, can contribute to their success in higher education and the workforce.

Military children's exposure to various educational opportunities and strong leadership skills can benefit college and university success (Mmari et al., 2010). They often have a sense of

duty, responsibility, loyalty, and a strong work ethic. Their community activities foster a strong sense of community, support, and care for others. Military children's optimistic outlook on life and ability to adapt to diverse cultural settings in college and university assists in their transition to higher education (Mmari et al., 2010). Military children who excel in college and university have developed essential qualities such as self-reliance, resourcefulness, and adaptability through life experiences. While they may face unique challenges in college, their background often equips them with the skills and resilience necessary for success in higher education and the life that awaits them after.

As we conclude our exploration of the educational experiences of military-connected children, it is essential to highlight the financial aspect of pursuing higher education. Cost often factors into deciding whether someone wishes to pursue a college education, and it should be noted that military-connected children are often eligible for scholarships and financial aid programs designed to support their higher education pursuits. Additionally, colleges and universities may have dedicated offices or staff members to assist military-connected students in navigating their education's academic, social, and financial aspects. These resources can play a vital role in helping military children succeed in their academic and career goals (Hunt, 2018). As we examine the challenges that await military-connected children in their transition to adulthood, we will further explore how these resources and experiences shape their journey toward personal and professional success.

### **The Move into Adulthood and the Challenges That Await**

As military children transition into adulthood, they face unique challenges stemming from their childhood experiences. Frequent moves, changes in schools and communities, parental deployments, trauma exposure, and family members' loss can significantly impact their adult

lives (de Vroedt, 2022; Schale, 2010). These experiences may lead to difficulties in forming attachments, trust issues, and struggles with mental health, such as anxiety and depression. The transition to civilian life may also be challenging for them. However, military children's resilience, a strong sense of community, adaptability, and resourcefulness can help them thrive in adulthood with the proper support (Hunt, 2018).

Cultural homelessness, the feeling of not belonging to any particular culture, can be particularly challenging for military children who frequently move and lack a solid connection to a specific place (Hoersting, 2011). As they transition into adulthood, this cultural homelessness can manifest in various ways, including difficulties securing stable employment and forming social connections. These challenges, in turn, can contribute to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation, directly impacting their adult lives (Hoersting, 2011).

The constant moving associated with military life disrupts families and has long-term consequences for military children as they become adults (McCallister, 1997). Frequent relocation hinders their ability to form lasting attachments to their peers and establish a sense of belonging within a community, resulting in difficulties in forming and maintaining stable relationships in adulthood. Additionally, the strain on marriages and intimate relationships within military families can leave lasting impressions on children, potentially affecting their own adult relationships and their ability to establish a sense of stability and security (McCallister, 1997). The challenges of maintaining stable employment and financial security, coupled with the emotional impact of constant moving, can contribute to increased stress and decreased overall well-being in their adult lives.

Military children face significant challenges in forming lasting attachments and friendships due to frequent relocations, which can have long-term consequences as they transition into adulthood (Bonebright, 2010). The constant adjustments to new surroundings can lead to feelings of isolation and rootlessness, which may persist into their adult lives and affect their ability to build and maintain strong support networks. Growing up in a military culture distinct from the civilian world can create difficulties adjusting to civilian life, leading to feelings of disconnection from the larger society and potential struggles in navigating professional and social environments (Bonebright, 2010). Additionally, meeting the high expectations of parents and other adults in their lives can leave military children with lasting feelings of pressure and anxiety, which may further impact their self-esteem, mental health, and decision-making in adulthood.

The challenge of cross-cultural identities for military children transitioning into adulthood can be particularly daunting (Hoersting & Jenkins, 2011). Feeling disconnected from any specific culture and struggling to find a sense of belonging may result in confusion, isolation, and difficulty forming lasting relationships. This cultural dissonance can also affect their self-identity and lead to self-doubt and insecurity, causing them to question their place in either culture or feel forced to choose between them (McCallister, 1997; Schale, 2010).

Military children who feel like outsiders and constantly compare themselves to others may develop self-esteem issues (Hoersting, 2011). In their adult lives, low self-esteem can limit their willingness to pursue opportunities and increase their susceptibility to depression and anxiety. Furthermore, it may lead to engaging in risky or harmful behaviors, such as substance abuse, further compounding the challenges these individuals face in adulthood.

Exposure to violence or trauma, coupled with the constant moving experienced by military children, may result in trust issues that persist into adulthood (Schale, 2010). Witnessing the devastating effects of violence and experiencing frequent parental deployments can hinder their ability to form close attachments with others. Trauma-induced changes in brain development may further affect their capacity to trust others, making it difficult for them to foster strong, lasting relationships as they transition into adulthood (Schale, 2010).

As military children face these challenges when transitioning into adulthood, it is crucial to recognize the support systems and resources available to them. Military families often have access to unique programs and services to assist with education, mental health, and career development. These resources aim to ease the transition to civilian life and help military children overcome the obstacles they may encounter as adults (Hunt, 2018).

Furthermore, mental health resources, such as counseling and therapy services, are available to military children and their families. These services can support coping with trauma, dealing with anxiety and depression, and fostering resilience in the face of adversity. Access to these resources can be invaluable in helping military children overcome the mental health challenges they may face as they transition into adulthood (de Vroedt, 2022).

### **Moving Forward: A Recap on the Lives of Military-Connected Children**

This literature review provides substantial evidence that military-connected children demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of numerous life stressors. However, their unique challenges resulting from frequent relocations and the need for a sense of belonging can impact their lives negatively. The challenges highlighted in this review include difficulties forming lasting relationships, adverse effects on their education, and the challenges of transitioning to college and life beyond.



The literature reveals that frequent relocation can hinder military children's ability to develop strong bonds with peers and form a sense of community, leading to feelings of rootlessness and dislocation. Additionally, transitioning to college can be daunting for military-connected children, given their structured upbringing and difficulty forming new relationships with peers. Nonetheless, exposure to diverse cultures can offer positive experiences and foster respect for diversity. As military children grow into adulthood, they may experience difficulties with cultural homelessness, affecting their mental health, employment prospects, and relationships. The success of military-connected children in college and beyond depends on various factors, including individual skills, support networks, and college and career choices.

In light of the challenges military-connected children face, this literature review underscores the need for strategies and interventions tailored to their unique experiences. As we move forward to Chapter 3, we will delve into the unique narratives and experiences of Coast Guard-connected children, to gain a deeper understanding of their stories. By identifying and analyzing the common themes that emerge from their experiences, we can develop targeted support systems and interventions to help these individuals overcome their challenges and pave the way for their success and well-being in adulthood.

## CHAPTER III

### **Through Their Eyes: Personal Narratives of Growing Up in the Coast Guard**

Growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child presents unique challenges and experiences that significantly shape our lives. In this chapter, we delve into the personal narratives of seven individuals who have navigated life as Coast Guard brats, exploring their diverse experiences through the lenses of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory. These stories encompass cherished memories, tales of hardship, trauma, adaptability, and resilience, offering valuable insights into the intricate and often overlooked world of Coast Guard-connected children. By analyzing the shared themes and unique aspects of their experiences, this exploration aims to foster a more profound understanding of the obstacles, strengths, and support systems that influence the lives of these military-connected individuals.

Each interview participant's story was unique, with some reminiscing about cherished moments living on Coast Guard stations (including a lighthouse!) while others recount harrowing struggles with poverty, racism, and emotional challenges. A recurring observation throughout these narratives is the absence of emotional support from parents and adults in general during frequent relocations, leading to difficulties in forming lasting relationships. The interview participants often convey the sentiment that the experience of growing up as a Coast Guard child

is more isolated compared to other military branches, primarily due to the lack of established community and support systems.

