Restorying in the Discourses and Literacies of Military-Connected Students

by

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DEDICATION

To Tim, for everything.

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation project explores the lived experiences and literacies of seven adolescent (13 to 18-year-old) military kids from the suburbs of a midwestern city with a large air force base. All seven participants had spent a majority of their lives with one or both parents in the military, all of them had relocated at least four times, and all of them had experienced at least one parental deployment (three students had experienced five deployments). This research builds on conversations in literacy studies about the links between adolescents' literacy practices and their identities, as well as research in the social sciences about the psychological and socioemotional effects of military life on service members' families.

Starting with questions about how military-connected students talk about their experiences, what kinds of literacies they engage in, and how they use those literacies to shape their perspectives on their experiences, this work presents findings from an analysis of students' discourses as well as their literacies. Drawing upon a series interviews, an archive of student writing, and the texts that students discussed reading, there were six primary narrative patterns that students adopted in their discourses about military life (three positive narratives and three negative narratives), and four primary ways that students used literacy to influence how they thought about the events of their lives. Students used literacies both in and out of school to escape challenging circumstances, to connect with loved ones across space and time, and to process their experiences directly through reflection and indirectly through refraction.

While analysis of students' discourses revealed how they viewed events such as relocation and deployment, analysis of students' literacies illuminated students' acts of restorying: the ways that they were agentively using reading and writing to shape their perspectives. This work also highlights ways that these military-connected students used literacy to engage in agentive acts of restorying, and it points to the power of literacy to shape how people view the world and themselves.

This research has implications for communities providing support to military children, as it provides insight into the ways that these military-connected students discussed their experiences and used literacies to shape their perspectives. For teachers, parents, and other community members providing support to military families, it provides key questions to ask and things to look for among military-connected students. It also suggests directions for future research regarding how teachers might leverage the literacies these students are bringing to the classroom. Additionally, this research points to the need for new kinds of work to be done among children of immigrants and refugees whose experiences may include frequent relocation, interaction with large bureaucratic institutions, trauma, and parental separation.

Chapter 1

Theoretical Framework and Review of Literature

INTRODUCTION

Often characterized by frequent moves, residence in base housing, disrupted schooling, separation from parents, and formative interactions with class-stratified, highly disciplined military sub-culture, life for the children of American service members, also called "military kids," "military-connected students" or "military brats,"[1] presents a complex series of challenges and possibilities for communities with military kids in their midst. As of 2018, the Department of Defense reported that "1.7 million dependents aged 0 to 22 have a parent or guardian in the military…Approximately 1.1 million these children are in active duty military families; nearly 700,000 have a parent or guardian in the National Reserves. Another 2 million are the children of veterans" (Griffiths & Townsend, 2018, p. 97). For nearly 4 million children and young adults, the military influences everything from how they make friends to how they process grief to how they learn to how they interact with people across the varied sociocultural contexts in which they live (Wertsch, 1991). A large body of research exists regarding the academic, social, and psychological effects of military life on children (Chartrand, 2007; Chandra

[1] In this dissertation, I refer to this group as "military kids" or "students" even though we most commonly refer to ourselves as "military brats." The phrase "military brat" began as an insider term and is not pejorative (Wertsch, 1991). To outsiders, however, the word "brat" has negative connotations. So I typically use the term "military kids" to refer to individuals who grew up (that is, spent some of the formative years of their development) with one or both parents in military. Even adults can be referred to as "military kids," and I use it here primarily as an identity marker; that is, I am interested in researching students who identify themselves as military kids or military brats.

et al, 2010; Cozza, Chun, & Polo, 2005; Dekel & Goldblatt, 2008; Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013; Faber et al., 2008; Gilreath et al., 2014; Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009; Huebner et al., 2007; Lester & Flake, 2013; Weber & Weber, 2005). There is also a rich body of research, primarily in the field of New Literacy Studies, regarding the links between literacy practices and the formative sociocultural contexts in which adolescents live (Brandt & Clinton, 2002; Heath, 1982; McCarthey & Moje, 2002; Moje et al., 2009; B. Street, 2006). However, scholars are only just beginning[2] to examine the role that literacy plays as a space where military kids can make sense of their lives, as well as the kinds of narrative frameworks these students employ to talk about their experiences.

At the intersection of literacy and adolescent identity, military kids emerge as a promising and generative microcosm. While they are a diverse group, they also typically have a number of formative lived experiences in common. The study of military kids has something to say not only about the effects of relocation, class, and family dynamics on students' perceptions of the world and themselves, but also about how adolescents use literacy to agentively shape their own perceptions of their experiences. Focusing primarily on one important identity with a set of common experiences (while still attending to multiple, intersecting identities) can provide a specific lens for examining how the literacy-identity connection works in the lives of adolescents. Given the current trend in literacy studies to examine how literacies unfold across space and time and how they are shaped by a variety of local and global forces (Stornaiuolo, 2016), studies of military kids could provide a wealth of information about what it means to

[2] I am only aware of one scholarly text that has approached this topic: a 2011 dissertation about the out-of-school journaling practices of students whose parents were deployed (Sherbert, 2011). However, this dissertation discusses one aspect of military kids' lives—deployment—and one kind of literacy practice: out-of-school journaling.

grow up reading and writing across ever-shifting contexts. While there are plenty of pedagogical and research implications for America's 1.2 million military kids, this study can also suggest directions for future research about adolescents such as the children of immigrants and refugees whose experiences may include frequent relocation, interaction with large bureaucratic institutions, trauma, and parental separation. And not only are there broad applications for the study of military kids' literacies, but the study of outliers can also illuminate aspects of the mainstream that might otherwise go unrecognized or taken for granted.

Research Questions

As a military kid, a former high school teacher, and a doctoral candidate with a research interest in literacy, I want this study to inform the practices of the communities supporting military kids, and to contribute to greater understanding of how people use literacy to process their experiences. Building on sociological data about military kids, theoretical constructs of literacy from New Literacy Studies, and transactional reader-response theory, this interpretive study explores military kids' narrative frameworks for talking about their experiences in preparation for a more extended analysis of how military kids use (and discuss using) alphabetic text literacies to sustain, enhance, or alter their perspectives. Through analysis of interviews and student writing, I explore the following research questions:

1) What patterns emerge and what differences are evident in how military kids talk about their perceptions of military-related experiences?
2) What kinds of literacy practices do military kids engage in, both in and out of school?

3) How do military kids *talk about using* literacy events and literacy practices to sustain, or alter their perceptions of military-shaped experiences? How are they *actually using* literacy in ways that may go beyond what they discuss?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Studies of Military-Connected Students

Within the past several years, there has been increasing public awareness about the unique needs of military kids, and a number of efforts have been made at both state and federal levels to attempt to mitigate negative circumstances for military families and improve education for military kids: "In January 2011, President Obama directed all federal agencies to make the education of military-connected students a funding priority by 'improving the quality of the educational experiences, reducing the negative impacts of frequent relocations and absences, and encouraging the healthy development of military children'" (DePedro et al., 2014, p. 3). The outcome of President Obama's directive was the interstate compact, which was designed to ease the transitions of military kids as they switched school districts. As I outline in the following section, many researchers have taken up the call to examine the situations of military kids more closely and provide data that can help educators and communities learn more about who military kids are, what challenges they face, what strengths and resources they bring with them, and how to construct an educational environment best suited to leverage these students' strengths and meet their needs.

Studies about military kids to date have relied heavily on quantitative tools, such as surveys, questionnaires, and reviews of medical records. While these data sources provide a

glimpse of the broader landscape of military life, they do not tell the whole story, nor do they provide space to understand how military kids tell their own stories. In a 2011 study of the literature about military kids, De Pedro et al. reviewed 86 published peer-reviewed articles, and only 7% of those articles included a qualitative component, such as an interview or focus group.[3] In addition to relying heavily upon quantitative methodologies, studies about military kids to date have focused primarily on the hardships of military life, such as the stress of frequent relocations (Weber & Weber, 2005), authoritarian family structures (Link & Palinkas, 2013), the pain and fear associated with deployment (De Pedro et al., 2011; Flake et al., 2009), and the possibility of parental injury and death (Gilreath et al., 2014). [4] What makes military kids a unique population to study is that while civilians' children may relocate, move across

[3] Out of those 86 studies, 92% were relied on surveys (mostly completed by parents of military kids, not the kids themselves), questionnaires, and/or reviews of medical records. Of the seven studies that included a qualitative component, one was a case study of one child from the Vietnam era, two were interviews with parents or teachers, and three were from the same data set. So as of 2011, there were only three published data sets about military kids that included the voices of military kids themselves. Two of those data sets are about adolescent coping strategies during parent deployment, which is only one feature of the military kid experience.

[4] Since I began researching the topic of military kids in the fall of 2015, I have received numerous recommendations to read studies of veterans. I have pored over this body of literature, returning to some authors multiple times trying to find relevant research. The more I read, the more frustrated I became, and it took me nearly two years to recognize the general futility of this line of inquiry. Especially after my conversations with three military kids, I began to feel the mismatch more keenly and to doubt that my study had validity, because what I was reading was so disconnected from my findings. Veterans' lives are characterized by encounters with violence, frustrations in dealing with convoluted bureaucratic processes, and strong commitment to the values for which they chose to enlist. This creates for them a unique set of challenges and affordances when they enter academic settings. For example, the anthology *Generation Vet* discusses ways that universities can address the needs of this population, including "addressing new disabilities and wounds," and a "renegotiation of personal finances and daily habits" (Doe & Langstraat, 2014, p. 4). They need help in learning how to talk like students rather than warriors and help with reconciling political positions they hold that may be different from faculty. I cannot stress how much this is not the case for military-connected students, including the ones I interviewed this past semester. They tend to be sheltered from violence, they accept convoluted bureaucracy as part of normal life, and they often feel ambivalent or resistant toward patriotic values. Everything about military culture for my participants has been filtered through the eyes and minds of children who did not choose military life for themselves, and I am prepared to argue that the literature on veterans and composition has almost nothing to do with understanding the literacy practices of military kids. This experience also made me aware of the conflation that happens in the public mind between military service members and their children, so part of my work will be to make distinctions between these groups so the needs of both populations can be better met.

cultures, live in authoritarian households, or face separation from a parent, they may not experience the intersection of these situations under the umbrella of institutional military culture the way military kids do. From the body of literature on military kids, I draw on examples of studies about two of the most common and identity-shaping features of military life: parental deployment and relocation. A brief review of these studies will provide a sense of what kinds of research are currently available on military kids and will provide context for some of the claims I make about my participants.

On the surface, military kids often seem to be doing just fine; data from my study and other studies present a picture of students who are rule-followers and resilient optimists. They submit their homework on time, respect adults, and don't ask for help, which would likely lead teachers to believe that this particular population does not require special types of intervention or support. However, the clearest picture that emerges across the body of literature about military kids is that military life is tough for families. Data from these studies suggest that, at least for some military kids, there are deeper issues beneath the surface and that communities serving military families should consider the unique challenges that this population faces. In 2011, the California Healthy Kids Survey added a question about military affiliation, giving researchers an unprecedented ability to compare the responses of military kids against those of their civilian peers. In March and April of 2013 over half a million children--54,679 military kids and 634,034 civilian kids--took the survey, and Sullivan et al. (2015) analyzed the data "to determine whether military-connected adolescents are at higher risk for adverse outcomes during wartime" (p. 922). These researchers discovered that "military-connected youth had greater odds of substance use, experience of physical violence and nonphysical harassment,

and weapon carrying" (p. 923). Nor were discrepancies across groups negligible; military kids had "73% greater odds of recent other drug use (e.g., cocaine and lysergic acid diethyladmide [LSD])…and twice the odds of bringing a gun to school…compared with nonmilitary-connected peers" (Sullivan et al., 2015, p. 922). Even more disheartening is the fact that "when compared with data from 2011, the rates of these negative outcomes appear to be increasing" (p. 922). So not only do military kids experience more negative behavioral outcomes than their civilian peers, but these data suggest that their situation is deteriorating, requiring further intervention. Also working with data from the California Healthy Kids Survey, researchers Gilreath et al. (2016) showed through multivariate logistical analyses that "military-connected youth were at increased risk for suicidal ideation, making a plan to harm themselves, attempting suicide, and an attempted suicide which required medical treatment" (p. 61). Figure 1.1 below demonstrates the disparity in these numbers between military and civilian kids:

Figure 1.1 Suicidal ideations and attempts among military and civilian youth

	Military-connected youth	Civilian youth
Seriously considered suicide	24%	18.1%
Suicide attempts	12%	7.3%

Numbers from Gilreath et al. 2016, p.63.

As disconcerting as these numbers are, given the large body of research that indicates a strong stigma against reporting or addressing mental health issues in the military (Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007), it is possible that military kids are actually under-reporting their suicidal ideations and attempts.

What is it about military life that causes military kids to be at higher risk for depression, substance abuse, experiences of violence, and even suicide? DePedro et al. (2014) attribute military kids' negative emotional and psychological outcomes to "daily experiences with parental separation, the fear of a parent's death or injury, constantly shifting household roles and responsibilities, the stress of a left-behind parent and/or caregiver, challenges surrounding reintegration into civilian communities, and veterans' post-trauma issues" (p. 30). Many children face versions of these types of issues, which is partially why a study of military kids can have implications for other populations. However, military kids often experience multiple stressors intersecting simultaneously, a situation that can alter the emotional landscape of a child's life.

There are also historical and political circumstances that have contributed to the particular struggles encountered by modern military kids. Gilreath et al. (2016) argue that the difficulties faced by today's military kids are rooted in and influenced by the historically anomalous nature of our country's current war, as well as general cultural attitudes toward military personnel and their families. Since 1973, the United States has had an all-volunteer armed forces, and since 2001, we have been involved in a war that has gradually faded from public consciousness (Gilreath et al., 2016). There is a sense in which America could be divided into two groups: a small group of people who live every day in the long shadow of ongoing war and the vast majority who, apart from the reminder of an occasional headline, live relatively unimpacted by American overseas activity. The current context differs widely from the situation of military families during World War II, when a greater percentage of the population was in the armed forces due to the draft, and daily American life was directly impacted by the war.

Gilreath et al. (2016) explain that “when service is mandated there is a national sense of normalcy for military service and the potential for all to be exposed to the consequences of combat….The voluntary military is one where the cost of combat is shared by only a small portion of the population” (p. 65). While a draft is undesirable for many reasons, what happens culturally during a draft is that military service is normalized. Depending on public sentiment toward the war, it is likely that military kids in the context of a draft would feel less isolated, more supported, and better understood. Such a situation could decrease the distance military kids feel from their peers. It is also because of the smaller military and prolonged nature of the current conflict that deployments have been longer and have increased in number (Gilreath et al., 2016): three of the participants in my study had experienced five parental deployments. It should also be noted, however, that only one of my participants was born before 2001 (and he was born in 2000), so a post 9/11 world and a post 9/11 military is all that they have ever known. The current situation, including the political climate, general sentiment toward the war, frequency of deployments, etc. feels normal to them, and they have little basis for comparison.

Parental deployment is a challenge of military life that appears to have both short-term and long-term effects on children, especially in a conflict which over two million troops have been deployed (Link & Palinkas, 2013, p. 376). Flake et al. surveyed spouses of deployed service members who had children between the ages of 5 and 12 to study the psychological and social effects of deployment on children. They found that a third of these children were at high risk for psychosocial dysfunction, and they highlight the different kinds of pressures that accompany each phase of deployment. Early on, the child of a deployed service member may exhibit "emotionally withdrawn, apathetic, or…regressive behavior" (2009, p. 271). This is

followed by a readjustment phase in which a family establishes new norms and new ways of functioning without the missing parent. However, further conflict arises when the parent returns from deployment and reintegrates into the family, partly because the reunification can end up being less joyful than expected. In fact, returning home can be "the most stressful part of a deployment" (Flake et al., 2009). Confirming the data reported by the California Healthy Kids Survey, Griffiths and Townsend (2018) report that “deployments are associated with significant increases in mental health referrals for military children for stress, anxiety, aggression, inattentiveness, attachment disorders, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation” (p.98). These authors observe that “the most difficult time for children is during and after a parental deployment” because “both these times require an adjustment in family roles and routines” (Griffiths & Townsend, 2018, p. 98).