However, many interview subjects emphasize the adaptability and resilience they have cultivated through these experiences in the face of adversity. They acknowledge the advantages of military life, such as the structure and support it offers families while shedding light on potential resource deficiencies and assistance at many Coast Guard stations.

By examining these diverse experiences and incorporating Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory, we seek to explore further and understand the distinctive aspects of growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child, aspects that often differed from my own, and the lasting implications for their adult lives. These narratives aim to create a comprehensive picture of the Coast Guard-connected child experience, celebrating the strengths developed in the face of adversity and understanding their unique challenges. This chapter will explore three main themes: Navigating Transitions, Creating Community, and Developing Identity. These themes will provide insights into Coast Guard-connected children's unique challenges and opportunities. However, before getting into the personal narratives of the seven Coast Guard-connected individuals interviewed and the related themes, I feel it is crucial to establish a contextual backdrop by examining the fundamental aspects that differentiate their experiences from those of other military backgrounds.

### **The Distinctive Experiences of Growing Up in a Coast Guard Family**

The lives of Coast Guard-connected children are a tapestry of unique experiences, woven together by the thread of military life. While they share common threads with children from other military branches, the distinctiveness of their upbringing sets them apart, making this thesis an essential exploration of their stories.

One of the defining characteristics of Coast Guard-connected children is their immersion in a smaller, closely-knit community. As the smallest branch of the U.S. military, the active-duty Coast Guard force comprises approximately 41,000 active-duty members (USCG, 2021). Perhaps that number might seem high, but when you compare it to other branches of the military and their active duty numbers (U.S. Army - 482,000, U.S. Navy - 332,000, U.S. Air Force - 327,000, and the U.S. Marine Corps - 184,000), you really get an idea of how small this community really is (SRD, 2021). This fosters an environment where relationships among service members and their families are more intimate, promoting a heightened sense of camaraderie and support.

The unique mission of the Coast Guard also plays a significant role in shaping the experiences of these children. While they share the challenges of frequent relocations, deployments, and family separations with their peers from other military branches, the nature of the Coast Guard's operations differentiates their experiences. Maritime safety, security, and environmental protection are at the heart of the Coast Guard's mission, often leading to shorter yet more frequent deployments (USCG, 2021). These deployments can involve search and rescue operations, maritime law enforcement, or environmental responses, providing a distinct context for the separations Coast Guard-connected children endure.

Coast Guard families' geographical locations further contribute to their experiences' distinctiveness. Typically stationed near coastlines, large cities, ports, and waterways, these children are exposed to unique coastal environments and maritime cultures (USCG, 2021). Such exposure can foster a deep connection to marine life and coastal communities, which may be absent for children from other military branches or civilian backgrounds. It's important to

remember that, more often than not, these stations are typically nowhere near bases from other military branches.

Like other military children, Coast Guard-connected children face the challenges of frequently changing schools and forming new friendships. However, the shared experiences and smaller community might make it easier for them to connect with other Coast Guard-connected children, however rare those occasions may be. Moreover, given the Coast Guard's affiliation with the Department of Homeland Security rather than the Department of Defense, these families often live and work in close proximity to civilian communities. This provides Coast Guard-connected children with more opportunities for interaction with non-military children, thus enriching their understanding of civilian life and promoting adaptability.

Having briefly explored the distinctive experiences and challenges Coast Guard-connected children face compared to other military-connected children, we now focus on the narratives that bring these experiences to life. In the next section, we will explore a poignant and illustrative account of a child's journey through the unique world of a Coast Guard family. By sharing these stories, I hope to provide a tangible representation of the resilience, adaptability, and invaluable lessons these children acquire as they navigate their formative years in the ever-changing landscape of Coast Guard life.

### **Two Rock Chronicles: Coast Guard Kids' Enduring Bonds**

When I decided to focus my thesis on the experiences of Coast Guard youth, it was surprisingly easy to find willing participants. I selected interviewees who shared a part of my childhood with me while living on the only Coast Guard base many of us had ever experienced, the US Coast Guard Training Center Petaluma (CGTCP) aka Two Rock. Although our time together as kids on the base dates back to the early 90s, we have all managed to maintain a loose

connection with one another in some way or another. Our unique bond as Coast Guard children has persisted, even as we've moved on to different stages of our lives and other communities.

Nestled in the picturesque Two Rock Valley of Northern California, CGTCP is an 800-acre training command surrounded by vast expanses of farmland. The base provided a sense of security and freedom that was unparalleled in our lives. With our parents confident in our safety, we were free to roam and explore the base, wandering through forests and interacting with various training squadrons and other aspects of the Coast Guard life. For the first time, we felt a direct connection with the Coast Guard and experienced a genuine sense of community. The base offered numerous support structures and activities designed with our well-being in mind, something we had never encountered at other duty stations. The abundant wildlife, including mountain lions, bobcats, foxes, turkeys, and deer, further enriched our experience, making it truly unforgettable.

For the majority of us, this period marked the sole occasion in which we resided in such close quarters with other Coast Guard kids, not to mention being surrounded by an entire housing development teeming with them. This unique living situation fostered a strong sense of camaraderie and belonging, as we were able to form deep connections with our peers who shared similar backgrounds and experiences. The base also presented a distinct environment for our parents. Its landlocked island status led to fewer deployments, a stark contrast to the typical Coast Guard lifestyle. This allowed them to be more present and actively engaged in our daily lives, providing us with a level of stability and support that we had not experienced at other duty stations. Our parents' increased involvement in our lives not only strengthened our family bonds but also enhanced our connection to the Coast Guard community as a whole.

Remarkably, despite the passage of over 30 years since our time at Two Rock, my conversations with fellow interviewees flowed effortlessly, as though we had just seen each other yesterday. This ease of communication can be attributed to the powerful and lasting connections we forged during our time at the base. The shared experiences we had, from exploring the base's natural surroundings to navigating the challenges of Coast Guard life, created an unbreakable bond among us that transcended both time and distance.

In essence, our time there served as a crucial foundation for our lives, shaping our personal and professional trajectories in countless ways. The unique relationships we formed with other Coast Guard kids and the support we received from our parents and the broader community have left an indelible mark on each of us. As we continue to reflect on our experiences at the base, it becomes increasingly evident that the camaraderie and shared experiences we had have played a pivotal role in forging the resilient and adaptable individuals we are today.

Each of the Two Rock kids I interviewed have gone on to lead diverse and complex lives, their stories spanning from childhood well into adulthood. While their experiences are unique to each individual, they also share striking similarities that connect us all. Like myself, most of the interviewees continued their nomadic way of living well into their adulthood, and their career choices have matched that. My interview subjects have made careers for themselves in an assortment of professional environments, from education, medical, tech, sales, art, music, and just about everything in between. They have made homes all over the United States, some still trying to find a way to “settle”. It was rare for many of us to have our careers figured out after college, let alone in our 30’s. The interviews revealed a wealth of experiences that could have easily filled an entire thesis on their own, making the task of weaving together seven such

narratives both challenging and rewarding. However, the common themes that emerged from these stories provided a detailed portrait of Coast Guard life, allowing us to better understand the unique challenges and opportunities that shaped our formative years.