One particular factor that influences the difficulty of a deployment is proximity to military bases; Griffiths & Townsend found that “more resources are available during deployment to support these families than those that do not reside near an installation” (p. 98). This factor is worth noting, given that all seven of my participants lived off-base, and my research sites (one school and two homes) were all approximately 30 minutes away from the base. None of the participants even lived in the city where the base was located, and six out of seven students in the study mentioned feeling a lack of support at school during deployments. These students’ comments connect to DePedro et al.’s (2014) findings that “School personnel and home caregivers have reported that military-connected adolescents exhibit increased behavior problems during a deployment…and perceive school staff as unsupportive or unaware of their unique circumstances” (p. 3).

Military life also involves separations unrelated to deployment. Families who do not have a service member currently deployed still have to deal with the service member parent leaving at times for training, special missions, remote TDYs (Temporary Duty), and the long work hours that accompany the expectation that military personnel are one hundred percent committed to their jobs (Link & Palinkas, 2009). While these circumstances may not differ greatly from those of civilian children whose parents have demanding jobs, it is important to remember that they often happen alongside other major life events, such as relocation.

Permanent Changes of Station (PCS), the frequent relocations that are perhaps most commonly associated with life in the military, come with their own set of difficulties. Most people seem to understand that military families relocate frequently, but perhaps less understood are the uneven effects of relocation on the children of those families. In 2005, Weber & Weber surveyed 179 parents of military adolescents to measure the effects of relocation frequency on student behavior. They categorized these adolescents by PCS frequency—low, high, and very high number of relocations—and then asked for the number of school problems reported among each group, defining a school problem as "any nonroutine request by the school for a conference about the child" (Weber & Weber, 2005, p. 640). Their first finding confirmed their hypothesis that increasing relocations would increase school problems: 42% of families in the high relocation group reported school problems, as opposed to 16% in the low relocation group. What surprised them was the "very high relocation group," in which only 19% of families reported school problems. This led the researchers to theorize that this group of students developed resilience; that the more they moved, the more adaptive strategies they developed, "thus experiencing fewer school problems than their less frequently

relocating peers" (Weber & Weber 2005, p. 640). I was inspired by Weber & Weber's finding that an aspect of military life could be an asset to military kids' development, that growing up in the military could generate strengths and not just challenges or obstacles. However, Weber & Weber's study—like most other studies of military kids—points to a need for different methodologies and perspectives to create a more well-rounded portrait of this population. DePedro et al. (2014) call for research that attends to military kids' voices because such studies

> could elicit an understanding of the extent to which military-connected students feel connected to civiewvilian peers, and how teachers support (or don't support) them during difficult military-life experiences (e.g., deployment). This information could be used to inform how teachers, principals, and school staff adapt evidence-based practices for military-connected students facing deployment, reintegration, and other military stressors" (p.29).

Largely missing from the picture of military kids are "studies that incorporate students' perspectives" and "rich information on the viewpoints of military-connected students" (DePedro et. al, 2014, p.29), and this is one gap to which I hope my study will speak. Using genre analysis to look at the patterns and narrative frameworks students use to describe their experiences will provide rich insight into the kind of viewpoints that DePedro et al. are saying the field needs. However, this analysis can only reveal what students' perspectives are, not necessarily how the students formed or developed those perspectives. This is where the study of literacy is particularly illuminating, because looking at how students are using literacy can provide insight into how they agentively work to sustain, enhance, or alter their viewpoints. Simultaneously, investigating uses of literacy among this group can contribute a new chapter to literacy studies.

Literacy Studies

Early literacy scholars, including the Great Divide theorists, often drew a too-sharp distinction between what they referred to as preliterate and literate cultures, contributing to a view of literacy as a neutral, decontextualized skill (Goody & Watt, 1963; Ong, 1982). For many of these scholars, writing meant encoding spoken language in visual form, and reading meant decoding text. These definitions of reading and writing, while not incorrect, may not fully account for the contexts in which literacy practices are situated. As J.P. Gee asserts, the traditional view of literacy was limited because it "was seen as something residing primarily inside people's heads, not society" and therefore it overlooked the embodied, social conditions for meaning making through literacies (1990, p. 2). Researchers in New Literacy Studies, such as Brian Street, Shirley Brice Heath, J.P. Gee, and Deborah Brandt pushed back against both the ethnocentric implications of the preliterate/literate distinction as well as the narrow scope of the definition of literacy. Brian Street posited that literacy was more than a mere technical skill and was never neutral, arguing instead that literacy is always socially and culturally contextualized and therefore ideologically loaded (2006). The social nature of literacy is rooted in the social nature of meaning making according to Gee, who argued that "[m]eaning is not something locked away in heads. Meaning is something we negotiate and contest socially," and it is influenced by cultures, social groups, common conventions, shared agreements, and relationships (1990, p. 27). To engage in acts of literacy is also to engage in these socioculturally situated processes of meaning-making.

In order to more finely distinguish among various types of engagement with texts, Shirley Brice Heath defined "literacy events" as "occasions in which written language is integral

to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies" (1982, p. 50). Deborah Brandt and Katie Clinton defined "literacy practice" as "the socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 342).[5] Like Brandt and Clinton, Street argued that "the concept of 'Literacy practices' is pitched at a higher level of abstraction" than the concept of literacy events, and explained that "[l]iteracy practices incorporate not only 'literacy events,' as empirical occasions to which literacy is integral, but also…the ideological preconceptions that underpin them" (1995, p. 2). Brandt and Clinton further distinguished between literacy events and literacy practices by identifying events as "discrete, observable happenings" and practices as "abstract, enduring, and not wholly observable" (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 342).

In teasing out the definitions of so many terms attached to literacy (literacy events, literacy practices, etc.), I find it useful to place boundaries around the thing I am calling "literacy." Lewis and Fabos define literacy as "the range of practices involved in the alphabetic coding of socially and culturally relevant signs and symbols," and they assert that when literacy is used "to refer to all forms of knowledge (i.e., math literacy) or modes of communication (i.e., visual literacy)" it becomes "too vague to be useful to educators and researchers" (2005, p. 474). Like Lewis and Fabos, for the purpose of maintaining a sufficiently narrow focus for my study, I limit my definition of literacy to alphabetically coded signs (which can be digital, print-based, handwritten, etc.). I define literacy events as the time-bound, discrete, observable contexts in which literacy acts occur and which influence meaning-making. I define literacy

practices as the set of socially- and culturally-shaped habits, patterns, beliefs, expectations, and dispositions that people bring with them to literacy events.

Furthermore, part of my study of literacy in the lives of military kids includes an examination of "uses" of literacy, because, as Street argued, "uses and meanings of literacy [vary] in different cultural settings" (1995, p.3). Therefore, a study of literacy can illuminate the nature and significance of the cultural setting, and vice versa. Especially relevant to my study are the ways people use literacy in various sociocultural contexts in relationship to their identities. I was not only interested in what kinds of reading and writing my participants were *doing*; I was also interested in what they were *doing with* those literacies. Attending to the function of literacy, particularly in relationship to identity, is a key aspect of my theoretical lens. In the section entitled "restorying," I explain more specifically how people use literacy to shape identity.

One of the major implications of all of this literacy research for the kind of work I am doing is that I am studying the spaces people inhabit as much as I am studying the literate work people do within those spaces. For this particular project, the "space" I am studying is military life. So before I can properly understand what the military-connected students in my study are doing with literacy, I have to map out the terrain of military life *as they perceive it*, and their perceptions are primarily accessible to me through their discourse. This is why the first findings chapter is a discourse analysis of how students talk about military life. But what that analysis does is lay a groundwork for a very different kind of understanding of these students' literacy practices, seeing beyond the practice itself to better understand the context. As Wargo & De Costa (2017) note, there is a "purchasing power" in seeing literacies "not solely as a field or set

of practices, but rather as a locating mechanism for studying a range of translanguaged and hybridized repertoires…that are shaped and constituted by the physical and social spaces that contemporary youth inhabit" (p. 102). The emphasis on studying physical and social spaces alongside the study of literacy is that it reflects a "commitment to staying rooted in people's lived experiences and an attempt to explore what may be at stake for them in specific contexts" (Lillis and Scott, 2007, p. 13). Lillis & Scott (2007) argue that what is needed in the study of literacy (speaking of academic literacies specifically) is "a critical ethnographic gaze focusing on situated text production and practice" (p. 13). What is especially interesting about military kids as a focus is that they live across ever-changing situations, rendering even more visible the phenomenon described by Wargo & De Costa (2017), who argue that the "experiences and contexts" of literacy shift: "They merge, transform, and create new conditions that have everything to with literacies (both academic and other), thereby demonstrating how deeply entrenched literacy is in the lives of people" (p. 103). My study will show that as military kids cut ties with certain communities, create ties with others, merge their lives into new conditions set by the contexts of relocation and deployment, their literacies cut, create, merge, and flow right along with them. If the field of literacy research is headed toward understanding reading and writing in terms of "action and movement" and if scholars want to view literacies as "connected, networked, and maintained in an era of globalization," then I would suggest that military kids offer many rich research possibilities.

Adolescent Literacy and Identity

In the field of adolescent literacy, popular discussions are often fraught with shifting definitions, deficit views, and claims based on insufficient evidence. As part of a broader

cultural narrative about the trouble with "kids these days," talk about the next generation's reading and writing habits tends to focus on problems rather than possibilities (e.g., kids waste time on their phones; kids have terrible spelling and grammar, kids aren't prepared for college, etc.). In-depth studies of adolescent literacy practices are important ways of constructing useful counter-narratives to these stereotypes. Adolescents draw upon complex discursive resources to discuss their experiences, and they also use literacy events and practices to cope with, escape from, make sense of, and/or deriving meaning from their worlds (Davies and Harré, 1990; Moje et al., 2009). In addition to acknowledging the challenges facing adolescents as they read and write, studies should also address strengths and key leverage points for educators. Modern adolescents are not only learning academic literacies that require navigation of different discourse communities, but they are also engaging in a variety of dynamic digital and multimodal literacy practices for diverse rhetorical purposes, both in and out of school (Moje et al., 2008).

A complex, nuanced picture of adolescent literacy is incomplete without a look at the crucial intersection between literacy and identity. A fuller understanding of how adolescents engage with texts can emerge from a study of how students' experiences shape the way they read and write. Because literacy practices are socially situated and culturally contextualized, and because those sociocultural contexts give us different selves to enact, a more complete picture of adolescent literacy will also include a study of literacy and identity's mutually influential relationship. A deeper understanding of that relationship not only challenges the prevailing deficit view by highlighting the motivations and purposes underlying adolescent literacy, but it also has different pedagogical implications than the study of literacy alone.

Reading and writing are sense-making activities, and no human sense-making happens in a vacuum: it is always contextualized by how we identify ourselves, by our personal and collective histories, and by what we do, think, say, feel, and believe about the world around us. The formative adolescent years present especially generative opportunities for investigating the literacy-identity relationship. What roles do reading and writing play in the lives of people at crossroads, who are figuring out who they want to be, and who are navigating multiple, intersecting identities—some chosen, some imposed, some embraced, some resisted? In the study of how military kids use literacy, it is important to ask, why study identity at all? More specifically, as McCarthy and Moje posit, "[w]hy indeed should literacy theorists, researchers, and teachers care about how readers' identities are constructed, represented, and performed in acts of reading?" (2002, p. 228). To answer that question, I need to first provide a working definition of what I mean by identity in the context of this project. I would align my own position regarding identity with those researchers who posit that identity is more fluid, dynamic, and socially contextualized, than it is fixed, static, and individually determined. As Lewis and Del Valle argue, "[i]dentity is not just an individual matter. It is social, cultural, historical, institutional, and political, and all of these conditions mean that identity has material effects related to lived realities in the form of resources, goods, and emotional well-being" (2009, p. 308). Identity is also by nature narrative, an ongoing dialogue between person and context. Stuart Hall (1996) observes that:

> identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language, and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from,' so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. Identities are therefore constituted within, not

> outside representation…not the so-called return to roots but a coming-to-terms-with our 'routes'" (p. 4).

The study of identity therefore must attend to the conversation between the individual and the historical/linguistic/cultural resources that person has drawn upon in the representation of his/her/their identity. Understanding identity in the terms that Hall describes has particular purchase in the study of military kids whose response to the question "where are you from?" is often a story of "routes" rather than a revelation of "roots." Identity is both shaped by a variety of global and local forces, and it also acts as a force of its own, a phenomenon with real-world consequences. Viewing identity as influenced by sociocultural forces does not eliminate agency; different identities can be enacted, depending on the situation, the individual, and the social and cultural forces at work.

The ways in which identities are being formed and enacted in the modern world require special attention to what Wargo & De Costa (2017) refer to as "mobilities," or the "multi-directional flows of culture, texts, identities, and ideologies" as students are "more readily entering and exiting classrooms, occupations, and contexts" (p. 104). These mobilities are what "create the conditions for identity-making" and "illuminate the movement and vibrancy that is literacy learning" (Wargo & De Costa, 2017, p. 104). In other words, the fluid and dynamic nature of identity is currently being emphasized in an increasingly mobile world; therefore the concept of "mobilities" is a lens that we should consider in the study of literacy and identity. Wargo & De Costa argue that in "taking heed of the constellation of communities, discourses, and cultures that students traverse across and through…identities can no longer be considered static or indexical" and that it is vital to recognize "the multiple affiliations and discourse

communities individuals traverse, and of which they remain a part" (pp. 104-105). In the case of military kids, understanding identity in terms of a constellation of communities and multiple affiliations and seeing individuals' efforts to enact identity as a negotiation of those systems, is impossible to ignore.

Given these multiple affiliations and discourse communities, it is important to understand how individuals are continually enacting different identities in different contexts and how those enactments create a framework through which we interpret the world around us. As Davies and Harré put it, "[a]n individual emerges through the process of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product, but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate" (1990, p. 46). The product of culturally-contextualized identity formation is what Holland et al. refer to as a "figured world," a "socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation that is formed and re-formed in relation to everyday activities and events" (1998, pp. 52-53). In other words, various identities are enacted moment by moment as we converse, make choices, interact with our environments, and of course, as we read and write. As we make these choices, we are shaping our "figured worlds": the filters for our perception of ourselves, other people, and the events of our everyday lives. The answer to the question "who are we?" is "always an open question with a shifting answer" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 46). Understanding the social and cultural forces that shape figured worlds and knowing that those worlds are perpetually in flux sets the stage for understanding the nature of the connection between identity and literacy.