This chapter showcases the diverse experiences of these seven individuals who have journeyed through the complexities of growing up as Coast Guard-connected children. Each of their stories provides a unique perspective that, when combined, unveils the challenges and triumphs of a military lifestyle. While every narrative is distinct, they collectively reveal common themes that offer insight into the intricacies and rewards of their shared experiences. The resilience, adaptability, and sense of pride that emerged from these stories are a testament to the strength of the Coast Guard community and the enduring bonds that have been forged through shared experiences.

As we delve into the lives of these remarkable individuals, it becomes clear that the challenges we faced were balanced by the unique opportunities that Coast Guard life provided. The friendships and connections formed during our time at Two Rock have left an indelible mark on each of us, shaping our personal and professional lives in countless ways. The heartfelt conversations and shared memories serve as a reminder of the power of community and the importance of providing support and resources for military-connected children and their families. As one interview put it, “I didn't know a Coast Guard kid my entire life until my years living at Two Rock. And it was the first and only time in my life that I hung out in groups. We were all vastly different, but we were also all Coast Guard kids, so it was new for most of us. But we all stuck together pretty tight, and provided so much support to each other, well past our time there. And all these years later, so many of those bonds still exist.”

### **A Coast Guard-Connected Children's Story**



The interviewees encountered many challenges navigating the complexities of growing up within the Coast Guard “community”. They often found themselves residing in underprivileged neighborhoods, confronted with scarce resources and limited opportunities. The relentless cycle of relocations made it exceedingly difficult for them to establish enduring connections and maintain friendships, frequently resulting in feelings of isolation and disconnection from their peers. In addition to the challenges of forming meaningful relationships, many interviewees faced bullying and ridicule due to their "military kid" identity, further amplifying their sense of isolation and detachment.

The emotional turmoil experienced by the interviewees was substantial, as they grappled with the anxiety of having a parent deployed on sea duty for prolonged periods, often left in the dark about when their loved ones would return. Compounding this emotional strain was the inadequate support within the Coast Guard community, leaving them to navigate these turbulent times with minimal guidance. Consequently, many interviewees battled depression and self-destructive tendencies, intensifying the difficulty of coping with military life's unrelenting changes and uncertainties.

In the face of adversity, the interviewees displayed extraordinary resilience, adaptability, and self-reliance, transforming their challenges into invaluable life lessons. Many developed close bonds with their siblings, relying on one another for support and companionship amid the constant upheaval, teaching them the art of forging new connections and building relationships quickly, a skill that proved advantageous in their ever-changing circumstances. Through their trials, the interviewees gained a deep understanding of Coast Guard life's unique challenges and rewards and recognized the critical importance of providing robust support systems and resources. This understanding fueled their desire to advocate for improved services and

assistance for Coast Guard-connected children and their families, demonstrating their resilience and commitment to their community.

A strong sense of pride in their military upbringing was evident among many interviewees, who attributed their well-rounded nature and capacity to appreciate diverse perspectives to the unique experiences they encountered during their formative years. The close-knit Coast Guard community gave them a sense of belonging and a structured environment, a beacon of stability even amid emotional upheaval. Many interviewees expressed heartfelt appreciation for their parents' selfless sacrifices in serving their country, fostering deep gratitude and admiration for the military and its members.

On the other hand, some interviewees felt detached from their military background, perceiving their personal experiences as distinct from the broader military world. This divergence in perspectives underscores the complex nature of growing up in a military family, where individual experiences can shape vastly different outlooks on their upbringing and connection to the Coast Guard community.

In this section, we delve deeper into three recurring themes - Navigating Transitions, Creating Community, and Developing Identity - exploring how these themes have shaped the lives of the interview subjects. By understanding the challenges and benefits of Coast Guard and military life, we can facilitate the provision of necessary support systems and resources to empower Coast Guard-connected children to thrive. The invaluable perspectives these individuals offer enable us to comprehend the intricacies of Coast Guard life better, providing insights that can be harnessed to support these families on their unique journeys.

### **Navigating Transitions: The Impact on Coast Guard-Connected Youth**

The first theme that emerged from the interviews with Coast Guard-connected children focuses on the constant transitions they faced, primarily due to frequent relocations. These transitions significantly impacted their lives, affecting their sense of stability, relationships, personal growth, and academic performance. On average, a typical Coast Guard-connected child moves every 2-3 years, which can take a considerable toll throughout childhood.

The constant moving created a sense of instability and presented challenges when establishing and maintaining relationships. One participant explained, "The worst part about being a Coast Guard brat is the constant moving, picking up, and leaving. I don't have those long-term, close-knit friendships like other people." Another participant echoed this sentiment and said, "Honestly, the Coast Guard brat thing, the worst part about it is moving. Just picking up and leaving." The emotional toll of these frequent moves cannot be understated, as they often disrupt the children's ability to form deep connections with others.

The instability caused by constant relocation significantly impacted Coast Guard-connected youths' social development and sense of belonging. The inability to forge long-lasting friendships meant they were always starting anew, trying to find their place in a new community and adapting to various social norms. This often led to feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety as they faced the challenge of building new relationships and support networks.

Additionally, the transient nature of their lives made it difficult for Coast Guard-connected youth to participate in extracurricular activities, clubs, or sports, further limiting their opportunities for social interaction and growth. This lack of involvement in community activities could result in a weaker sense of belonging and contribute to a more disconnected and unfulfilled childhood. The constant moving affected not only the relationships of Coast Guard-connected youths with their peers but also with their extended families. One participant shared, "My

family's families are settled all over the United States." The geographical distance between relatives made it challenging to maintain strong familial bonds, creating a sense of detachment and fragmentation within the family unit.

Participants frequently faced the challenge of moving with insufficient support from their families, which amplified the emotional burden of the transition. One participant recalled, "I don't remember my mom asking us any of us how we were doing when it came time to move." This lack of emotional support left Coast Guard-connected youth feeling overwhelmed and on their own when dealing with the various changes and adjustments required during each move.

The absence of a strong connection with other Coast Guard families added to the struggle, making it more challenging for these youths to relate to their peers who had not experienced the same lifestyle. One participant described the disconnect: "That's our realism. Like Coast Guard brats, we lived very different lives than the other military kids." This sense of isolation from their civilian and military-connected peers further intensified the difficulties that Coast Guard-connected youth encountered when navigating the numerous life transitions. Coast Guard families' lack of a built-in support network limited their ability to share experiences and coping strategies with others facing similar challenges. This absence of a shared community made it more difficult for them to find understanding, empathy, and guidance from individuals with firsthand knowledge of Coast Guard-connected child's unique struggles.

Additionally, the emotional toll of moving frequently without adequate familial support often led to feelings of detachment from their parents and siblings. This emotional distance could result in a weaker family bond, further exacerbating the sense of isolation and disconnection experienced by these young individuals. The lack of emotional support from family members and the absence of a connection with other Coast Guard families made it harder for some Coast

Guard-connected youth to manage the many transitions they faced. The resulting isolation and emotional challenges further complicate their navigation through the frequent moves and adjustments required in their unique lifestyle.

Constant relocation significantly influenced the academic performance of Coast Guard-connected children as they grappled with adapting to new curricula, teaching styles, and educational environments. The emotional upheaval of moving frequently took a toll on their ability to focus and excel academically, potentially resulting in lower grades and hindered educational progress. The challenge of adjusting to different educational standards and expectations in various schools required Coast Guard-connected youth to be highly adaptable and resourceful in their learning experiences. However, this constant adaptation could lead to gaps in knowledge or skills. The students struggled to catch up with their peers in subjects where the curriculum may have varied significantly between schools.