One of identity's "material effects" is on literacy, and just like identity, literacy shapes and is shaped by social, cultural, historical, institutional, and political conditions. Indeed, social

and cultural identity influence literacy in such a profound way that “texts have little meaning outside the particularly contextualized lives…of readers” (Lewis & Del Valle, 2009, p. 307). Sfard and Prusak explore the idea that the study of identity takes on different significance depending on the situation. They argue that:

> Why one needs identity depends on the researcher's questions, and these questions may not be the same for a sociologist, a cultural theorist, and an educational researcher. This said, all of these types of research have on overarching theme in common: The focus of the investigator's attention is on human beings in action and on the mechanisms underlying human action. More specifically, the leading queries are as follows: Why do different individuals act differently in the same situations? (Sfard & Prusak, 2005, p. 14)

I need to study identity because I am interested in how students growing up in the military use literacy events and practices to shape their perspectives on their lived experiences and, conversely, how military life influences students’ engagement with literacies. Moje et al. (2009) describe this two-way street between literacy and identity, arguing that people’s identities influence and are influenced by their literate acts (p. 416). The authors explain this connection between literacy and identity in more detail, asserting that "texts and the literate practices that accompany them not only reflect but may also produce the self" through such means as "constructing self-understanding" or "developing consciousness amidst conflicted social arrangements" (Moje et al., 2009, p. 416). Ira Shor makes a similar claim with a construction metaphor: "We are what we say and do...[t]hrough words and actions, we build ourselves in a world that is building us" (Shor, 1999). When we sit down with a text to decode its symbols and engage with its meaning, we are building worlds and being built; actors being acted upon. Why should studies of literacy be linked with studies of identity? Because “language itself is not only a linguistic system of signs and symbols; it is also a complex social practice in which the value

and meaning ascribed to an utterance are determined in part by the value and meaning ascribed to the person who speaks," and any engagement with texts necessarily includes "ongoing negotiation among historical understandings, contemporary realities, and future desires" (Norton & Toohey, 2002, p. 115).

While acts of reading and writing may appear to be neutral and decontextualized, there is much happening in the cultural context and in the mind of the learner, and these are depths well worth sounding in order to develop the most complete picture of the engagement between person and text. In short, as Moje succinctly states, "identity matters [in literacy studies] because it, whatever *it* is, shapes or is an aspect of how humans make sense of the world and their experiences in it, including experiences with texts" (2002, p. 228). If growing up as a military kid shapes how students make sense of the world, then it also shapes their experiences with texts.

Agency

The link between identity and literacy is agency, because it is through literacy that students can shape their identities, speak back to what has happened to them, and exert control over the shape of their own stories. In the context of literacy and identity, what is meant by agency? What does it look like, how is it enacted, and what are its affordances and limitations? Theoretically, agency has its foundations in worldmaking, "a concept with a long history (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Goodman, 1978; Holland, Lachiotte Jr., Skinner & Cain, 1998) [that] refers to the ways we collectively make the spaces we inhabit" and worldmaking "serves as a generative lens for understanding the ways people construct and negotiate these social frames of meaning from existing cultural and historical resources" (Stornaiuolo and Whitney, 2018, p.

206). Stornaiuolo and Whitney present a vision of “writing as a practice of worldmaking to foreground its productive, generative dimensions, as young people use resources at hand to construct new worlds and write themselves into narratives…” (p. 206). There is a sense in which we live in worlds that we are placed in, but in another sense, we live in worlds of our own construction, and that worldmaking is the visible manifestation of our agency.

Certainly, the literacy resources we are given for this symbolic activity are provided for us by our environments, both local and global, immediate and historical. As Julie Warner (2016) notes, “people have agency as communicators, but are inextricable from their context, linguistically and historically…A person’s words are ever populated with historical meanings, even as she or he contributes authorial intent” (p. 167). However, even given the contexts that constrain our communicative choices, it is still possible to read agency in the way people engage in worldmaking. It would be irresponsible to talk about agency without naming the asymmetrical power structures, sponsors of literacy, and sociocultural systems that constrain agency and set the conditions in which we act. We are not completely free. The constraints upon agency are thrown into sharp relief in examining the circumstances of most military kids’ lives, because the military is a fundamentally agency-suppressing institution. From the moment new recruits begin basic training, many of the choices they make about how to live their lives are taken away and replaced with the will of the unit, squadron, group, or team, which is also in service of the will of the military as a whole. This lack of agency extends in some ways to the families of service members: families are usually given little or no choice in where or how often they move, when or how long they are separated, and where and from whom they receive basic services, such as health care (and it is easy to see how some of these constraints can also

apply to other groups of people, such as immigrants). However, honest appraisal of the limitations of agency need not erase it altogether. Literacy is one place we can look to study agency, because it is through reading and writing that people can begin to exercise control over their own stories. For military kids, who live in a context in which limits on agency are especially visible, an examination of literacies can also be an examination of how they regain the agency that was taken away from them. There is a sense in which the military very directly tells its service members (and indirectly tells service members' families) who they are; it tries to give them a meaning and a purpose—duty, honor, country. Literacy presents the opportunity to construct a different set of meanings.

Restorying

So what are the specific, agentive, worldmaking practices in which students engage through literacy? How are students using reading and writing to shape their perspectives on their lives? Scholars who have studied the ways that people use literacy to rewrite their narratives use the term "restorying" to explain this phenomenon. Ebony Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo (2016) discuss restorying as "reshaping narratives to better reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences" (p. 314). Their definition of restorying is built on Louise Rosenblatt's transactional reader response theory, which "characterize(s) the relationship between readers and writer as a transaction—a dynamic, fluid interrelationship instantiated in particular, lived contexts" (p. 316) and Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, which focuses on ways "readers and writers are always engaged in a struggle over meaning that influences the development of their ideological selves" (p. 316). Rosenblatt's and Bakhtin's theories will each be taken up and discussed elsewhere in this dissertation, but what is important to note here is

the way Thomas & Stornaiuolo synthesize these theories, arguing that "Rereading Rosenblatt's theory of reader response alongside Bakhtin's notion of ideological becoming, we find the idea of *struggle* to be central to reader-writer-text transactions, as readers shape their identities in effortful dialogic interrelationships" (p. 316). Viewing literacy as a dialogue and a transaction, something ideologically-loaded and identity-connected, is a necessary condition of seeing agency in students' literate acts. If literacy is not a passive, one-way street, but an active dialogue, and if meaning emerges in a struggle between reader/writer and text, then restorying—the act of using literacy to frame the story of one's own life—is not just possible, but almost inevitable.

Lauren Rosenberg also used the term "restorying," but with a slightly expanded focus to examine not only the ways participants are challenging dominant narratives about their lives, but also to understand more generally the links between life and literacy. In her longitudinal study of 4 adult literacy learners, Rosenberg (2015) described how her participants "challeng[ed] the scripts imposed on them by restorying their narratives," (p.21) and in this quote, her use of the term "restorying" is similar to the kind of restorying that Thomas & Stornaiuolo discuss: a subversive retelling of a dominant, marginalizing narrative. However, Rosenberg broadens the term to include ways that her participants used literacy to "theoriz[e] about their own experiences, thus moving toward… 'rhetorical agency'" (p. 21), and she argued that "Working out experience by constructing narratives, and re*stor*ing experience through the act of re*story*ing, is unique—often essential—to the act of writing" (p. 18). In this definition, restorying can be seen in the ways people use literacy to tell stories about their lives, whether or not those stories subvert the dominant narrative. And the final goal of restorying is almost

always related to the formation and enactment of our identity, a greater understanding of ourselves as we move through the world; Rosenberg notes that "The work of restorying allows for an articulation of self-knowledge that the writer makes permanent and can revisit" (p. 114). This quote also draws attention to the ways that literacy allows for more enduring narrative frameworks and therefore a construction "self-knowledge" that can be deepened through repeated encounters. There is a limit to the kind of restorying that can happen through talk. It is through literacy that students have a fuller set of tools for sustaining, enhancing, or altering their own perspectives on their lives. Examining students' literacies through the lens of restorying allows us to see agentive acts that may or may not subvert the norm, but always involve students' choosing what to think about their lived experiences.

Transactional Reader-Response and the Psychology of Fiction

While the examples from Thomas & Stornaiuolo and Rosenberg would seem to suggest that only writing provides the potential for students to restory their lives, reading—and more specifically reading fiction—also enables students to develop their perspectives on their experiences. To understand how this is possible, we need to investigate both the nature of art and the psychology of fiction. Art is typically not intended to communicate an objective reality and "drive people towards a particular conclusion" (Oatley, 2011, p. 18). Instead, as Keith Oatley (2011) observes, art is meant to provide a space for "thoughts and feelings around a shared object—a work of art—in a way that offers multiple possibilities of understanding" (p. 18). Fiction by its nature possesses a simulative aspect, which means that acts of reading go beyond comprehension; there is a kind of identification with the story, a connection with the characters that happens as we read and are drawn into a narrative. Not all of this simulation

occurs at the level of consciousness. Embodiment theory suggests that fiction does its work on readers in ways that are not entirely within their control, and some of the most significant interactions between reader and story happen within the subconscious. Keith Oatley (2011) describes the work of Glenberg et al., a team of researchers who conducted a 2006 study in which they scanned the brains of people who were reading fiction:

> what these researchers found was that when we understand a sentence, [in addition to] activation of the areas of the brain concerned with hearing and language, *there is also activation in the areas concerned with making the same actions ourselves*…When readers were engaged in a story, the researchers found that, at the points in which the story said a protagonist undertook an action, activation of the brain occurred in the part which the reader himself or herself would use to undertake the action (p. 20, emphasis mine).

If someone was reading about a person pulling on a chain to switch on a lightbulb, the areas of the brain associated with grasping would light up on the scan. If someone was reading about a small room with a table and chair next to a window, the areas of the brain associated with spatial reasoning would light up. These kinds of activations applied both to physical transfer ("give the ball to Lily") as well as to abstract transfer ("give that task to Serena") (Oatley, 2011, p. 202). In other words, people were finding themselves connecting to what they were reading in ways that were beyond their control, and their brains were internalizing and personalizing each action in the story, as if they were the characters.

The reader-text connection goes beyond mere physical sympathy with a character's actions; reading forges an emotional connection as well, through a series of "distinct psychological processes," as described by Oatley. One such process is identification, which happens when someone reads a story and the book's "plot takes over the planning processor" (p. 114), or the part of the brain that runs simulations. In identification, "one tends to identify

with the protagonist, adopt his or her goals, and take on his or her plans….But here is the extraordinary feature: Although the goals and plans are simulated, the emotions are not. They are the reader's own" (p. 114). A key psychological aspect of reading involves a merging of the reader's emotions with the protagonist's emotions, a sympathetic connection that not only enhances the imaginative experience of reading, but also allows readers to approach their own emotions in a way that they may not be able to in real life. Part of the usefulness of fiction is the distance it affords, and the space it gives us to work out emotional responses to situations that we may not be able to handle in a straightforward way. Oatley explains this process:

> In ordinary life…emotions can sometimes be overwhelming, so their meaning is not recognized. In other instances, one distances oneself from emotions and suppresses them. In either case, the effects of such experiences can leave one in emotional arrears, because events have occurred that have profound emotional significance but that one has not assimilated. Drama, novels, and certain kinds of rituals allow re-evocation of such emotions, neither underdistanced nor overdistanced but at what Scheff called an optimal aesthetic distance at which they can be understood and assimilated. (p. 114).

A reader watches a character experience something and calls upon a memory of an emotionally similar circumstance in order to interpret and make meaning of the fictional situation.

Meaning-making goes both ways; not only do our real-life experiences provide a framework for interpreting fiction, but fiction offers us a different frame for understanding and making sense of our real lives. Although book lovers and English majors hold as self-evident the truth that fictional texts shape perceptions of one's own life, the phenomenon is under-theorized. The human tendency to grab hold a piece of story that matters to us and then view our lives through its lens is widely recognized, often assumed in studies of literature, and seldom explicitly studied. A different world proffers a different set of rules for processing the

dark matter of our lived experiences. In this sense, the connections between literacy and identity are not superficial or tenuous; they run deeper than we may recognize. This idea of the reader's self as one a text was expressed rather poetically by Marcel Proust in *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* when he said, "it would even be inexact to say that I thought of those who read it, as readers of my book. Because they were not, as I saw it, my readers. *More exactly they were readers of themselves, my book being a sort of magnifying glass…by which I could give them the means to read within themselves*" (quote translated by Oatley, 2011, p. 79; emphasis mine). The Roman poet Horace put it more succinctly in his famous quote: *mutato nomine de te fabula narratur.* Change the name, and the story is about you. What fiction affords us is the mitigating power of aesthetic distance—we see our lives, but through a glass, darkly. We process and make sense of our experiences, but indirectly. The cathartic power of fiction is not a flash flood, but the slow drip of an IV.

Because people read fiction through the lens of their own memories, background, and experiences—what Oatley refers to as a schema—it is possible to better understand people's schemas by listening to them discuss fiction. Oatley (1999) notes that "when people read a story, their comprehension and remembering of it are not faithful renderings. They are based on idiosyncratic and societal schemas available to the reader; these schemas assimilate salient details and the emotional tone of a story and can then, if remembering is required, generate a construction of it that is more or less inaccurate" (p. 102). Therefore, in the findings chapters when students describe the stories they have read or written, they are not only providing insight into the book, but also into the schemas that they used to interpret and understand the book. In some cases, through a comparison of a book's contents with a student's retelling,

salient differences or key points of emphasis provide crucial insight into students' schemas. Schemas apply to emotional responses as well. As readers feel emotions simultaneously with fictional characters, they are drawing upon their own emotional reserves built by years of responses to their own set of lived experiences. Listening to people talk about what has happened to them only gives us one kind of look at the effects of their experiences on their identities. If we can examine their schemas for reading fiction, we have a way of triangulating their stories and understanding more deeply how they view the world and themselves.

Oatley's research in the psychology of fiction lends scientific support to the transactional reader-response theory developed by Louise Rosenblatt, who emphasizes the co-creative act of the reader. While it is tempting to view reading as passive, Rosenblatt argues that reading involves a "to-and-fro, spiraling, nonlinear, continuously reciprocal influence," a kind of "combustion fed by the coming together of a particular personality and particular text at a particular time" (1995, p.xvi). If reading is as active and dynamic as Rosenblatt suggests, then meaning is a by-product of this combustive process, and not a static entity: "'meaning' does not reside ready-made 'in' the text or 'in' the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text" (2005, p.7).

Using Rosenblatt's theory as a basis for studying how people use literature requires examining what backgrounds and experiences people bring to literacy in order to understand what kinds of meaning are being made between specific people and specific texts. Rosenblatt explains that in the reading of a literary work,

> The reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the

> submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him* [sic]. The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition (1995, p.30).

For the adolescent reader in particular, the combustive transactions involved in reading are further complicated by the fact that "he [sic] has probably not yet arrived at a consistent view of life or achieved a fully integrated personality" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p.30). For adolescent readers even more than other readers, the changing circumstances of external events as well as ever-fluctuating internal development influence the wildly different kinds of meaning they can derive from literacy. Rosenblatt advises beginning the study of reading with the study of the reader, because "[w]ithout an understanding of the reader, one cannot predict what particular text may be significant to him or what may be the special quality of his experience. Hence it is important to consider some of the selective factors that may mold the reader's response to literature" (1995, p.35). In response to Rosenblatt's argument, I begin my study of military kids' literacies with a study of the military kids themselves. By examining how they talk about their lives, I can more fully understand how they make meaning through literacy. Like all adolescents, the participants in my study "must draw on…past experience[s] with life and language as the raw materials out of which to shape the new experience symbolized on the page" (1995, p.25).

CONCLUSION

A review of the research about military kids demonstrates a need for greater understanding of military kids' perspectives on their experiences, and my study takes up DePedro et al.'s (2014) call for "rich information on the viewpoints of military-connected students" (p. 29). The way to answer the question of what kind of perspectives military kids

have on their experiences is to examine how they talk about their lives. Specifically, I use genre analysis to explore the narratives that military kids employ to tell their stories. Such analysis can reveal not only how these students feel about their experiences, but also how their identities have been shaped by various events. However, it is an examination of military kids' literacy practices that can yield an understanding of how military kids are using literacy to restory their perspectives on their experiences. Studying relocation and deployment alone casts military kids in a passive role; studying these students' literacies through the lens of restorying allows us to see agency, and it gives us a glimpse into how they are narrating and counter-narrating their own lives through the reading and writing they do. A look at military kids' lives and the ways that literacies are interwoven with their lives allows us to see more clearly the "multi-directional flows of culture, text, identities and ideologies" (Wargo & De Costa, 2017, p. 104) that are present in all literacies. Although my three findings chapters are dedicated to the lives and literacies of the seven participants in my study, there are implications for students who experience things like parental separation and multiple relocations. And given that there is a "scarcity of information in how youths use literacy to make meaning" (Crooks, 2014, p. 8), my work makes an important contribution to the field of adolescent literacy studies as well.

Chapter 2

Methods

STUDY DESIGN

In the book *Learning from Strangers,* Robert Weiss (1994) lists some of the following items as good reasons to conduct a qualitative study: "developing detailed descriptions…integrating multiple perspectives…developing holistic description…learning how events are interpreted…bridging intersubjectivities (making it possible for readers to grasp a situation as a participant might)" (p. 13). These reasons align well with my research goals for this study of military kids and their literacy practices. I worked to create a study with detailed descriptions that integrated multiple perspectives but provided a holistic description of the phenomena I witnessed. I not only worked to learn how my participants interpreted and made sense of the events of their lives, but I also worked to help my readers understand situations in the way that my participants understood them.

In Chapter 1, I reviewed the available research about military kids and argued that there was not only a need for research that more thoroughly investigates how military kids talk about their experiences, but also examines their literacies to understand more fully how their viewpoints are formed and developed. Starting from the notion that literacy and identity are both socially situated and culturally contextualized, I used the theoretical frameworks of

restorying and of transactional reader-response theory to argue that an examination of literacies can provide insight into the ways that students are agentively narrating (and counter-narrating) their lived experiences. In this chapter, I describe how I elicited students' perspectives on their lives and how I studied the role that literacy played in shaping those perspectives. This chapter describes my study design, research sites, participant selection, data collection, and data analysis, as well as the ethical questions I considered at each stage of the research process.

As a military kid, a former high school English teacher, and a researcher with an interest in literacy, I noticed that there were very few studies that asked military kids to provide their own perspectives on their experiences, and that there were almost no studies that examined the literacies of this specific population. Therefore, I sought to design a study that would attend to military kids' discourses as well as their literacies and that would explore the connections between those two things. As I worked to foreground the students themselves in my analysis, I also sought to understand their literacies not as a separate phenomenon, but as woven into the fabric of their everyday lives and constitutive of their identities.

Several qualitative, empirical studies of adolescent literacy practices informed my purpose, design, and methodological approach to this project. Moje, Overby, Tysvaer, and Morris's "The Complex World of Adolescent Literacy" (2008) is a mixed methods study that investigates the reading practices of Latino/a youth, and Elizabeth Moje's "To Be Part of the Story" (2000) explores the literacies of adolescent gang members. Both studies employ ethnographic methods to study the literacy practices of adolescents from different communities. Moje et al.'s "Complex World" explores the relationship between reading and the

development of socially situated identities, making the link between literacy and identity explicit. One of the central claims the authors make based on their data is that "young people's motivations to read and write outside of school is that reading and writing are situated in and constitutive of social networks and identities (either developed, or developing)" (2008, p. 13). Moje's "Part of the Story" presents findings from in-depth, longitudinal ethnographic work she conducted among adolescent gang members. Moje's study focused on how adolescents use literacy to navigate their tumultuous lived experiences. Relocation was one of the features of her participants' lives that influenced their literacies: "[a] relatively high degree of transiency…contributed to their learning a wide variety of practices in order to survive and gain position in their communities" (2000, p. 674). This research highlights the numerous, complex connections between literacy and adolescent identity and provides a glimpse into the kinds of data about literacy practices that can emerge in studies that employ ethnographic methods. Like Moje, I worked to understand adolescent literacy practices through the lens of "use"; that is, how these students were using literacy to shape their perspectives on their experiences, and ultimately, restory their lives (though she does not use this term).

Quaylan Allen's (2017) article "'They Write Me Off and Don't Give Me a Chance to Learn Anything': Positioning, Discipline, and Black Masculinities in School," based on data from a study of black male high school students, also informed my research design and reflections on positionality. Allen's study design involved choosing ten youth from a single high school and conducting two semi-structured interviews and one photo elicitation interview. Allen identifies one of his strategies for triangulation: approaching the collective interviews as "multivocal interpretations (Tobin et al. 1989) of the same phenomenon" (2017, p. 272). While he is

focused on one particular aspect of identity (race), he is also attentive to intersectionality of multiple identities. In terms of positionality, Allen writes that he considers himself "both an insider and an outsider" in relationship to the participants in his study, and he reflects productively on the affordances and limitations of being on that insider spectrum. In order to address potential threats to validity, some of which are related to positionality, Allen describes the process of thoroughly member checking his findings with his participants. Allen's attentiveness to the ways his participants both "resist and accommodate…positioning discourses…in inconsistent and contradictory ways" (p. 274) gave me a useful pattern when it came to making sense of my participants' interaction with positioning discourses. Allen's work also pushed my thinking on the subject of positionality; the way he considers both the limitations as well as the affordances of being on the insider spectrum with his participants was useful for considering more facets of my own "insider-ness" with my research subjects. In different ways, Allen's study and Moje's study each provided useful blueprints to follow, and I was able to imitate many of these scholars' rhetorical and analytic moves in designing my own study.

SITE SELECTION AND PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT

In order to address my research questions, I investigated the lives and literacy practices of adolescent (13 to 18-year-old) military kids from the suburbs of Camden, a city of approximately 140,000 people in a midwestern state. Located within Camden is a large air force base that employs around 27,000 people. The data[5] for this study was collected between

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[5] All geographic details (city names, township names, etc.) have been anonymized to protect the identities of my participants.

January and June 2018. In that time frame, I conducted three sets of interviews, collected an archive of student writing, and obtained observational data from the school that most of my participants attended, as well as observational data from the surrounding community.

I began my recruitment efforts by creating a list of schools in the area that could serve as possible research sites. I knew from talking to colleagues and professors that I would not be likely to get permission to do my research at a K-12 school without having a prior connection to the teachers or administrators, and this turned out to be completely accurate. I secured my first site by looking at a staff directory of a church in my denomination that is in the Camden area and finding a woman I attended college with 18 years ago. She put in me contact with the principal at my first site, who was incredibly helpful and generous in talking through recruitment strategies, quick to answer email, etc. I sent to him and to the district superintendent my research plan, a draft of my interview guide, and parental consent and student assent and consent forms (for a sample consent form, see appendix C). After the principal had signed the permission letter from the IRB, he began to assist me with participant recruitment.

Despite our best efforts, the response rate was very low; I only received two responses to my first recruitment email. That low response rate made me realize that I would have to change my strategy significantly. I immediately begin preparing an amendment to my IRB that would allow me to use additional recruitment strategies. The principal sent a follow-up email that gained me one additional participant. I gave my recruitment packet (introductory letter and consent forms) to teachers who agreed to help me and who knew of military students in their classrooms. Using this method, I gained four additional participants, seven total from the

one school (although as I discuss later, one did not fit the selection criteria). At that point, I had exhausted all recruitment strategies permitted by my IRB and administration at that particular site, so I began to turn my attention to other possible sites in the area.

I was involved in some kind of recruitment effort for almost a full year. I emailed every school in the region and invested considerable time and energy (creating customized materials, phone calls, emails, and an in-person visit) in one site that looked very promising but ultimately did not materialize. I also reached out to two dozen churches in the area, but only heard back from two of them to say that they did not have any military-connected students in the age range I was looking for. I went back to my original contact and asked if they had any family or friends who were military and had teenage children. They put me in contact with the family of a girl who ended up being my seventh participant. What all of this means is that rather than getting to choose my six or seven focal cases from 15 recruits (as I proposed to do in my prospectus), I had to accept all seven students who responded to my recruitment efforts, who fit my selection criteria, and whose parents signed the consent form. Therefore my final group ended up being a convenience sample and I was not able to include as many types of diversity as I had hoped to include.

I accepted seven students for initial interviews at the first school. The survey I had designed to help me select participants became somewhat superfluous, because I no longer needed it to determine which respondents would be the most appropriate participants, although it did provide useful demographic information. After conducting all seven interviews, I decided that only one student definitely did not fit the selection criteria and would not be a good fit for this study. This student's father was in the reserves (no longer active duty), and the student had

never moved, nor did he remember his father's deployment. He indicated on the survey that he rarely thought of himself as a military kid. The other seven participants all fit the following selection criteria:

- Student has had at least one parent as a service member in the military for most of their lives.
- Student has relocated at least three times.
- Student can remember a parent's deployment.

These selection criteria helped me identify students for whom growing up in the military was particularly salient to their identity. Students who had grown up in one place or who had parents who hadn't served long in the military were less likely to consider the military as an influential force in shaping who they were (and how they read and wrote). Initially, one of my selection criteria was having lived on base at some point, but I only had one respondent who remembered living on base. Nevertheless, I believe that the sample I ended up with not only "document[ed] diversity" across military-connected students as a whole, but also allowed me to"identify important common patterns that are common across diversity" (Rogers & Brefeld 2015, p. 267). I was able to document several important kinds of diversity among what initially appeared to be a fairly homogenous group and to find connections between literacy and identity that existed across cases.

I had assumed that since I was an "insider," having grown up as a military kid, I could easily earn the trust of the community. I did not anticipate that I would encounter so much difficulty with finding willing participants, but I have some theories about why I may have struggled with recruitment. First of all, upon reflection, I do not think these military families viewed me as an

insider. I think that since I was coming from a large educational institution, they likely saw me first and foremost as a member of the academic community. Five out of seven students came from families with some kind of connection to education or research; for example, Louisa's father had recently completed a Ph.D., and Jake had two siblings who were English teachers. I think those personal connections created a degree of trust because the families understood the nature and potential benefits of a research study. Second, I think that many military families are at least somewhat familiar with the body of research about military kids, and they know that the findings have been overwhelmingly negative in measuring the military's impact on children's lives. It is likely that they would assume that my study would contribute to that negative image, and I can understand why they would not want their children to contribute to a pessimistic picture. This is a stance in keeping with the well-documented stigma against addressing mental health issues in the military (e.g., Greene-Shortridge et al., 2007). While I believe that my study demonstrates that potential benefits and advantages of military life as well as honestly addressing the challenges, I had no way of assuring families that at least some of the results would be positive. Third, I hypothesize that the increasing political polarization of our society and the ever-smaller circles from which military service members are recruited has led the military to become more distrustful of outsiders. For my pilot study, I was able to recruit two undergraduate students I had previously taught and another undergraduate who was the son of a friend. My personal connection to these three students was sufficient to overcome any distrust these students might have felt for researchers. For the dissertation study, I had no personal connections to high-school-aged military kids, and as a result, recruitment was one of the most challenging aspects of conducting the study.

CONTEXTUAL DATA

There are two parts to the landscape surrounding the towns where my participants lived: farmland and industry. My drive to the site passed many miles of farms, fields, barns, factories. There was pervasive evidence of patriotism (American flags flying from many homes) and religion (barn roof painted with the word JESUS in massive letters; a factory with a giant cross displayed on one side). All signs pointed to a community that was likely religious and predominately Republican. My participants' towns are suburban satellites for the larger city of Camden. As you drive through Camden, you see a sign for the air force base and an air force museum, then an overpass painted air force blue-and-white with airplanes painted on it. Approximately 30 minutes outside of Camden is Midvale (the other town that my seventh participant is from is Zenith, and it too is about 30 minutes away from the base). There is a sign with curlicue font that says "Welcome to Midvale, established [18th century]." Further on, another sign boasts, "The Most Old Stone Structures of Any Town in [Midwestern State]." Neighborhoods in Midvale are middle class or upper-middle class, very clean and neat, and members of the local community were open and friendly with me. For example, I went to eat at a local staple, Betty's Pizza, and two women who have been neighbors for 20 years and who eat monthly at Betty's Pizza invited me to eat dinner with them. I visited the town's tiny local museum, and the docent talked to me for two hours about the town's history. She also gave me the book *A Sense of Place*, which was published by the city council and which documented the history of the town. The book opens with the following quote:

> As one travels through Lincoln Township or pauses to look around the city of Midvale, the heritage of our early roads and buildings casts its spell. There is a sense of place. A sense of continuity. A sense of identity. The patterns of the roads, the early buildings,

> old walls, dams, lonely chimneys, markers and gravestones tell us who we are and where we are, and where we came from. *They provide a sense of place that nourishes our deepest psychological and physical well-being.*

What is especially salient to my study is the way that this quote so strongly links ‘place’ with identity. What about the military kids who come to reside in the town for a few years? If they have no sense of place, do they have no sense of continuity or sense of identity? When they look at the town’s roads, buildings, walls, and gravestones, they are not told who they are or where they come from. The last sentence presents the most vexing question of all: for children without a sense of place, what nourishes their psychological and physical well-being?

Within this small-town context, military families would likely feel welcome in some senses and alienated in other senses. They are likely to encounter expressions of gratitude for what the military does for America; five of my seven participants reported that people had thanked either them or their parents for their service. These participants would be very unlikely to encounter any protests of American military activity. However, it is not very likely that military families in this context would feel understood. Most people in the small towns surrounding the base have never moved, and they have that “sense of place” described by Midvale’s book of local history. Because all of these families lived so far from the base, the military kids were in a context where they were markedly different from almost everyone around them. However, there were both benefits and disadvantages to this situation, which I discuss in more detail below.

Midvale High School, attended by six of my seven participants, was established in the late 19th century, and it is one of the largest high schools in the state, serving nearly 3,000 students. The current building was completed in the late 20th century and is divided into four

units, each with its own principal (all four principals are white and male). The school underwent a major renovation that was completed several years ago. It had a huge series of windows and doors in the front, and it was a large and nice-looking brown-and-beige building.

Just inside, there was a large welcome area with a very friendly receptionist at the desk. Close to reception was a large poster that advertised upcoming school productions of various plays and musicals. There were all manner of extracurricular activities available to students, from rowing to poetry club to jazz band. Most of the times I entered the building I saw the school's security guard farther inside, but he always appeared very relaxed. I was particularly struck by this image since the shooting at Parkland High School in Florida took place between my first and second round of interviews. There were a couple of times when the receptionist was not present and I was not able to get my nametag until much later in the day, but no one ever stopped me from going around the school. On the wall by the reception desk was an Air Force plaque: a picture of planes and a tri-folded flag—it was present, but not prominent. The school impressed me as very clean, and it also smelled nice, which has not ever been my experience with a high school. Every classroom had a Chromebook cart, although few classes used them.

From my first impression, it seemed that the vast majority of students were white and middle class; this held true in the classes I observed and was later confirmed by the demographic data I obtained from the district's web site.[6] I observed students of color sitting together at the cafeteria and walking through the hallways together. After completing a series

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[6] Out of 2,800 students at Midvale High School, 76% are white, 9% are Asian, 7% are black, 4% are multiracial 3% are Latino, and less than 1% are Native American. Just 12% are noted by the district as economically disadvantaged. All categories are created by the district.

of observations in several classrooms, I noticed that very few students were asleep or on a phone in class; most of them seemed fairly engaged with classroom activities. My interpretation was that education was a process most of these students believed in; school worked for their parents, and they believed that it would work for them too. For better or worse, they were committed to the narrative that hard work would yield success. Through conversations with the principal and several teachers, I learned that these students are from families who have deep roots in the local community, and most students have known each other since preschool. This situation makes it especially difficult for highly mobile military kids to integrate well.

I conducted a number of classroom observations in order to gather contextual data about my students' school experiences. Although I sat in classrooms with my participants, I did not interact with them during that time. In one of my earliest visits to an AP Literature class, I was chatting with the teacher before class, and she noted that the school does a lot of professional development and that it is very helpful. Her take on the students was that they were very committed to perfection and focused on grades. She observed that, in her opinion, they hesitated to take risks in interpretation because they did not want to be wrong. Interestingly, she was an alumnus of the high school where she was currently teaching, further reinforcing the more general sense I had that the people of this town were deeply rooted in it. Another teacher, who was incredibly helpful to me in participant recruitment, mentioned to me that since their state participated in Race to the Top, standardized tests were a big deal for them. Her teaching often mentioned skills they would need in college, which seemed to assume that most of them were college-bound (an accurate assumption; the district reports that 96% of

2017 graduates planned to attend a two-year or four-year school). At one point during the lesson, this teacher asked the class "Who has an iphone or smartphone?" and 100% of the students raised their hands, which spoke to students' general socioeconomic level. In another class, the teacher listed four substantive items on the day's agenda, which seemed very ambitious for a 55-minute period. However, she covered them all and covered them well.