The emotional stress associated with frequent moves often left these individuals overwhelmed and unable to concentrate fully on their academic pursuits. Anxiety, depression, and feelings of isolation resulting from the constant transitions could further exacerbate the negative impact on their academic performance. The lack of consistent academic support and resources also played a role in the challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected youth. The transition between schools might have led to a loss of familiarity with counseling services, tutoring programs, or other academic assistance, making it difficult for them to access the help they needed to succeed academically.

The frequent moves also made it challenging for these individuals to form strong relationships with their teachers and school staff, vital for academic success. Without these

connections, Coast Guard-connected youth may have missed out on valuable mentorship, guidance, and encouragement that could have positively impacted their academic performance. The constant relocation experienced by Coast Guard-connected youth significantly affected their academic performance as they navigated the challenges of adapting to new educational environments, curricula, and teaching styles. The emotional toll of moving and insufficient academic support and resources likely further contributed to their difficulties in achieving academic success.

For some participants, the frequent moves were challenging and traumatic experiences that significantly disrupted their lives. One participant vividly recalled the emotional pain of moving during a critical time in high school: "We moved between my sophomore and junior year of high school from the East Coast to the West. I was devastated. I can remember when I was driving across the country, sleeping and laying on the floor of the van between the backseat and that middle seat, and not moving. That really messed me up." This account demonstrates the deep emotional turmoil that can accompany these life-altering transitions, particularly during formative years.

Another participant described the impact of moving on their entire family, stating, "My family and I had to give up a lot for the military. I think in the long run, we lost more than we gained." This perspective highlights the sacrifices Coast Guard families make to serve their country, including the potential long-term emotional and social costs that can outweigh the perceived benefits. These traumatic experiences can have lasting effects on the mental health and well-being of Coast Guard-connected youth. The emotional strain of constant upheaval can contribute to conditions such as depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which may persist long after the moves occur.

The disruption of their lives and the sacrifices made by their families also influenced how these individuals view and relate to the military. For some, the pain of these experiences may lead to resentment or disillusionment towards the institution that necessitated such frequent upheaval. This could create a complicated relationship with the military for these individuals as they grapple with the sacrifices made by themselves and their loved ones.

For some Coast Guard-connected youth, the constant moves were not merely challenging adjustments but traumatic experiences that profoundly disrupted their lives and had lasting emotional consequences. The sacrifices made by their families and the potential long-term impact on their mental health and well-being demonstrate the significant burden that these individuals bear as part of their unique military-connected lifestyle.

The absence of a permanent home for Coast Guard-connected children often led to feelings of insecurity and instability, which reverberated into their development and adult lives. One participant captured this sentiment: “I think you know a lot is your own self having less control, you know already so powerless as a kid. But then, you know, even sometimes your parents don't have control over where and when they're going to go, and you know that I think that can be kind of disturbing for a kid.” This statement underscores the profound influence of constant relocation on these individuals' perceptions of stability and security in their living situations.

Growing up with the reality of frequent moves, Coast Guard-connected youth may struggle to develop a sense of rootedness and long-term stability, which can impact their ability to form lasting relationships and achieve a sense of belonging in their communities. This is echoed by many of the interviewees, with one stating: “We have no concept of how to build a long, lasting relationship. We just don't. And when I think about like not only that, but like when

I think about us moving, and the lack of emotional support that we had, we are predisposed to worry about ourselves because no one else does.” This instability can have lasting ramifications on these individuals' mental and emotional well-being as they transition into adulthood. Feelings of insecurity and a lack of a stable foundation may contribute to difficulties establishing strong personal and professional relationships or settling down in a single location.

The perpetual relocation endured by Coast Guard-connected children leaves them struggling to grasp the idea of living in a single location for a long duration. This disparity highlights their unique challenges compared to their peers who have not undergone such frequent shifts. One individual shared their astonishment, saying, "But it was just kinda like I also knew, it was expected, I knew it was not gonna be permanent anywhere, and I didn't know anything else. When I hear about people who have lived in one town their whole life. I'm just like, how did they do that?"

This inability to imagine a more sedentary lifestyle underscores the substantial impact of constant moving on the lives and perspectives of Coast Guard-connected youth. The comparison to their peers who have experienced a more stable upbringing reveals the distinct challenges these individuals must navigate as they grow up and forge their paths. This different worldview may affect their relationships and social interactions, as they may find it difficult to relate to those who have not experienced a similar upbringing. The constant moving may also create a sense of restlessness and difficulty settling down as they become accustomed to regular change.

Amidst the challenges, some participants found silver linings in these transitions, viewing them as catalysts for personal growth and change. One optimistic participant said, "I've never been devastated leaving anywhere. I was always excited for the next, like sad to leave people, obviously, but I'm always excited for what's next." Another participant demonstrated this



adaptability, noting, "I can move anywhere. I'm not attached to the where. I'm very open, and I guess that's why I've been able to move so many times, often with little notice or thought put into it during my adult life like, yeah, I'll move somewhere else."

These reflections highlight the resilience and adaptability that some Coast Guard-connected youth have developed due to their frequent transitions. Instead of being overwhelmed by the challenges, they have learned to embrace change and view it as an opportunity for growth, self-discovery, and new experiences. This mindset equips them with valuable life skills and can help them navigate the uncertainties and challenges they may face in their adult lives. The ability to adapt to new environments and circumstances with ease and enthusiasm is a testament to the resilience and strength of character fostered by their military-connected upbringing.

While the constant moving has allowed some Coast Guard-connected youth to develop adaptability and resilience, it can also inadvertently create a pattern of evading problems and leaving issues unresolved. One individual candidly revealed, "When things are getting to be too much, I'll just go somewhere else like no big deal, and then start, and then start fresh, and just like nothing gets solved. But now, as I get older, it's like I should probably have taken care of some of those loose strings that are hanging around." As they mature, the necessity to tackle these "loose strings" becomes increasingly apparent, especially when confronted with more complex challenges in their adult lives.

This avoidance pattern can have long-term consequences on their personal and professional growth, as unresolved issues may resurface or accumulate over time, leading to increased stress and difficulties in various aspects of life. The constant moving may have inadvertently conditioned them to believe that starting afresh in a new place can resolve problems rather than confronting and addressing them head-on.

While adaptability and resilience are valuable traits developed by some Coast Guard-connected youth due to constant moving, they can also lead to a tendency to avoid problems and leave issues unresolved. As they grow older and face increasingly complex challenges in their adult lives, it becomes crucial for them to address these "loose strings" and develop healthier coping mechanisms to ensure personal and professional growth.

In addition to the challenges already mentioned, participants underscored the absence of stability in their living situations, further complicating their lives. One participant poignantly recalled, "Everything was always so sudden. One time my family was removed from base housing. Unsure of what to do next, we decided that we were going to go live in the car. Where am I going to school? I don't know. We lived in the car for a while until my mom figured out, you know where to go, what to do." This unpredictability introduced an extra layer of stress and uncertainty into their already demanding lives. Because the interviewee's father was away on sea duty and unable to be reached, the family was left to figure things out. It was stated that the interviewee's mother had a limited grasp of the language and an even more limited understanding of Coast Guard life. This instability in their living conditions disrupts their sense of security and affects their education, social connections, and overall well-being. As they grapple with these uncertainties, Coast Guard-connected children may find it increasingly difficult to establish a sense of normalcy or routine.