One teacher whose classroom environment and methods seemed rather different from the rest was a teacher for the environmental studies track (one of several tracks that students can elect to do in preparation for collegiate work). The class I observed was focused on the rhetoric surrounding environmental issues. She had a poster that read "Other cultures are not failed attempts at becoming you" and her classroom walls were covered with student work. This teacher, like another teacher I spoke to, came to Midvale from an under-resourced urban school where 90% of the students had a free or reduced-price lunch.

Overall, the quality of education was very high at this school, I witnessed a strong rapport between teachers and students, and there was evidence that the school was well-resourced.[7] My impression was that there were more than sufficient financial resources available for educational needs, the parents were involved, and the administrators were committed and caring.

[7] There was only one notable exception to this rule, and it was a class of low-track students. Unlike in every other class I observed, the teacher opened with a series of behavior management directives and spent most of the class discussing grammar and mechanical issues. There was joking chatter among students at the end of class about how low their grades were, and the atmosphere contrasted strongly with the rest of the school.

PARTICIPANT PROFILES

All of my participants were children of fairly high-ranking officers (majors and colonels), and all of them lived in small towns approximately 30 minutes away from the base. This meant that they were all from the same socioeconomic background (middle or upper middle class) and that they lived in environments without sustained regular contact with other military families. This situation had both benefits and disadvantages: these students were perhaps better integrated into mainstream American life than military kids who live on base, but they may have lacked the close community and support structures that are especially important during a deployment. One implication of only studying officers' children is that my participants were situated in a context of relative power and privilege. Because the military is deeply stratified and hierarchical, rank not only signifies income, but also quality of housing, level of education, and often physical distance from combat. These advantages mean that I was analyzing a well-resourced population and was not able to investigate some of the hardships that accompany enlisted families, such as lack of access to quality housing and education, as well as increased exposure to combat and all of its accompanying risks (injury, death, PTSD, etc.). My pilot study prior to the dissertation study included one son of an enlisted service member, and there was more direct discussion of both personal and intergenerational trauma in his account of his military-related experiences. My study's relative racial homogeneity also influenced my findings; since most students identified as white, they did not experience the military's racial discrimination, as reported by the two African-American students in my pilot study.

Figure 2.1 Selected participants

Name	Gender	Age	Parent in military, rank, branch	School	Number of Relocations
Abby	Female	17	Father, major, air force	Midvale	4
Alex	Male	15	Father, lieutenant col, air force; Mother, captain (ret.), air force	Midvale	4
Eric	Male	18	Father, lieutenant col, air force; Mother, captain (ret.), air force	Midvale	5
Hannah	Female	13	Father, lieutenant col, air force	Homeschooled	4
Jason*	Male	15	Father, air force reserve	Midvale	0
Jake	Male	16	Mother, lieutenant col, air force	Midvale	4
Louisa	Female	14	Father, lieutenant col, air force	Midvale	4
Peyton	Female	16	Father, lieutenant col, air force	Midvale	5

*Student was dropped from the study because he did not meet the selection criteria.

Abby[8] was a 17-year-old white female and indicated on the survey that her military-kid identity was “very important” to her, adding in the margin, “I can’t imagine life without it.” Her father was a bioenvironmental engineer for the Air Force who had attained the rank of major at the time of the interviews, and he had been deployed five times. Abby talked extensively about the health problems she had experienced her whole life. In fact, the main reason she identified as a military kid was because free military health care had been so important to her. She had lived in five locations around the US: Texas, Louisiana, Arizona, Colorado, and her current state. Abby was an avid competitive bowler, a writer of fantasy fiction, and was active in German club.

[8] All student names are pseudonyms.

Alex was a 15-year-old male who identified on his survey as "Asian/Caucasian." Both of his parents had served in the military, although his mother had retired as a captain before he was born. His father was a colonel and a flight surgeon who had been deployed five times. Alex indicated on his survey that his military-kid identity was "very important" to him, and he had lived in five places: California, Massachusetts, Texas, California, and his current state. Alex was a member of the SADD club, which stood for "Students Against Destructive Decisions," and they created and distributed materials designed to help other students address issues like "depression, body image, those sorts of things." He was also a dedicated soccer player, noting that making it to practice was especially challenging when his dad was deployed. Upbeat, positive, and unfailingly polite, when I initially thanked Alex for participating in the study, he replied with a smile, "Thank you for having me!"

Eric is Alex's older brother. Initially, I was not planning to have both brothers in the study, because I sought a diversity of perspectives. I did the first interview with both of them, intending to choose just one to conduct the successive interviews with. However, what I discovered after the first interviews was that these brothers had dramatically different perspectives on their experiences—it was like talking to children from two different families. Eric assumed a lot of family leadership and adult-level responsibilities during his father's repeated and prolonged absences, and he expressed a less positive outlook on his experiences than Alex did. So I decided to keep both brothers in the study. Eighteen-year-old Eric indicated on his survey that he thought of himself "somewhat" as a military kid. His mother, who worked as a nurse, retired as a captain when he was a baby. Eric was born in Tokyo, Japan, and had also lived in southern California, Massachusetts, Texas, northern California, and his current state.

His early moves meant that he attended 3 different preschools. When I interviewed him, he was preparing for another move, this time to college, and because he had so recently written his college application essays, he was the student who had written the most extensively and directly about his military-kid experience. He talked about all the places where his father had been deployed—Saudi Arabia, Kyrgyzstan, Iraq twice and Qatar. Eric was a soccer player and an avid reader of both fiction and non-fiction, and he knew Mandarin Chinese, although his brother did not. Early on in his childhood, he spoke better Mandarin than English.

Hannah was a 13-year-old white female, and she was the only student who did not attend Midvale High School. Like many other military kids (myself included), Hannah was homeschooled. Although this made her different from my other participants, it also gave me a chance to see how the patterns I was noticing with the first six students held true in a different educational context. Hannah's father was a lieutenant colonel who had been deployed once to Afghanistan, and Hannah had lived in six different places: she was born in the Midwestern state where she currently lives, and then moved to Georgia, then Alabama, then Washington D.C., then Washington state, and then back to her current state. Hannah's passion was dance: she was heavily involved in ballet classes and told me that she loved performing. She also told me that she took piano lessons for five years, but that she had "retired from that." Also very important to Hannah's life was her faith. She and her family were actively involved in churches wherever they were stationed, and Hannah talked about how that connection helped create a community and a sense of belonging. When people asked her where she was from, she would reply that her dad was in the air force. Therefore, Hannah is the only student who regularly disclosed her military-kid identity.

Jake was a 15-year-old white male who indicated on his survey that his military-kid identity was "not very important" to him and that he "rarely" thought of himself as a military kid. Because of these responses, I considered not including him in the study, but I found after some interaction with him that although his military experiences had been extremely formative, he kept his military affiliation hidden. When people asked him where he was from, he would respond "Oklahoma," even though he had no memory of living there. However, Jake had experienced even more of the unique features of military life than most of the other participants: he had lived overseas and remembered living on base. When I asked him why he did not really think of himself as a military kid, he did not directly answer the question, responding instead, "When people ask me why I moved around so much, I'll answer, 'My mother's in the air force.'" Jake's mother was a lieutenant colonel who had been deployed to Iraq. Born in Oklahoma, Jake had also lived in England (where he lived on base), Maryland, Texas, and his current state. While I am not completely sure why Jake was reluctant to acknowledge or disclose his military-kid identity, I suspect that it may have been connected to his political leanings: Jake told me that he did not like President Trump, and overall, the military tends to lean more politically conservative. It may also have been due to the fact that Jake presented himself as somewhat gender-non-conforming, and the military is usually strictly gender-conforming. Jake was a competitive dancer who did 23 hours of ballet, jazz, and contemporary dance each week. He told me that one day he would like to be a physical therapist for a dance company.

Louisa was a 14-year-old white female whose father was a lieutenant colonel and had been deployed three times; in fact, he was currently deployed at the time of the interviews.

Louisa's mother was from Bulgaria, and she worked on the Air Force Base in human resources, as a civilian employee. Louisa was also a competitive dancer and she and her sister both took many hours of ballet, tap, and jazz lessons each week. Louisa described herself as "adventurous" because she liked going to different places, meeting new people and seeing "new customs"; her family regularly visited her grandmother in Bulgaria, and Louisa spoke Bulgarian. Louisa's situation in regard to relocation is one of those inexplicable personnel decisions for which the military is well-known: Louisa had spent her whole life moving back and forth between her current state and Texas. She was born in her current state, moved to Texas, back to current state, back to Texas, back to current state. She told me that the following year, she was going to move back to Texas, which is where her parents wanted to retire. In addition to dance, Louisa also enjoyed horseback riding and closely followed her favorite K-Pop bands on Twitter. She was also from a multigenerational military family—her grandfather was in the military as well.

Peyton was a 16-year-old white female whose military-kid identity was "very important" to her and whose father was a lieutenant colonel. He had been deployed once to Afghanistan when she was very young, but he also had to live apart from the family for 10 months to receive special training in Washington D.C. Although he was able to drive home on some weekends, his absence had some similarities to deployment. Peyton was born in the Midwestern state where she currently lives and then moved to North Carolina, back to her current state, Virginia, Utah, and then back again to her current state—six locations total. She had been involved previously with the swim team and was currently involved with rowing, which she did six days a week. Peyton described her Catholic faith and Republican political persuasion as important to her, but

she also noted that when it came to politics, she liked to "see both sides." One of the things that Peyton mentioned as most challenging about her military-related experiences were the social and academic difficulties she faced in transitioning schools. She described encountering frustrating differences in multiple subject areas, being put in the wrong math class, having to suddenly switch citation formats, and dealing with different grading scales and vastly different expectations for academic achievement. Both Peyton and Abby seemed somewhat wary and guarded initially, but both of them opened up as the interviews progressed.

DATA COLLECTION

Student Interview Procedures

I designed the interviews in keeping with the strategy advocated by Neumann (2006) who outlined the following approach:

> Helpful interview study design features include the following: (a) sample size balanced between depth (allowance for substantive and analytic probing within any one case or instance) and breadth (expanded sample size to enhance power of comparison and elaboration across cases); (b) maximal variation, within the study sample, of participant characteristics meaningful to the subject of study…(c) judicious use of multiple and overlapping interview questions varying in openness, directness, and specificity, as well as multiple data sources, to elucidate vague responses to enhance the visibility (in analyses) of key data markers; (d) opportunities for repeat interviews to elaborate or clarify brief or vague responses, follow a changing situation, pursue analytic insights derived between interviews, or pursue evolving study directions; (e) pretesting and refining of interview questions and procedures relative to test interviewees' interpretations and quality of response; and (f) the researcher's balancing of a continuing study aim with openness to rephrasing of interview questions and reframing

> of interview protocols as the analytic value of interview questions continue to unfold in the field (p. 389).

Even though I ended up using a convenience sample and therefore could not strategically select participants in keeping with Neumann's call for maximal variation, the seven focal cases that I ended up with allowed me to engage in "substantive and analytic probing" as well as "comparison and elaboration across cases" that allowed for development of my theoretical categories. As Neumann suggested, I constructed my interview guides to ask "multiple and overlapping questions" that often approached the same issue from different angles, and of course I used multiple data sources, including interviews, analysis of student writing, classroom observations, and analysis of students' reading material. All students participated in multiple interviews that allowed me to take up new potential threads of ideas that emerged in analysis between interviews, and I sought to balance the research goals I had established prior to the study with the new directions and aims that unfolded before me through my sustained interactions with the study data.

Phase 1: Surveys, Collecting Contextual Data, First Interviews

The first round of interviews was 30 minutes each. I had an interview guide prepared, but in keeping with the open-ended and semi-structured interview format, I sometimes deviated from the printed questions to follow a student's line of thought and to ask follow-up questions where necessary (see appendix A for sample protocol). There were two sets of questions: the first set was related to students' military experiences (deployment, relocation, etc.) and the second set had to do with their literacy practices, both in and out of school. I

conducted most of the Midvale student interviews in a conference room provided to me by the administration, and I conducted one interview in an empty classroom when the conference room was in use. Because Louisa had no study halls, I went to her house for two Saturday morning interviews, which I conducted at the family's dining room table. These locations provided the requisite privacy for students to share freely about their lives, while also conforming to the "semi-public" nature of spaces required by my IRB. After each interview, I wrote a quick memo of my observations about the interview—things that wouldn't be captured by the audio recording, such as body language, setting, and what immediately stood out to me about what the student said. One of the most important things that happened in this interview was that trust was built. As I mentioned in the participant profiles, some of the students initially seemed guarded with me (closed posture, less direct eye contact, etc.) but they let down their guards significantly in the second interview. These first interviews were staggered over two different trips, because recruitment ended up being a multi-step process. I also spent any time that I wasn't doing interviews or writing memos in classrooms trying to get a feel for the school culture and observing some of my participants in their classroom settings. Although classroom observations were not part of my research design, I felt it was important to getting the fullest possible picture of who my participants were and the worlds they inhabited.

After conducting first interviews, I transcribed the interviews and open coded them using NVivo. On the drives down and back to the state where I collected data, I also re-listened to the interviews, trying to understand my participants' meanings in fresh ways. This initial work with the data elicited many more questions that I wanted to ask. At this point, I began constructing the guide for the second interview, which would be one hour instead of thirty

minutes and which would not only ask more detailed questions about their literacies and experiences, but would also ask about the writing samples they would be bringing with them to the interview. After all interviews had been transcribed and coded, the transcripts re-read and the interview re-listened to, I conducted second interviews with six participants. I continued to observe classes and participate in local town life.

Phase 2: Second Interviews, Collection of Student Writing, and Continued Collection of Contextual Data

After returning from the second interviews, I used the codes, my post-interview memos, and the transcripts themselves to build an outline of the ideas I saw emerging. I met with my co-chairs to go over this outline and to map a path forward through the rest of my data collection. Shortly afterward, I finished transcribing the last of the second round of interviews. Then I went back to my open codes and created a codebook (see appendix B). Once I had these clearly focused codes, I applied them to my second set of interviews and I went back to edit codes from my first set of interviews. From there, I revised my outline and began writing memos about the major themes I was starting to see emerge: Relocation, Deployment, Uses of Literacy, and Cultural Contexts/Settings (see the data analysis section for more information about my process of developing these codes). I took the students' writing, read through it carefully, and then typed up passages related to the emerging themes. I coded the writing as I had coded the interview transcripts, and I used those codes to pull data from the writing into my memos. At this time, I also began reading some of the books that my participants discussed in the interviews so that I could better understand their interpretations and reactions to these texts.

Phase Three: Third Interviews with Member Checking

As I was engaged in analyzing the second interviews, I began drafting third interview guide, in which member checking was a central component. I pulled quotes from writing and interviews that I would be most likely to use in the dissertation, thought about how I would be framing or interpreting those quotes, and prepared to present the contextualized quotes to the participants to get their feedback about how I was using their words. I conducted third interviews with my six participants and had a dialogue with them about my general arguments for the dissertation, as well as specifically how I was using their material to make my arguments. At the same time, I was still involved with recruitment efforts, and I eventually found Hannah. I conducted the interviews with her after all interviews with the other students were complete, and we did the interviews in a glass-doored office in her home. The first interview was primarily about assessing students' suitability for the study, and I knew from email exchanges with her mother that Hannah fit the selection criteria. Therefore, in the first interview, I combined the first and second interview guides. This decision was largely motivated by practicality: at that point, I had no other interviews to conduct, so each interview with Hannah required me to spend seven hours driving.

DATA ANALYSIS

The interviews and student writing were transcribed (12 by me; 8 by a transcription service) and coded; first using open coding so that my claims emerged from the data as much as possible, and then developing and implementing a set of well-defined focused codes (Erickson, 1986). Although I brought to the data some theories about the socially situated,

culturally contextualized nature of literacy and some ideas about military life formed by my experiences and reading the available literature (reviewed in chapter one), I privileged an inductive approach, in which the cases themselves influenced the shape the interpretive theory took (Moss and Haertel, 2016). As with most qualitative studies, however, this one shifted "between cycles of inductive data collection and analysis to deductive cycles of testing and verification" (Huberman and Miles, 1994, p. 438).

Both the interviews and the writing samples provided complex and varied data for addressing my four research questions. I used a combination of descriptive and in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2013) for both the interview transcripts and the writing samples. Codable units for the interview transcripts included individual words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, and turns of talk. Codable units in the writing samples ranged from individual words to whole documents. Because the writing samples provided a means of crosschecking students' actual literacy practices with their stated literacy practices, it was important for me to consider how I solicited the texts from students. While my first priority was analyzing writing that was explicitly about military-kid experiences, I was also interested in building a bigger picture of these students' literacy practices through analysis of their writing. Therefore, I also asked students for texts that had no apparent to connection to military life (this also corresponded to some of the interview questions in which I ask students more generally to describe their literacies, without making explicit connections to the military). So I asked students to share with me 1) texts they mentioned in the interviews, 2) texts they had written about military life, and 3) any other kinds of writing that they did frequently, were particularly proud of, or found especially engaging.

My first research question, “What patterns emerge and what differences are evident in how military kids talk about their perceptions of a range of identity-shaping, military-related experiences?” was addressed by the survey, the three interviews, and the writing sample analysis. Although the data challenged and expanded my coding scheme, I began by coding interviews for experiences across the features of military life most prominent in research about military kids: relocation, deployment, military cultural norms (rank, gender, family dynamics, etc.), life on base (commissary, BX/PX, base housing, on-base groups, etc.), and interactions with military versus civilian peers. I was also interested in coding for students’ expressed dispositions toward aspects of military life—whether they directly express acceptance of those features (e.g., “I loved moving around a lot”) or resistance toward them (e.g. “Deployment is awful”). Codes for this question included deployment, shifting family dynamics, staying connected, insider-outsider, military identity, attitude toward military, emotional recasting, relocation benefits, relocation hardships, school transitions, school or teacher support, disruptions in curriculum, and uneven effects of relocation. Items in the writing archive that specifically discussed military life provided helpful triangulation for me, as I see how these students discuss their military-shaped identities outside the context of my interviews with them. Codes for students’ writing samples (in terms of research question one) included mentions of the five features listed above: relocation, deployment, military cultural norms, life on base, and interactions with military vs. civilian peers. The writing also provided some insights into students’ dispositions toward aspects of military life.

My second research question, “What kinds of literacy practices do military kids engage in, both in and out of school?” was addressed by the three interviews and the writing samples.

The interview included questions about a wide variety of students' literacy practices and encouraged them to think about how they approach in-school reading and writing assignments as well as how they engaged in out-of-school literacies, such as texting, reading and writing for social media, following the news, blogging, reading fiction, etc. Codes for this question included literacy events (separate codes for reading and writing) and literacy practices (separate codes for reading and writing). Additionally, as I asked students about how they engage in different literacies, I also gained an understanding of their literacy skills development. The writing samples provided triangulation for students' descriptions of their literacy practices, and I coded students' writing for genre, purpose, audience, and rhetorical or literary devices.

My third research question (which is actually two questions), "How do military kids *talk about using* literacy events and literacy practices agentively to sustain, enhance, or alter their perceptions of military-shaped experiences? How are they *actually using* literacy in ways that may go beyond what they discuss?" was addressed by the three interviews, the writing archive, and the texts students were reading. This question was connected to students' discussion of the various purposes of their literacies. I anticipated this question being the most generative and potentially revelatory of all four questions, but the claims I make about the connections between military-kid identity and literacy also presented challenges in terms of validity. As I analyzed the archive of student writing and began to form interpretations of how students are using their literacies, it was crucial for me to thoroughly member check my interpretations with students in successive interviews. Codes for this question included literacy events, literacy practices, uses of literacy, connection, escape, identifying with or as, and processing/making sense. I also thoroughly checked the interviews for ways participants talked about the purposes

of their writing (e.g., they might not have said "escape," but they might have talked about using reading to get away from a difficult circumstance).

I conducted a comparative analysis across each individual student's data sources (comparing interview to interview and comparing interviews to writing), across all student data (comparing data set to data set), and across interviews and writing (comparing what students say to what they write). These comparisons enabled me, first of all, to search for disconfirming evidence, both within individual student cases and from student to student. I noticed differences within each student's data set due to the month-long distance between interviews, and I also noticed differences between what students said and what they wrote. This gave me the chance to see aspects of their identity or literacy of which they might be unaware. In reference to my research questions, the comparative work I did allowed me to begin to see patterns and themes emerge; I then checked across cases and data sources to test typicality of those patterns. Comparative analysis also pointed me to diversity—the variations and differences evident within a group that appeared to be relatively homogenous. While my approach to analyzing their reading material was not as systematic, I selected the texts that they chose to discuss with me at the greatest length in the interviews, with greater weight given to texts they mentioned re-reading. I analyzed these texts for basic plot structure, key themes, and characterization, especially of the protagonists.

In composing the first two findings chapters, I followed Moje et al.'s (2009) lead by focusing on student uses of literacy and found four uses that were closely tied to the ways that students experienced and thought about their lives. However, in analyzing what students said about deployment and relocation, I found myself without sufficient tools to describe what I was

noticing. The first draft of this findings chapter focused on what was happening to the kids—the cycles they experienced in deployment, the difficulties of school transitions, etc. In that sense, it was not really making any new contributions to the field (besides the unique perspectives of my individual participants), because the field of research on military kids was already overly focused on what happened to the kids, casting them as passive victims of circumstances. I realized that I needed a methodology that would allow me to look not just at what they were saying but at how they were saying it. That methodology was discourse analysis. Having never taken a discourse analysis class, I borrowed a syllabus from colleague and began reading. I quickly honed in on genre analysis as the set of tools that would best allow me to examine these students' narrative structures and the trajectory of their stories about military life. Genre analysis allowed me to accomplish two important research goals. First, my review of the literature about military kids presented a collection of very negative narratives about military kids' lives, and genre analysis allowed me to present students' experiences as a set of counter-narratives that would speak back to the literature in the voices and words of military kids. Second, what I discovered through examining students' literacies is that they were "restorying" their experiences, which would only make sense within the context of the stories that students were telling about their lives. In order to more fully understand how students' literacies were interacting with their identities, I first needed to know what kinds of stories they were telling about their experiences. The discourse analysis tool that best allows for an examination of "kinds of stories" is genre analysis.

GENERALIZABILITY

My analytic work relied on grounded theory and used the data “to elaborate and refine [my] theoretical categories,” (Charmaz, 2006, p. 103). I noticed as I continued to conduct interviews, transcribe and code data, and then conduct more interviews that my categories began to become more and more fully delineated. I continued to collect data until these categories seemed complete, as measured by the fact that I was starting to elicit the same kinds of responses from my participants and was no longer gathering data that was shifting or expanding my categories. In following this process of theoretical sampling (as outlined by Charmaz, 2006), I have not sought to create theories that are generalizable to all military kids. As Mica Pollock (2008) notes:

> I do not seek to make broad generalizations; instead I am making specific, contextualized descriptions. In doing so, I seek to resist more shallow interpretations that rush to name groups as sharing behaviors. The methodological implications of these commitments include starting with individual behaviors, seeking socially situated/culturally contextualized explanations, and expecting variation within groups.

Pollock suggests that there is a value in these “specific, contextualized descriptions” that is different from the broad generalizability often pursued by more quantitative methodologies. Instead of trying to create a set of assumptions that can be applied to all military kids, I have worked to create rich descriptions that will give teachers, administrators, and other concerned community members a set of questions to ask and things to notice about the military kids in their midst so that they can be better prepare to support these students. Donmoyer (2009) makes the argument for small studies even more directly when he states that “thinking of generalizability solely in terms of sampling and statistical significance is no longer defensible or functional” (p. 4). Instead, Donmoyer identifies the value of small studies as phenomena that

can "expand and enrich the repertoire of social constructions available to practitioners and others; it may help, in other words, in the forming of questions rather than the finding of answers" (p. 11). Generalization works by mediating mechanisms. As we move through different contexts (in my case, through the stories of different participants), our ideas of what their experience entails are broadened and deepened. In this study, my concept of what it means to be "a military kid" has gone through shifts at the level of tacit knowledge as I expand and complicate the category of "military kid" and its related experiences (a journey that began, for me, at the level of personal knowledge). Donmoyer discusses a kind of generalization that does not involve the transfer of characteristics from a sample population to a whole population, but a series of cognitive shifts that re-shape how the researcher (and her readers) conceptualizes the experiences of the study's participants.[9] Those cognitive shifts involve viewing the population in ever-expanding and ever-complicating ways, and they often materialize not as a set of assumptions, but as a set of more specific, targeted, well-informed questions to ask about the population represented by the sample. For example, my hope is that as a result of my research, English language arts teachers of military kids will undergo a cognitive shift that makes them more attuned to what these students are saying about the kinds of literacies in which they are engaged both inside and outside the classroom.

[9] In this section, my development of what effectively reads as a methodological defense was precipitated by an early interaction I had with a principal who suggested that validity could only be measured in terms of generalizability. I had to go back to these texts in order to defend my small sample size as productive and generative based on the kinds of questions I was asking and the theory of generalizability that I was using.

RESEARCH ETHICS

Treatment of Participants

Enacting respect for my participants was my primary concern, and it required several different considerations. First, I gained IRB approval. Second, I obtained consent for my study from administrators at the school where I collected data. Third, I obtained informed assent from students and informed consent from their parents/legal guardians (or in the case of the 18-year-old student, informed consent). Third, I took steps to preserve participants' anonymity, from using pseudonyms to de-identifying data in the writing samples, to storing data securely using MBox.

VALIDITY

One of the major limitations of this study was fact that I was compelled to use a convenience sample. I knew going into this project that one potential threat to validity was not having sufficient diversity in types of evidence. I planned to mitigate that threat by initially distributing as many surveys as possible so that I could identify a diverse range of participants and experiences. In my prospectus, I proposed ultimately focusing on six or seven participants; however, after almost a full year of recruitment activities, the seven focal cases selected themselves (there was only one student with whom I did an initial interview who clearly did not meet the selection criteria).

As mentioned previously, the most significant limitation in my final group of focal cases was the lack of some of the kinds of diversity that I was looking for, particularly the lack of diversity in rank, and this limitation does have implications for my study's validity. Officers and enlisted personnel have very different experiences in the military, from how much they are

paid, to what kind of housing they live in, to what kinds of jobs they are required to do (and how dangerous those jobs are). All seven students in this study were children of officers. However, what I was able to do with this group was to tell their specific stories, and to trace patterns in their language and literacies, with the idea that if some of the issues I describe in my findings chapters are emerging among students who are extremely well-resourced, we can extrapolate what those experiences might be like for other groups who may have fewer economic and academic resources.

The group of seven participants who ended up being in my study did have some of the diverse characteristics I was looking for. Three of the seven students were from multilingual, multiethnic households; two identified themselves as "half-Asian, half-white"). Three students had mothers who were either current or former military service members. One student had lived overseas. Most importantly, they varied greatly in their perspectives on military life, how they chose to disclose or to hide their military identities, and how they believed growing up in the military had affected them. A future study might be able to circumvent these limitations if the researcher lives in close proximity to a military installation and works with members of the military community before seeking permission to research them. Building a rapport with military families and earning their trust by showing respect for them and for the military as an institution is a key component of obtaining their permission to interview service members and their children.

Throughout my data analysis, I worked to make claims within the scope of what my evidence allowed, and wherever possible to triangulate students' interviews with samples of their writing and analyses of their reading material (Erickson, 1986; Huberman and Miles,

1994). Multiple interviews provided additional means of triangulating the data I collected. I used my analysis of participants' reading and writing to crosscheck the claims they make in their interviews about their writing.

I conducted member checking during interviews two and three, showing my findings to my participants and receiving feedback from them regarding the fairness and accuracy of my interpretations. During those member checking sessions, I considered the fact that military kids, on the whole, tend to be very compliant and responsive to people they perceive as authority figures. I worked to establish a comfortable and reflective space in which the students did not feel compelled to give me the "answers" they might think I am seeking. My success in this effort was confirmed by the fact that students felt authorized to amend or contradict my findings during member checking.

Positionality

In assessing possible validity threats in my data interpretation, I considered how my positionality both constrained and enabled my interpretation of the data. Being on the insider spectrum with my participants had certain affordances and limitations. I was able to identify personally with some of my interviewees' experiences, and I knew what kinds of questions to ask. I had some prior knowledge of military ranks, TDY, PCS, shopping at the commissary and BX,[10] and life in base housing. However, my experience as a military kid was entirely pre-9/11 and the world has changed significantly since then; for example, deployments are more

[10] TDY is Temporary Duty, usually a brief time that the service member spends in a different location. PCS is Permanent Change of Station, and it refers to relocation. The BX (or PX in the army) is the Base Exchange, a store where military personnel and families buy household goods and personal items.

frequent. I also had a very specific experience as the daughter of a non-commissioned officer in the Coast Guard who became an officer in the Air Force, and who flew C-130s, B-52s, and FB-111s (the latter during Desert Storm).

My own experience created a set of assumptions that I brought to the interviews, and those assumptions determined the way in which I positioned my research subjects. Davies and Harré explain the ways people position each other using terms from narrative fiction; we are all writing stories and assigning each other roles in those stories. In the process of "giving people parts in a story, whether it be explicit or implicit, a speaker makes available a subject position which the other speaker in the normal course of events would take up. A person can be said thus to 'have been positioned' by another speaker," (Davies & Harré, 1990, p. 48). The questions I asked in my interview protocol provided my interlocutors with a limited range of subject positions, although they were able to directly or indirectly resist these proffered positions. I also worked to create and sustain my own awareness of the ways in which I was not only casting my interviewees but also casting myself in these interviews, which Davies and Harré define as "reflexive positioning" (1990, p. 48). As I reflected on my interview process in a research journal, I was conscious of the ways in which both interactive and reflexive positioning were occurring in the context of asking and answering questions. Developing meta-awareness about positioning was one way I helped ensure that my findings emerged from the data and avoided confirmation bias as much as possible. Conducting multiple interviews allowed me to return to themes that emerged early on and check my early interpretations against more developed and informed interpretations. It also presented two opportunities for member checking.

CONCLUSION

I designed this qualitative study to explore how military kids talk about their experiences and how they might use literacy to sustain, enhance, or alter their viewpoints. Rather than many of the previous studies that viewed military kids as passive victims of their circumstances, I went into this study looking for agency—how were these students speaking back to their experiences and using reading and writing to make meaning of the events of their lives? By creating a space for their words, their voices, and their writing, I was able to see their efforts to narrate--and counter-narrate--their own stories as part of their identity formation and enactment. In the chapters that follow, I present the two major findings from this study. In chapter three I use genre analysis to examine how students are talking about their experiences with deployment, relocation, and military culture. Then in chapters four and five, I look at four ways students are using literacy to restory their perspectives. In the final chapter, I consider what implications this research might have for education and specifically for the high school English classroom.