The relentless transitions encountered by Coast Guard-connected youth have profoundly impacted their lives, influencing their sense of stability, belonging, and self-awareness. The experiences of frequent moving, a lack of support, and the distinct challenges they face provide invaluable insights into Coast Guard-connected children's lives. Gaining a deeper understanding of these experiences can aid in exploring more effective methods to support them during these

transitions, ultimately laying the groundwork for enhanced resources and support systems tailored to their unique needs.

### **Creating Community: Fostering a Sense of Belonging**

The incessant relocations inherent in the lives of Coast Guard-connected children present substantial obstacles to sustaining enduring friendships and stable social life. One interviewee expressed, "I've got a lot of friends, but they're all over the states, you know, and I don't have what other people have, those close-knit/long-term friendships." Another spoke of their struggles with finding belonging, saying, "I've always felt like a little lost in that sense where I see people and groups in the community. But I just think it is just being kind of like, I've never really belonged to any group or anything, I don't really know how to go about joining groups. I know people do it all the time, but it's just kind of a foreign thing to me." Nevertheless, despite these challenges, Coast Guard-connected children frequently display remarkable social skills and adaptability. One respondent observed, "I think the Coast Guard was good for developing social skills," while another shared, "I had no problem socializing with anyone or striking up conversations."

This theme delves into how Coast Guard-connected children cultivate a sense of belonging and community amidst the constant changes they face. By developing strong social skills and adaptability, they demonstrate resilience in overcoming the challenges of their unique circumstances. In exploring this theme, we aim to uncover potential avenues for fostering a greater sense of belonging and connection for these children, ultimately supporting their emotional well-being and growth.

Coast Guard-connected children often find themselves without the support systems their peers from other military branches enjoy, as they frequently do not live on large bases with

established networks. As one interviewee pointed out, "There's a lot of lack of support for Coast Guard kids, like growing up like a lot of like nothing there in terms of the Coast Guard being there to help you like, whereas Air Force, Army, Navy, more than likely you're living on a sizable base and like everything's in place, like we got you." This lack of support can make it challenging for these children to form lasting friendships and create a sense of belonging.

Despite this, Coast Guard-connected children often develop strong bonds with fellow Coast Guard brats. These relationships can be intense and long-lasting, forming a critical source of support and connection. As one interviewee said, "I don't keep in touch with a lot of people. But, man, those Coast Guard brat friendships are just some of the best friendships I've ever had." These friendships, forged in the face of numerous challenges and relocations, hold a special place in the hearts of those who have experienced them. They offer a sense of stability and continuity in a life marked by change and uncertainty. The adaptability and social skills developed by Coast Guard-connected children during their unique upbringing provide them with a valuable set of tools that can serve them well in a variety of settings. Nevertheless, they also recognize the value of strong, long-lasting friendships, which offer a sense of rootedness and connection in an otherwise constantly changing world.

The impermanent nature of a Coast Guard-connected child's life can evoke feelings of isolation and hinder their ability to connect with others truly. Anxiety and trust issues may surface as they grapple with the fact that people often conceal their true selves behind a façade. One interviewee recounted their experience, saying, "You don't have that support system of years of you know, being friends with somebody and knowing them inside and out. I mean, I know, coming into new environments constantly, even through my adult life that you may be friends with somebody. But you know people wear masks all the time as well, right? So you find

out. They're really not who you thought they were, you know. So again you have no friends, and you continue on." Nevertheless, amidst these challenges, Coast Guard-connected children frequently find comfort in their close-knit families and siblings, who serve as their unwavering support system throughout their lives. One interviewee shared, "My best friends were my siblings, and it still kind of is that way. You know, you grow up with such a tight-knit family and the situations that we were always thrown into."

This aspect of the Coast Guard-connected experience highlights the importance of family bonds in providing stability and support. Though these children may face difficulties forming connections with others due to their transient upbringing, they often develop strong relationships with their family members, who understand their unique challenges. As a result, siblings and other family members play an essential role in fostering a sense of belonging and unity.

Coast Guard-connected children's experiences instill the ability to navigate diverse social groups and become adaptable "floaters," seamlessly moving among different social circles. This adaptability is viewed as a strength that can translate into various aspects of their lives, including roles that require strong interpersonal skills, such as sales. One interviewee observed, "I think you could be very likable and endearing very quickly with almost anybody because you can find that common denominator. I think being a military kid made that happen real quick."

Creating a supportive environment for Coast Guard-connected children to form connections with their peers is essential for their emotional well-being and growth. By understanding their experiences, we can identify ways to support them better as they navigate the challenges of constant transitions and create lasting connections. As one interviewee recounted, "We are like transients, and I'd move somewhere, and they'd actually had these groups that

they've had for a long time. Yeah, that was like something I vividly remember of being there and feeling like I didn't fit in anywhere. I was like, I don't know who I'm supposed to hang out with."

Providing opportunities for Coast Guard-connected children to connect with others who share similar experiences is essential to address this challenge. This can include creating support groups or clubs where they can meet and bond with others who understand their unique challenges. Additionally, providing resources such as counseling services and mental health support can help these children navigate the emotional toll of frequent moves and transitions. By prioritizing the needs of Coast Guard-connected children and recognizing the value of their experiences, we can create environments that foster a sense of belonging and community. This, in turn, can help these children develop the resilience and adaptability necessary to thrive in a constantly changing world.

### **Developing Identity: Nurturing Sense of Self**

Growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child presents unique challenges and opportunities that significantly impact identity development. By delving into the personal accounts of individuals who have shared their stories, a pattern emerges, illustrating the complexities of forming a stable sense of self and building lasting relationships in the context of a constantly changing and unpredictable environment.

Despite many interviewees' difficulties, most expressed a more positive outlook on their experiences. For instance, one participant noted, "The military is better for family than it is worse." Another added, "I miss the structure that the military world provided." The structure and discipline instilled by the military environment have taught these individuals resilience and adaptability, qualities they cherish and consider valuable life skills. This positive perspective on

their upbringing suggests that their challenges have shaped them into strong, adaptable individuals.

However, the challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected children cannot be ignored. Many of their early memories are centered around varying degrees of trauma, which impacts their emotional well-being. As one interviewee bluntly stated, "Most of my early memories are centered around trauma." This highlights the emotional toll that the unpredictable nature of their upbringing can have on their mental health. Another interviewee shared their experience living in impoverished neighborhoods, saying, "We often lived in terrible neighborhoods. Rough, rough town. Living in poverty. I was around for the first time I was around serious racism. I was around serious people living in total fucking poverty." This quote underscores that Coast Guard-connected children may be exposed to harsh living conditions and societal issues, further complicating their identity development and worldview.

The transient nature of their upbringing often made it difficult for Coast Guard-connected children to form lasting relationships. The constant moving from place to place and adjusting to new environments disrupted their ability to form deep bonds with peers. One interviewee remarked, "I hear stories of people like, oh, I've known her since I was like 3 years old. I can't even relate to that. I don't even know what that means, or being in the same house like your whole life." This inability to develop long-term connections can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness.

Moreover, this instability has led many interviewees to develop self-protective mentalities as a coping mechanism. One participant disclosed, "I think that because of how we grew up, I was so broken. I had an 'I'm gonna fuck you before you fuck me' mentality. That's how my relationships usually go. Because you know, like the example that we had was, I don't

give a fuck how you're feeling. We're fucking leaving." This statement highlights the emotional distance that can develop from their transient childhood, making it even more challenging to form genuine relationships and trust others. Consequently, Coast Guard-connected children often carry these protective mentalities into adulthood, potentially affecting their personal and professional relationships.