Chapter 3

Discourse Analysis of Military Kids' Discussions of Deployment, Relocation, and Military Culture

"People don't realize that we go through a lot.
Everyone knows about the moving, everyone knows about deployment,
but they don't realize that our social life is different, the way we learn is different."
-Abby

INTRODUCTION

As reviewed in chapter one, research about the impact of events like deployment and relocation on military kids suggests that there are both benefits and significant challenges associated with military life. Therefore, it is worthwhile for educators to consider military kids as a unique population in order to leverage their strengths and meet their needs (Easterbrooks et al., 2013). The fewer understanding community members there are, the harder time military kids have in school; DePedro et al. note that "in civilian-run schools, military-connected adolescents felt alienated, had difficulty making friends, and could not form caring relationships *due to a perception that civilian peers and teachers did not understand military life and culture*" (p.5, 2014, emphasis mine). One of the best ways for civilian peers and teachers to develop an understanding of military life and culture is to pay attention to how military kids talk about their lives. This chapter will use genre analysis to identify the frameworks students use to discuss such topics as deployment and relocation, providing insight into how students respond

to and make sense of these events. Narratives are one way that people make meaning out of what has happened to them; they can impose a purpose and an order onto the seemingly random and chaotic events of life. In examining how these students are telling their stories, we can glimpse their purposes and gain insight into how these events are shaping their identities.

The information that emerges from students' discourses in this chapter is foundational for the arguments I will make about literacy in the next two chapters. Because I argue that students use literacy to shape their perspectives on their lives, it is necessary to first understand what these students' perspectives are, especially within the context of current literature about military kids. And if, as I will argue, students' prior experiences influence what they do with literacy, then it is also crucial to examine more closely the schemas that students bring to the texts they read and write. Louise Rosenblatt (1995) argued that "[t]he teacher realistically concerned with helping his [sic] students develop a vital sense of literature cannot, then, keep his eyes focused only on the literary materials he is seeking to make available. He must also understand the personalities who are to experience this literature. He must be ready to face the fact that the students' reactions will inevitably be in terms of their own…backgrounds" (p.50). In this chapter, I analyze student discourses in order to understand, as Rosenblatt states, the personalities who experience texts. This chapter's work will allow for a deeper dive into understanding what students are doing with literacies in the next two chapters—how they are using texts to form or develop their viewpoints.

In the following analyses of student talk, I use tools from discourse analysis to examine how students are framing their experiences. The foundation for my approach comes from Labov & Waletsky's (1997) argument that by "examining the actual narratives

of…unsophisticated speakers, it will be possible to relate the formal properties of narrative to their functions" and their belief that "fundamental structures are to be found in the oral versions of personal experiences" (p.12). While I find Labov & Waletsky's term "unsophisticated" problematic and would not apply the term to my participants, I do find their analytic categories, including complication, evaluation, and resolution, useful for the study of my participants' stories. I also draw upon Rose's (2012) definition of genre as "staged, goal-oriented social processes: social since texts are always interactive events; goal oriented in that a text unfolds towards its interactants' purposes; staged, because it usually takes more than one step to reach the goal" (p.209). Looking for the stages and goals of my participants' narratives was what enabled me to identify distinct stories in their talk about their lives and divide up their discourse into chunks of narrative that I could then analyze.

The most direct model for my work was Rogers & Brefeld's (2015) analyses of parents' talk about schools. Although Rogers & Brefeld are specifically analyzing counter-narratives (and I did not use opposition to dominant narratives as part of my criteria for deciding what stories to analyze), their approach is still well-suited to my data analysis for two reasons. First, their approach works for me because the speaker's affect, as expressed through genre, is part of what Rogers & Brefeld are examining, and affect is a crucial aspect of what I wish to understand about my participants as well. Second, and most importantly, Rogers & Brefeld are looking at narratives to understand the speaker's point of view, which is my primary purpose in exploring how students talk about deployment, relocation and military culture. Understanding military kids' own perspectives is the glaring gap in the data about military kids, and genre analysis of these students' discourses is one methodological approach that can address that gap.

Following Rogers & Brefeld's model, I identified places in the interview transcripts where students talked either positively or negatively (or a mixture of both) about some aspect of military life, such as relocation, deployment or military culture. I re-coded all interviews using this schema (positive, negative, mixture) and ran a query so that all re-coded excerpts (191 total) were in one document. I created a table with five columns (1. a chunk of narrative, 2. student's pseudonym, 3. interview number, 4. code, and 5. topic of discussion) and put all data from the query into this table. I then read through all of the quotes several times and identified up to six different stages of each story: orientation, complication, catalyst, crisis, resolution, and evaluation. It is important to note that not all features were present in every narrative chunk and sometimes the phases would appear out of order or would repeat. Drawing on Labov & Waletsky's work as well as Rogers & Brefeld's work, I define orientation as the narrative's setup, the information about the background or setting that will prepare the reader to follow the speaker's path through the story. I define complication as the problem or issue that moves the story to the next stage and presents a narrative tension that must somehow be resolved. I define catalyst as the reason behind the complication, or the student's identification of the person or event that precipitated the narrative tension, and I define crisis as the high point of narrative tension. I define resolution as the way the story is drawn to a close and the tension is dissipated. Evaluation is the student's commentary on the narrative, assigning it some kind of meaning or affective impact; it may also appear simply as a brief summation of the story.

As I identified these six stages within each narrative chunk, I began searching for "patterns within and across the narratives," (Rogers & Brefeld, 2015, p.49) and categories began to emerge. It was not only the structure of each narrative that suggested its category,

but also the speaker's lexical choice and other rhetorical features, such as questions, metaphors, imagery, repetition, etc. As Rogers & Brefeld note, each narrative "includes identifiable dimensions that signal a particular kind of story" (p. 47). Through extensive annotation, I was able to approach students' talk about military life in a new way, and to understand how they were using discussion of relocation, deployment, and military culture to exert narrative agency over the things that had happened to them (in the next two chapters I explore the concept of narrative agency in more depth using the term "restorying"). What I discovered through this discourse analysis was that these students were not only drawing on a variety of narrative frameworks to make sense of their experiences, but that there was a pattern across some interviews of students transforming negative narratives into positive ones.

In my analysis of student talk about military life, I identified six kinds of stories: three mostly positive (cosmopolitan, normalization, development) and three mostly negative (outcast, loss, and hardship). I also identified narratives of support, but decided that they fit best in the implications section, because in these narratives, students discussed ways that people in their families, schools, and communities helped them deal with some of the difficulties of military life. Using grounded theory, I developed these categories as I saw certain narratives arising from students' talk, so that each new category emerged directly from students' language. I continued to create categories until they could account for nearly all of the narrative chunks where students were talking about military life. The words "outcast" and "loss" were taken directly from students themselves. Some students used the word "outcast" to talk about feeling different from their peers, and some students used the word "loss" or "lost" to discuss separation from parents and friends. The word "hardship" was taken from

students' use of the word "hard," which appeared 85 times in their discussions of military life. The word "normalization" was taken from students' use of the word "normal," sometimes in discussions of how their unique upbringing just felt like normal life to them. The word "development" was taken from students' explanation of how military life had helped them develop certain skills or develop as people. The only category that did not emerge directly from students' language was "cosmopolitan," because I could not find a single word that better captured the phenomenon that students were describing. This word is drawn from Amy Stornaiuolo's work, as I discussed in chapter one.

Once these categories had fully emerged, I went back to the table of student quotes and coded most chunks as one of these six narratives (a few did not clearly fit). I will begin by providing a set of brief definitions and indications of the frequency of each narrative. Then in each section of this chapter, I will provide a more thorough definition of each kind of narrative, give a representative example, briefly account for diversity of narratives in the genre beyond the representative example, and identify some of the narrative's key features. Rogers and Brefeld (2015) note that narratives are not meant to be formulas, but that they include "identifiable dimensions that signal a particular kind of story" (p. 46). It is those identifiable dimensions and linguistic or structural signals for particular kinds of story that I went looking for in my analysis of students' interviews. After exploring definitions and frequency of each narrative, I analyze students' narrative progressions; that is, instances where they turn one type of narrative into another (usually one of the negative narratives gets turned into its corresponding positive narrative). I then discuss some of the possible implications of these narratives and reasons why students might choose to take them up. In the table below, each

narrative is defined, categorized as either negative or positive and labeled for its frequency of use.

Figure 3.1 Definitions and Frequency of Six Narratives

Negative Narratives	Definition	Frequency (% of all narratives)	Positive Narratives	Definition	Frequency
Outcast	Contrastive narrative in which students frame experiences as isolating and alienating, focusing on perceived social, ideological, or academic differences between themselves and their peers/environments.	**17%**	**Cosmopolitan**	Students discuss military-related experiences in terms of how those events expanded and diversified their understanding of the world and other people.	**15%**
Loss/lack	Students describe losses, ranging from tangible and concrete discussions of physical things lost to more symbolic losses, such as relationships or identities. A prominent sub-narrative in this category is *lack*, which describes an absence of something necessary for physical, emotional, or mental well-being.	**12%**	**Normalization**	Students frame their experiences as normal aspects of life, as versions of events that happen to everyone, military or not. Sometimes, students frame experiences in terms of how normal/regular they feel due to how frequently they occur (while explicitly or implicitly acknowledging that these experiences are not normal for everyone).	**4%**
Negative Narratives	**Definition**	**Frequency (% of all narratives)**	**Positive Narratives**	**Definition**	**Frequency**

Hardship:	Students discuss aspects of military life that produced difficult, challenging, or traumatic effects.	21%	Development	Students frame experiences of military life as directly or indirectly beneficial for their identity formation, character, and/or knowledge. Often these benefits are attributed to the ongoing practice of adjusting to new or challenging circumstances.	11%
Narratives that transitioned from one of the negative narratives to one of the positive narratives: 16%					

The alignment of these narratives on the table above is not accidental; they are often two sides of the same coin. For example, the downside of frequent relocation is feeling like a outcast, but an upside is that you encounter a lot of different people and places and therefore gain a more cosmopolitan outlook on the world. Loss is a terrible, grief-inducing experience, but everyone experiences losses anyway, and if you go through it a lot, you get more used to it (normalization). Military life is full of various kinds of hardship, but going through those experiences makes you into a stronger person and aids in your development. These examples demonstrate how these 3 pairs of narratives can become different ways of framing the same experience, sometimes within the same narrative chunk. In considering the relationship between these narratives, I take up Rose's (2012) call to go "beyond individual genres, to consider how they relate to one another" (p. 209).

In order of frequency of occurrence, the most common narrative by far was *hardship* (41 quoted excerpts, which accounted for 21% of all narratives), followed by *outcast* (33), *cosmopolitan* (28), *loss* (23), *development* (21), *normalization* (8) and *support* (6). It may seem by this count that the total number of negative narratives (97) far outweighed the positives (63). However, there were also 31 narratives that transitioned from negative to positive, which means that 94 narratives were either completely positive or ended up positive. Therefore, 49% of narratives were negative and 48% of narratives were positive or ended on a positive note. The balance in these numbers confirms the balance in perspectives that I perceived when interviewing these students; they were honest about the struggles of military life, but also believed that it had real benefits. None of the students started out with a positive narrative that took a negative turn and landed fully in the negative. Although they might present a caveat

or exception to a positive story, they did not fully steer the ship in a negative direction; the steering impulse was always toward the positive. Although I did not conduct this genre analysis until well after the interviews were completed, I was struck by how many students' narratives followed this negative-to-positive trajectory. When I asked Alex why his stories so frequently followed this pattern, he cited parental influence, stating that his mother was "always telling me to focus on the positive." Another reason I suspect that these students may have used a negative-to-positive narrative trajectory is that this is the pattern they followed in relocations and in deployments. Relocations started out as chaotic and isolating, but over time things got better. Deployment started out lonely and somewhat frightening, but eventually the parent came home, and life returned to normal. The pattern of some of these events may have led to these students adopting a broader narrative framework that accounted for the totality of their experiences: things are challenging, but they will turn out okay. While students may have had different motives and models for the ways they constructed their stories, it is clear that all of these stories provide insight into how these students interpret and make sense of their experiences and how experiences like deployment and relocation have shaped their identities.

SIX KEY NARRATIVES

Narrative 1: Outcast

The *outcast* story is a contrastive narrative that focuses on perceived differences—social, ideological, and/or academic—between military kids and their peers or environments. The main themes of the outcast narrative tend to be isolation and alienation. I selected Jake's outcast narrative as a representative example, because rather than recounting one experience of feeling like he didn't fit in, he drew on multiple experiences with relocation. In this

conversation, the topic of discussion was whether moving gets harder or gets easier as you get older. Jake had previously mentioned that there were some things about moving that got easier, but this narrative summed up his thoughts on the subject.

Orientation[11]
And it starts to get really tiring at some points/

Catalyst
cause you just have to like/
break a relationship
and then you have to remake a bunch of new ones
with people you've never met in your life/

Complication
everyone's already formed their little cliques
and their little groups/
You have the band groups
you have the theater kids
you have the orchestra kids
and then choir
and then science Olympiad/

Crisis
And then where do you fit in that?
Where do you fit in that equation?/

Evaluation
Cause everyone's already accustomed
to who they're used to being around/
And then you're the new one/

Jake sets the scene for his narrative by explaining his mental state: his moves have left him tired. While this cause-effect modality bears some resemblance to the hardship narrative, Jake

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[11] The only transcription conventions I used were to break up the lines into meaningful units (typically phrases or clauses) and to use a / to indicate 2s pauses.

quickly moves into the contrastive structure of the outcast narrative as he compares his state of existence to that of his peers. He describes the story's catalyst using destruction/creation metaphors: he has to "break" apart his meaningful relationships and "remake" them with strangers. He describes these strangers in the complication section of the narrative, using parallel phrases to reinforce the sense that everyone but him belongs somewhere and adjectivizing the nouns "theater" and "orchestra," in the phrases "you have the theater kids, you have the orchestra kids," a choice that suggests that these affiliations generate group identities. In other words, according to Jake, "theater kids" is not just what these students do, but also who they are. He creates a picture of stark isolation in which everyone else is in "little cliques" (which he indirectly repeats by saying "little groups"), a picture that implies that he stands alone, with meaningful relationships left behind. Then come the aching rhetorical questions that form the crisis of his story: "where do you fit in that? Where do you fit in that equation?" The two questions are almost identical, but Jake adds the word 'equation' to the end of the second question. His math metaphor calls to mind a balanced algebraic equation to which the addition of a new number anywhere in the equation creates an imbalance. His evaluation at the end summarizes the problem of his situation and accentuates the theme of isolation that tends to characterize the outcast narrative. As sometimes happens with students in some of the more emotional moments in their stories, he shifts from first person to second person. There may be a number of reasons for this choice, including a degree of dissociation from emotionally painful content, a desire to put the audience into the speaker's shoes, or an appeal directly to me, the interviewer, as a fellow military kid who has had similar experiences.

There were two primary kinds of outcast narratives that emerged from students' interviews: social outcasts (like Jake's narrative above) or academic outcasts. Stories of academic outcasts focused on students' difficulties with the curriculum or instruction in a current school, either because it was repeating something they already knew, it was beyond their current level given their previous learning experiences, or it was assumed that they had knowledge or skills that they did not have. For example, Peyton mentioned that she moved from a school that used exclusively APA format to a school that used MLA format, which she was not familiar with:

> And then obviously like, knowing the material, in my English class, I was the only one who didn't know what MLA format was. Everyone was like, "What? You don't know what that is? What's wrong with you?" And I was just like, "Sorry, I can't really help it, I didn't—I don't know."

As in the case of Peyton's quote, students often discussed connections between feeling like academic outcasts and feeling like social outcasts. In Peyton's narrative, not only does she have to deal with quickly teaching herself a new citation format, she also has to deal with the ways it makes her stand out among her classmates.