Emotional distance is a recurring theme among Coast Guard-connected children, as they often learn to keep their feelings and emotions to themselves. One individual poignantly shared, "We keep it distant. So, we, I think, even growing up, I know I had serious issues that I didn't display. Whatever it is, whatever is happening in my life, even even to this day, I keep them inside. For the most part, I just handle it." This tendency to internalize emotions and refrain from sharing them with others is likely a defense mechanism developed in response to the uncertainty and instability they faced throughout their childhood.

Maintaining a stable identity amid the ever-changing landscape of military life poses a significant challenge for Coast Guard-connected children. One interviewee insightfully described this dilemma: "Because we grew up in the military world, we grew up in a very structured environment. But at the same time, we also grew up with no fucking structure. And I think that has led us to this total confusion and uncertainty, like, who are we supposed to be?" This quote highlights their paradox, as they must navigate the rigid structure of military life while grappling with the lack of continuity and consistency in their personal lives. This constant state of flux can lead to a sense of disorientation and identity confusion for these individuals, as they must continually adapt and redefine themselves based on their surroundings. "I definitely lost myself along the way. I definitely had a shield up so I could protect myself because I knew everybody I would meet I would eventually end up losing or say saying bye to. So that was hard, trying to get



close to people because you know you're not going to see them again after a year or two. I have a heart of steel currently that I'm trying to break away from.”

The challenge of finding a stable sense of self is further compounded by the fact that they are often exposed to diverse cultural backgrounds and differing value systems, making it difficult to establish their beliefs and principles firmly. Additionally, constantly adapting to new environments and social circles may exacerbate feelings of insecurity and self-doubt, making it even more challenging for Coast Guard-connected children to develop a strong sense of self. One interviewee stated “Being a Coast Guard kid, I was always adjusting to new places and people, and it made it tough to figure out who I really was. Like I’d be somewhere for a year or two and think, ah okay I think I’ve got it. Then move across the country and feel like I have to start all over again. Finding my own self has been a neverending experience, just an endless deal.” Pursuing a stable identity becomes a complex and ongoing challenge for these individuals as they strive to understand their place in the world and who they are meant to be.

Achieving authenticity in relationships is yet another significant hurdle for Coast Guard-connected children. The constant relocation and the need to adapt to new communities make it incredibly challenging for them to establish deep, genuine connections with others. One interviewee said, "I try to be as authentic as I can. It's very hard, and I think it's hard because, as we were growing up, knowing people for only two years, you don't really know who they are." This statement emphasizes the immense difficulty of forming authentic, meaningful relationships when time is limited, and the people around you constantly change.

Considering the emotional toll this ongoing struggle takes on these individuals is crucial. They must repeatedly navigate the process of forming new friendships and trust while knowing that these connections may not have the chance to mature fully. The lack of stability in their

relationships can also lead to feelings of isolation and detachment, as they can never fully anchor themselves to a specific community or group of friends. This constant flux in relationships may impact their ability to develop a strong sense of identity and belonging. Coast Guard-connected children must continually adapt to new environments and integrate themselves into different social circles, which can make it difficult for them to define their values and beliefs.

Despite these challenges, many Coast Guard-connected children display remarkable resilience and adaptability. They often learn to form connections quickly and develop a keen sense of empathy as they understand the importance of making the most of their limited time with others. While borne out of necessity, these skills can serve them well in their adult lives, allowing them to easily navigate various social and professional situations.

The impact of growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child on mental health and relationships cannot be understated. One interviewee spoke of the difficulties of forming close relationships, saying, "I've been in therapy for a little while now, and one of the things that has come up is the fact that I'm really good at making friends, but I'm not really good at keeping them." This struggle is a common theme among those who have grown up in a military family. The constant moving and uprooting of their lives can make it difficult to maintain lasting connections. As a result, many individuals feel isolated and disconnected from others, leading to anxiety and depression.

Moreover, constantly adapting to new environments can affect one's mental health. As one individual shared, "It's like you're constantly having to reintroduce yourself to the world. It was so hard to make friends because it was like, 'Oh, I'm the new kid again.' And I feel like that's contributed to my anxiety and depression, because I'm just constantly in this state of transition."

This sense of instability and uncertainty can lead to feelings of anxiety and depression in both children and adults who grow up in a military family.

Despite these challenges, many Coast Guard-connected children develop resilience and adaptability, which can serve them well throughout their lives. As one interviewee noted, "I think the biggest thing that I've taken away from growing up as a Coast Guard kid is the ability to adapt. I feel like, in life, things are constantly changing, and I'm able to handle that now because I had to do it growing up." This adaptability is a valuable life skill and can help individuals succeed in a variety of situations and environments. Growing up as a Coast Guard-connected child can positively and negatively impact one's mental health and relationships. While the challenges are significant, many individuals can develop resilience and adaptability, serving them well throughout their lives.

Despite the challenges, several interviewees expressed pride in their experiences as Coast Guard-connected children. One individual proudly stated, "I'm proud to say that I'm a Coast Guard brat. You know, I hold that with pride when people ask, you know, like, where'd you grow up? I always like, well, I kind of grew up everywhere." This sentiment highlights the resilience and adaptability these individuals develop due to their unique upbringing. They embrace their diverse experiences and recognize the valuable life skills they acquired while growing up in a military family. For them, being a "Coast Guard brat" is a badge of honor, which they wear with pride, acknowledging their ability to adapt and thrive in various situations and environments.

The experiences of Coast Guard-connected children, as underscored by the individuals interviewed, profoundly influence their identity development and mental well-being. Their personal stories reveal a complex interplay between the resilience and adaptability they develop

due to their unique upbringing and the challenges they face in forming a stable sense of self and forging lasting relationships.

It is essential to acknowledge the mental health implications stemming from their transient nature, such as anxiety and depression. By understanding and empathizing with these experiences, we can collectively work towards providing better support systems for Coast Guard-connected children and their families. This includes offering specialized mental health resources, promoting social networks that enable them to maintain connections, and ensuring that schools and communities are equipped to help them smoothly transition through the various stages of their lives. As we delve deeper into the lives of Coast Guard-connected children, we gain invaluable insights into the resilience and adaptability that often defines them.

Despite the hardships discussed above, many Coast Guard-connected children develop valuable life skills such as adaptability, resilience, and resourcefulness, which can aid them in overcoming these identity challenges. By recognizing and addressing these children's unique obstacles, we can help support their journey toward self-discovery and personal growth, ultimately allowing them to establish a stable identity that reflects their true selves.

### **The Interplay of Transitions, Belonging, and Social Identity in the Lives of Coast Guard-Connected Children**

Continuing to understand Coast Guard-connected children's lives, this section dips into the profound impact of transitions, social identity, and belonging on their overall well-being. Drawing upon Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory, and Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, we strive to explore the complex interplay of these factors in shaping their unique experiences. By examining their challenges and resilience, I aim to highlight the importance of tailored support systems and interventions that nurture their

psychological and emotional development. This brief analysis offers crucial insights into the lives of Coast Guard-connected children, emphasizing the significance of fostering a strong sense of self and belonging as they navigate the ever-changing tides of their military-connected lives.

Drawing from Nancy Schlossberg's Transition Theory, this study delves into the rich experiences of Coast Guard-connected children, as their narratives illustrate the numerous transitions they face throughout their lives. Schlossberg's theory categorizes transitions into anticipated, unanticipated, and non-event transitions. By examining these transitions in the context of Coast Guard families, we can better comprehend the multifaceted nature of their experiences and the strategies they employ to adapt and thrive.

Anticipated transitions, such as scheduled relocations and school changes, require Coast Guard-connected children to develop strong coping mechanisms and support networks. These children often display remarkable adaptability, learning to form new friendships and integrate into new communities more quickly than their civilian counterparts. Unanticipated transitions, such as unexpected deployments or family separations, can be particularly challenging, requiring rapid routines and responsibilities adjustments. Coast Guard children must learn to navigate these situations with resilience, drawing on the support of their family and extended community.

Non-event transitions, although less obvious, also play a significant role in shaping these children's lives. These transitions may include missed milestones or family events due to military obligations, and they can create a sense of loss or disconnection. Acknowledging and addressing these non-event transitions is crucial for fostering a healthy sense of identity and belonging in Coast Guard-connected children.

Abraham Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory underscores the importance of social connectedness and a sense of community in achieving psychological health. Due to the frequent relocations and separations inherent in military life, Coast Guard-connected children often face unique challenges in developing a secure sense of self. By incorporating Maslow's theory, this study highlights the role of supportive interactions within families and communities in fostering a sense of belonging among Coast Guard-connected children.

By providing opportunities for socialization and community involvement, Coast Guard families and organizations can help these children develop a sense of identity and belonging. Participating in extracurricular activities, volunteering, and forming meaningful connections within their communities can all contribute to a sense of purpose and fulfillment. This, in turn, can enhance self-esteem, self-actualization, and overall psychological well-being.

The study emphasizes the importance of recognizing Coast Guard-connected children's unique needs and the supportive networks' role in fostering a sense of belonging. By prioritizing the provision of community resources and support systems, we can help these children navigate the challenges of military life and develop a strong sense of self and belonging.

Informed by Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, the research highlights the critical role of belonging and social identity development among Coast Guard-connected children. As military community members, these children often experience unique challenges shaping their self-concept, group identification, and peer relationships. The study delves into the isolated mindset that these children may face, as they frequently find themselves in environments where their connections to other Coast Guard or military-connected children are limited.

Tajfel's Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a sense of self-worth and belonging from their group affiliations, which can influence their overall well-being. For Coast

Guard-connected children, it is imperative that they maintain a strong connection to the Coast Guard community and cultivate a positive social identity. This can be achieved by creating supportive networks, mentorship programs, and initiatives that unite military-connected youth, fostering unity and shared experiences.

The research underscores the importance of community support in helping Coast Guard-connected children develop a positive social identity. By fostering a sense of belonging and providing opportunities for meaningful connections, we can empower these children to overcome the challenges associated with military life and contribute to their overall well-being. By understanding the unique experiences of Coast Guard-connected children through the lens of Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, we can better tailor support systems and interventions to nurture a strong sense of self and foster resilience in the face of life's transitions.

Through the synthesis of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory, and Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, this study provides a holistic and nuanced insight into the lives of Coast Guard-connected children. By examining their experiences, challenges, and developmental processes from these three theoretical perspectives, the research underscores the importance of catering to the distinctive needs of these children. The study emphasizes that community support, social identity, and a sense of belonging are vital components in nurturing their psychological well-being and fostering resilience. By understanding and integrating these theories, we can better tailor support systems and interventions, ensuring that Coast Guard-connected children can confidently navigate their unique life experiences and flourish emotionally and socially.

### **Insights into the Lives of Coast Guard-Connected Children: A Summary**

In this chapter, we delved into the unique experiences and challenges of Coast Guard-connected children, focusing on three key themes: navigating transitions, social identity development, and the importance of belonging. By examining these themes through the lenses of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, Tajfel's Social Identity Theory, and Maslow's Sense of Belonging theory, we gained a comprehensive understanding of these children's developmental processes and psychological well-being.

Firstly, we explored the concept of transitions, highlighting the frequent relocations and adjustments Coast Guard-connected children experience. Schlossberg's Transition Theory helped me to provide a framework for understanding how these transitions can impact their lives and emphasized the importance of coping strategies and support systems in fostering resilience.

Secondly, we discussed the importance of creating a sense of belonging for Coast Guard-connected children, guided by Maslow's theory on the Sense of Belonging. We emphasized the critical role of supportive interactions within families and communities in fostering a sense of self and belonging, which can contribute to the overall psychological well-being of these children.

Lastly, we investigated the role of social identity development in the lives of Coast Guard-connected children, drawing upon Tajfel's Social Identity Theory. We emphasized the significance of group affiliations and cultivating a positive social identity, recognizing the potential for isolation these children may encounter in their unique circumstances.

By integrating these theoretical perspectives into the themes explored, Chapter 3 offers a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the experiences and challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected children. The research underscores the importance of addressing their unique needs and the vital role of community support, social identity, and a sense of belonging in



fostering their psychological well-being. This understanding lays the groundwork for developing tailored support systems and interventions, ultimately empowering Coast Guard-connected children to thrive in the face of adversity.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Delving into the Experiences**

In this thesis, I have primarily drawn upon the insights and experiences of seven Coast Guard-connected children, now adults aged between 40-50, whom I interviewed extensively. These personal accounts provided a diverse collage of perspectives that helped illuminate the unique challenges faced by this population. I believe they offer valuable insights into the transitions and challenges faced by Coast Guard-connected children, which extend beyond those encountered by civilian children and even those from other military branches. As someone with a similar background, I could empathize with their stories and better understand the complexities of their journeys.

Although the existing literature demonstrates that military-connected children, which include those who are Coast Guard-connected, exhibit remarkable resilience toward life stressors compared to their civilian peers, they often wrestle with psychological needs related to a sense of belonging to a particular place and culture. Furthermore, the unique nature of Coast Guard duties, such as extended remote sea duty, search and rescue, and maritime law enforcement, can introduce additional stressors to these children's lives due to the potential danger and unpredictability of their parents' work.

Besides the challenges mentioned above, Coast Guard-connected children may grapple with feelings of isolation due to the probable scarcity of a thriving Coast Guard community during their formative years or later in life. This lack of a supportive network can compound the

difficulties they face in forging lasting relationships, as they often find themselves in environments where few, if any, share similar backgrounds. This sense of isolation can also give rise to validation issues, as these children often struggle to find peers who genuinely understand their unique experiences and challenges. Consequently, they may feel a persistent need to seek validation and understanding from others, which can be emotionally draining and impact their overall well-being.

To alleviate these feelings of isolation and validation issues, it is crucial for Coast Guard-connected children and their families to proactively seek out and engage in communities, both within and outside the military sphere, that can offer support and understanding. In doing so, they will expand their social network and foster a sense of belonging to help them navigate their distinctive life experiences more effectively.

Inconsistent access to medical and mental health care is another challenge that Coast Guard-connected children face. Frequent relocations can result in disruptions in care and difficulties in finding new providers familiar with their unique needs. Consequently, these children are vulnerable to developing unchecked or overlooked physical and mental health concerns.

One of the significant challenges Coast Guard-connected children face is maintaining continuity in their education. With frequent relocations and school changes, it can be challenging to establish lasting relationships with teachers and peers, which can lead to feelings of isolation and disconnection. However, despite these challenges, exposure to diverse schools offers a distinct advantage to Coast Guard-connected children. Moving frequently allows them to experience different educational systems, meet new people and cultures, and adapt to new ways

of learning. These experiences can foster respect and appreciation for various cultures, providing a unique perspective that can be invaluable in today's increasingly multicultural world.

The adaptability and social skills that Coast Guard-connected children develop through navigating different school systems and environments can be significant assets throughout their lives. Adapting to new situations, communicating effectively with a diverse range of people, and appreciating the value of different perspectives can be crucial in academic, professional, and personal contexts. While these experiences can be difficult at the time, they can also be transformative, providing a unique perspective and skill set that can serve them well in the long run.

As Coast Guard-connected children transition into adulthood, they face unique challenges stemming from their upbringing. In addition to the recurring relocations and difficulties in forming lasting relationships mentioned earlier, they may also grapple with issues related to their cultural identity. As they move from one place to another, they may find it challenging to define themselves within a specific culture or community, leading to potential identity conflicts.

These challenges can have far-reaching effects on various aspects of their lives. For instance, a fluctuating sense of self-esteem may arise from their constant need to adapt to new environments or the lack of a stable support system. Communication issues may develop due to frequent changes in social circles, requiring continuous adjustments to different communication styles and norms. Intimate relationships may also be affected, as forming deep connections may prove challenging due to the transient nature of their lives.

Career choices for Coast Guard-connected young adults may be influenced by their experiences growing up in a military family. They might be uncertain about establishing a long-term career path or may feel drawn to careers that offer a sense of stability and predictability.

Alternatively, some may choose careers that mirror the dynamic nature of their upbringing, embracing the opportunity for mobility and change.

Despite these challenges, Coast Guard-connected young adults can draw strength and resilience from their experiences. Overcoming these obstacles can instill a sense of pride, self-reliance, and independence, traits that can serve them well in their adult lives. The adaptability and flexibility they have cultivated can be invaluable in a rapidly changing world, equipping them with the skills necessary to navigate various personal and professional challenges with confidence and understanding. Embracing their unique background and experiences can empower them to forge their own paths, building a strong foundation for a fulfilling and successful adulthood.

### **Supporting the Unique Needs**

Support structures are crucial for Coast Guard-connected children during their formative years and as they navigate adulthood. Based on the interviews I conducted, the research explored, and my own experiences, this study recommends that Coast Guard families prioritize cultivating close relationships with their children and nurturing emotional and mental health through consistent family practices. Additionally, seeking assistance and support networks beyond the Coast Guard can help alleviate transitional challenges and address difficulties children might face throughout their lives.

Schools and educators play a vital role in assisting military-connected children by fostering a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere that promotes a sense of belonging. By focusing on building relationships with military families, understanding their unique needs, and implementing support mechanisms, schools can significantly contribute to the mental and emotional well-being of Coast Guard-connected children. Schools and institutions should ensure

access to counseling services, adjustment support, and extracurricular activities that encourage community involvement and social connections while providing resources for future educational opportunities and career development.

For policymakers and military support systems, it is essential to prioritize the needs of Coast Guard-connected children throughout their lives. This includes providing transition resources, access to mental health services, and implementing policies that promote academic success, nurture a sense of belonging, and support professional growth. Collaboration with local communities and educational institutions is critical in offering comprehensive support to military families and creating a cohesive network addressing the challenges Coast Guard-connected children may face as they transition into adulthood.

Additionally, mentorship programs and networking opportunities for Coast Guard-connected youth can significantly contribute to their personal and professional development. Exposure to diverse career paths, internships, and vocational training can help prepare them for a range of possibilities in their adult lives. Encouraging resilience and adaptability through sharing experiences and lessons learned from others who have navigated similar life transitions can empower these young individuals as they face their own unique challenges.

The practical implications emphasized in this study highlight the importance of a comprehensive, long-term support system for Coast Guard-connected children as they grow up and navigate life as adults. We can help ensure their overall well-being, success, and fulfillment by addressing their needs at every stage.

### **Advancing Our Understanding**

This study offers valuable insights into the experiences of Coast Guard-connected children, including my own experience. However, several avenues for future research are

recommended to enhance our understanding further and provide more comprehensive support for these children.

To start with, this study primarily focuses on Coast Guard-connected children, it would be beneficial for future research to explore further and investigate the experiences of children from other branches of the military, going well beyond the small avenues explored by me. By advancing the research on comparing and contrasting the experiences of children connected to different military branches, researchers can obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by military-connected children as a whole. This information can contribute to developing more effective support systems tailored to the unique needs of each military branch's children.

Future research could consider utilizing a mixed-methods approach to delve deeper into the experiences of Coast Guard-connected children and address potential biases. This approach would entail gathering data from various sources, including surveys, direct-question-based interviews, group discussions, and observations. Research could also benefit from conducting longitudinal studies that track the experiences of Coast Guard-connected children over an extended period. This approach would allow researchers to understand these children's changes and challenges as they grow up in a military family, providing valuable data to inform the development of targeted support systems. Researchers could obtain a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of these children's experiences by employing multiple methods.

Another area of focus for future research could be the role of technology in supporting Coast Guard-connected children's mental health, social connections, and academic success. As digital tools and online resources become increasingly essential in today's world, it is crucial to explore how these technologies can be utilized effectively to support military-connected

children. Investigating the use of communication apps, online tutoring, and mental health resources could provide valuable insights into how technology can bolster the well-being and success of these children.

Furthermore, future research could examine the impact of parental deployment on the mental health and well-being of Coast Guard-connected children. By understanding the specific stressors associated with Coast Guard deployments, such as prolonged separation, disruption of routines, and increased parental responsibilities, researchers can inform targeted interventions and support for families during these challenging times. This could include the development/improvement of counseling programs, support groups, and educational resources tailored to the unique needs of Coast Guard families.

To build upon the findings of this study and further support Coast Guard-connected children, future research should focus on utilizing mixed-methods approaches, conducting longitudinal studies, expanding the scope to include children connected to other branches of the military, exploring the role of technology, and examining the impact of parental deployment. By doing so, we can better understand military-connected children's experiences and develop more effective support systems tailored to their unique needs.

### **Empowering Coast Guard-Connected Children and Their Families:**

#### **Final Thoughts and Recommendations**

The foundation of this study lies in the invaluable insights learned from interviews with seven Coast Guard-connected adults, whose personal accounts serve as the cornerstone of this thesis project. Each interviewee, hailing from a diverse background and leading a distinct life, contributed a wealth of perspectives that shed light on the unique challenges faced by this population. By incorporating their experiences and insights, this research offers a deeper

understanding of the challenges and opportunities encountered by Coast Guard-connected children and strengthens the study's conclusions. As we delved further into the implications of these findings, it became clear how they can shape the development of tailored support systems for this unique group of individuals. The lived experiences of Coast Guard-connected children are multifaceted and pose distinct challenges compared to those of their civilian peers and children from other military branches. Despite facing these challenges, these adults now exhibit remarkable resilience and adaptability, empowering them to handle life transitions with greater ease.

These findings emphasize the importance of recognizing and addressing the unique needs of Coast Guard-connected children during their formative years and beyond. By deepening our understanding of military children's experiences, particularly those connected to the Coast Guard, this study highlights the need for tailored recognition and support. With the right support and understanding, Coast Guard-connected children can transform these challenges into opportunities, building a strong foundation for future success and happiness.

As a society, we must ensure that the challenges these children face are met with adequate resources, empathy, and understanding. By doing so, we can foster their growth and development, enabling them to reach their full potential and continue the legacy of resilience and adaptability that defines the Coast Guard community. In conclusion, it is my hope that the insights gained from these interviews, together with the research findings, serve as a foundation for future research, policy development, and support systems that cater to the unique needs of Coast Guard-connected children, ensuring their overall well-being, success, and fulfillment.



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