The other, more common kind of *outcast* narrative was social. In these stories, the students discussed difficulties they had in making friends, and they often emphasized feelings of being misunderstood. Abby noted that her community was verbally supportive during her father's deployments, but she still felt a lack of genuine empathy: "they don't realize how difficult it can be sometimes." In another interview, Abby summed up feelings of both curricular and social outcasts when she said, "I mean, everyone knows about the moving, everyone knows about deployment, but they don't realize that our social life is different, the way we learn is

different." It is not only these military kids' recognition of the differences between their lives and the lives of their civilian peers, but also the lack of feeling understood by their communities that characterized these students' *outcast* narratives. I picked up the term "outcast" from Peyton, who mentioned a connection she felt to a fictional character: "I think probably just because that's how I feel sometimes. An outcast." In chapter 5, I analyze Peyton's identification with this fictional character.

Narrative 2: Cosmopolitan

Cosmopolitan narratives are the other side of the 'outcast' story and a very different narrative frame for the experience of relocation. These narratives tend to follow a clearer cause-effect structure than other narratives, because they typically include anecdotes or examples of military kids' diverse experiences (cause), followed by a description of the broader, more global perspective on the world that these students believe their experiences give them (effect). Eric's narrative provides not only a material symbol of his global experiences, but also a discussion of how it sets him apart—in a good way—from his peers. In this discussion, Eric was talking about how he decided to write one of his college application essays about the blending of cultures that makes up his identity.

Setting
I never really thought about it growing up/
I was like yep that's our Japanese ornament on the Christmas tree/
Just stuff like that/

Catalyst
but when my friends come over to my house sometimes, they'll say something like, "Why do you have that on the wall?"

Crisis

That kind of make me think
Yeah/ it's probably unique that we've got so much almost like
influences from the cultures of the places we've lived/
even within the US/
Like Texas culture's very different from California/
different from [midwestern state]//

Evaluation
Culture is not just this black and white issue
where you're part of this culture or this one/
but it can blend and make what you know as your culture growing up/

Eric opens the narrative by discussing a symbol of his cosmopolitan background: an ornament from the country where he was born (Japan) that had previously seemed ordinary to him. It is not until his friends come over and comment on the ornament that he recognizes, as he mentions in the crisis section of the narrative, what a relatively unique experience frequent relocation is, especially given his current small-town setting. Although Eric's narrative, like Jake's, draws attention to his differences from his peers, it does not contain themes of alienation. Instead, Eric speaks with appreciation of what he has been able to learn about different cultures through his experiences; the specific examples he gives are the different cultures found in three of the states where he has lived. He makes a nod toward identity when he indicates in the crisis section that the places where his family has lived have exerted certain "influences" on their house. Following the typical structure of the cosmopolitan narrative, Eric's evaluation sums up the lessons he believes he has learned from his relocations about culture: that it is not monolithic and that it possible to be influenced by a "blend" of cultures. The ornament is a symbol of this rather extraordinary cultural synthesis he's experienced. What is also significant to remember in reading and interpreting Eric's comments here is how he

identifies himself. The following excerpt is from the college application essay that Eric was discussing in the quote above, and it sheds additional light on Eric's uptake of the cosmopolitan narrative:

> Upon first glance, my life appears a cultural dichotomy, two halves of myself pulling equally upon my identity…for the first few years of my life I spoke exclusively Mandarin, a side effect of spending a large portion of my time within the culture of my mom's parents…Many of my classmates assumed that being part-Asian determined certain aspects of my life and being part-white determined the rest. Only at this point did I realize they were wrong. In truth, my house is a unique blend of cultures, both ancestral and learned from all the places my family has lived…I'm half-Asian and half-white. These two cultures have played a valuable part in my childhood and in the family traditions I have come to appreciate. *But more importantly, I am more than what my parent's bloodlines make me. I am a product of all the places I've lived, experiences I've had, people I've met, and goals I've set.* [emphasis mine]

At first, Eric focuses on the tension of his family's two cultures and outsiders' perceptions of him as a fragmented person, either determined by the "part-Asian" or "part-white" pieces of himself. The truth, he writes, is even more fragmented than his classmates realize; he sees himself as a blend of many cultures, not just two. And he declares that his classmates are wrong, that he is not torn in two directions by two different perspectives or in many directions by many perspectives. Instead, the cosmopolitan outlook functions as a source of narrative coherence, giving Eric the ability to bring together the pieces of his identity and his experiences and to declare himself more than his heritage: "I am a product of all the places I've lived, experiences I've had, people I've meet, and goals I've set." The cosmopolitan narrative reconciles the tension of living among different worlds and affords Eric a holistic view of his identity.

Cosmopolitan narratives focus on the military kid's exposure to a diverse array of places and people, and they present a specific kind of benefit: a change in perspective. Most cosmopolitan narratives follow a cause-effect structure, and many include an element of comparison, as the military kids compare their highly mobile lives to the lives of their peers who have always lived in the same place. In one of Abby's quotes, she imagines an alternate, less cosmopolitan version of her life: "if I just stay in [small midwestern town] the rest of my life and it starts going downhill, I'm not going to be able to tell." Her cosmopolitan narrative focuses on the narrower perspective that she believes would result from staying in one place for too long.

Students who used this narrative sometimes attributed their expanded perspectives to the large number of people they were able to meet: the phrase "meet new people" came up in four different interviews as a benefit of relocation. Alex directly attributed his growth mindset to his cosmopolitan life:

> Yeah, we took a little survey…and so I found out that I have more of a growth mindset. And I'd say being a military kid probably does influence that. And more open to other people's point of view, just because you've met more people I guess, and you get to see different perspectives on a lot of different things.

Alex's narrative flips the usual order and opens with the benefit ("growth mindset"), followed by an explanation of the reasons for that benefit. However, he still subtly includes the language of comparison to his peers by choosing words like "more" and "different" and presents a picture of a student whose perspective on himself (growth mindset) is linked to the breadth and diversity of his interactions.

Frequent relocations not only make students' lives feel fragmented, but they can also make it difficult at times for military kids to feel like they belong anywhere. Cosmopolitan

narratives focus on the upsides: traveling across the country or around the world, meeting new people, and gaining new perspectives on life. These stories usually open with a recitation of diverse experiences that the student feels he or she may not have had as a civilian child, and these examples are followed by a summary of the perceived benefits or advantages of the experiences. All of these narratives can be viewed as coping strategies, but the cosmopolitan narrative fulfills that function especially well, because it keeps students focused on gain rather than loss. It would be interesting to know how these students' perspectives on their experiences might change over time and whether the positivity and coherence provided by this narrative is sustainable throughout adulthood.

Narrative 3: Hardship

Like the cosmopolitan narrative, the hardship narrative typically follows a clear cause-effect structure: students list or describe circumstances related to military life and then explain the difficult, challenging, or traumatic effects that the circumstances produced. Occasionally, the order is reversed and the effects are stated before they're attributed to various causes. The themes of hardship narratives are stress, anxiety, fear, and longing. Louisa's hardship narrative surfaced during our discussion of her father's deployment and the effects it was having on family dynamics. Although in this quote Louisa is discussing a previous deployment, it is important to remember that Louisa's father was deployed at the time of this interview.

Setting
It was really hard for/like/my mom and all of us
to like get everything done

Catalyst
because we had a very busy schedule

and my mom had to take us to dance//

Complication
I have a sister
both of us dance/
and she would take us right after school
and we'd have to go to dance
and we'd have a bunch of activities to go to/

Crisis
She was struggling with that//

Resolution
And we just had to get all of the like chores and everything around the house/
trying to help her out//

In this quote, Louisa describes the practical, physical effects that her father's deployment had on the family. Although at first glance Louisa seems focused on her mother's hardships, there are two places—the setting and the resolution—where Louisa's use of plural first person pronouns expands the hardship narrative to include herself and her sister. In the setting she initially says "it was hard for my mom" but adds "and all of us." The complication section uses a parallel structure (we'd have to go/we'd have a bunch) to describe the circumstances that contributed to the hardship, culminating in the crisis, in which Louisa simply stated, "She was struggling with that." Deployment in this narrative is not mentioned directly but lurks in the background as the ultimate cause of the family's stress. In this narrative, Louisa resolves the tension but does not provide a clear evaluation of what this hardship meant.

Hardship narratives are usually a description of tough circumstances surrounding relocation, deployment, or military culture, and they are typically opened, closed, or bookended with a brief summation of the emotional impact of those circumstances. Here are

some of the words and phrases that surfaced in students' hardship narratives: "hard, challenging, can't adapt, weird, stress (super stressed, really stressed, very stressful), horrible, sucks, hated, difficult, alone, emotional strain, scared, rough, cry, anxious, tough, upset, sad, bawled, shock, can't get attached, freaked out, torture, devastating, draining, grueling, and disconnected." These lexical choices accentuate the emotional details in hardship narratives by revealing how these students viewed and responded to their circumstances. Seen together, these words create a picture of a fraught emotional landscape.

Narrative 4: Development

The military kids in this study did not always discuss the hardships of military life purely in terms of negative effects. A common narrative among participants was that of development. Like hardship, development uses a cause-effect structure, but rather than connecting difficult circumstances to outcomes such as stress or anxiety, students attribute positive aspects of their identity formation, character, and/or knowledge to their experiences growing up as military kids. Usually (but not always) in development narratives, a beneficial outcome would be tied to a difficult event. Often the development was connected in some way to the adjustments and adaptations military kids made in response to parental absence, frequent relocation, or other aspects of military culture. As Eric describes below, having to adjust so frequently to changing circumstances is what caused him to develop into a more mature person. This quote, which contains two narrative chunks, is part of a discussion of the effects of relocation on adolescent development, and it is the anecdotal evidence Eric provides for an earlier claim he made about how moving presents the opportunity "to reinvent yourself wherever you go."

Setting
Like I feel like when I came into middle school/
I had this anticipation that okay
I can't really do the whole playing pretend at recess thing anymore/
because that's for little kids//

Complication/Crisis
and that would be embarrassing
and I need to act cool
and I need to change the way I dress/
because I want these people in the new place to accept me/

Evaluation
So it really speeds up the changes that you go through
trying to figure out who you are//
versus changing myself from middle school to high school was a long process/
because who I was in middle school is different from who I am now/

Resolution
But/that happened over the span of eighth grade to freshman sophomore year
versus like that when I moved/

Setting
And I guess deployment plays a role in that too/

Crisis
because I feel like when you're just a teenager regularly
you already have a lot of stress and pressure on you/
and adding deployment on top of that
it makes things worse/

Resolution
but it can also help see how these other problems aren't really so bad//

Evaluation
And/I don't know/
I feel like deployment gave me a more mature view of things
than other people would've had//

This quote includes two anecdotes—one from relocation and one from deployment—but together they present a narrative of development. In the 'setting' section of the first anecdote, Eric provides an insight into the mental process that was triggered by his relocation: he felt a need to act differently in his new context ("I can't really do the whole playing pretend at recess anymore"). Being an outcast is the catalyst for his change. However, this is not an outcast narrative. In the evaluation section of the first anecdote, Eric attributes the rapidity of some stages of his identity formation to a relocation. The parallel phrases "and I need to act cool/and I need to change the way I dress" suggest the comprehensive nature of these changes—behavioral as well as physical. Eric then reinforces his argument by way of contrast: because he did not move between his middle and high school years, his growth process was longer. It was the act of adaptation, according to Eric, that precipitated more rapid personal development. The change in environment caused to see himself as more mature and less of a "little kid." In this narrative, the relocation was not a cause of hardship but an opportunity for self-reinvention.

The second anecdote connects a slightly different kind of development to a different cause; in this case, deployment. In this anecdote, Eric shifts to second person, a stance he holds until the final evaluation, where he rests his final assessment upon himself after having applied it to other military kids. In the setting, Eric connects the second anecdote to the first, saying, "I guess deployment plays a role in that too" (speaking of development). The narrative almost swings in the direction of hardship when Eric uses metaphors of load-bearing to describe deployment's negative effects, which fall "on top of" the "stress and pressure" that teenagers already have on them. Had Eric sustained this metaphor of weight, it would have been a

hardship narrative about military life intersecting with the difficulties of adolescence. However, Eric shifts in the resolution with the word 'but' to assert that deployment, rather than being a crushing force, provides a perspective that leads to development. In light of fears over a deployed parent's safety, an anxiety that Eric discusses elsewhere, teenage problems appear less daunting. When Eric resumes first person in the evaluation section, he asserts that the different perspective provided by deployment has given him a "more mature view of things" in contrast to his peers. Eric asserts that deployment lightens life's load by making other struggles seem less weighty by comparison. He does, however, hedge his final assertion with the phrase "I don't know," opening the door to uncertainty.

Development narratives, like cosmopolitan and hardship narratives, typically held to a clear cause-effect structure, and they were frequently tied to the act of adjustment. In other words, it was the act of adapting to difficult or undesirable circumstances that was the catalyst for these military kids' development. Other times, difficult circumstances generated empathy. For example, Hannah said, "I do think I, [moving has] changed my personality a little bit. I want to be more welcoming and friendly to new people when they come, because I know what it's like to be in their shoes." For Hannah, moving helped her empathize with newcomers and was thus a catalyst for her development.

Narrative 5: Loss/lack

The loss or lack narrative is related to the hardship narrative in that loss is a particular kind of hardship. However, it differs from hardship narratives in that it does not clearly follow a cause-effect structure. It focuses on what is left behind, what is missing, and what must be let go of due to the nature of military life. Losses range from tangible and concrete to highly abstract

and symbolic. These narratives typically start with descriptions of surface loss and move to descriptions of deeper loss or discussion of what that loss represented. Themes often include grief, sadness, and a sense of missing out. Loss indicates something that was possessed previously but is now lost (like a sweater or a friend in a former city), while lack indicates missing something that should be there, but isn't (like a feeling of community, theoretical friendships). Usually "loss" referred to what was left behind in the old place and "lack" characterized the pieces that felt missing in the new place. Peyton's narrative focuses on the double loss and lack that many students discussed as characterizing their relocations. Her story came up in our discussion about transitional spaces—the time that military kids spend feeling disconnected from their previous locations and not fully integrated into their current communities.

Setting
The summer that I moved here/
I moved here like July first
And so I had met a few friends
And stuff like that/
But then/and I had them all on social media or something/

Complication
And then I would see them all hanging out/
But I wasn't invited/because I wasn't close with them yet//
And then I would see all of my Utah friends hanging out doing something fun/
But they wouldn't be Snapchatting me or talking to me/

Catalyst
Because toward the end of the semester
I was starting to lose ties a bit more/
Like we would talk maybe once a week
Or we just wouldn't talk every day anymore/

Crisis
So I was totally stuck in that place where
I had sort of friends
But I wasn't getting invited/
And then all my friends were having fun/
But I wasn't talking to them/

Evaluation
And I was just in a rut//

In this narrative, Peyton describes the loss she feels among the friends she left behind in her former location, and the lack she feels among the friends she recently made in her new location. The 'complication' section uses parallel syntactic structures and similar lexical choices, including the phrase "hanging out" to emphasize similar feelings of loss and lack. It is in the 'crisis' section that Peyton specifically mentions loss with the image of a cord or thread, a metaphor that characterizes this loss as a gradual process ("starting to lose ties a bit more"). Again, the 'crisis' section uses parallel phrases to draw out the similarities between how her current and former friends are making her feel ("I had sort of friends/but I wasn't getting invited/And then all my friends were having fun/but I wasn't talking to them"). The fact that in the 'crisis' section she does not distinguish linguistically between these two groups, referring to both of them simply as "friends," draws them into tighter connection within the same narrative. The word "stuck" in the crisis and "rut" in the evaluation are drawn from the same metaphor and emphasize her. Peyton's "stuck" metaphor implies that gaining new friendships won't happen overnight; making ties, like losing ties, happens gradually.

The losses Peyton describes are relational, but these participants discussed many different types of losses across all of their narratives. Louisa said that "a lot of things get lost in

moves, so it's really sad" and told me a story of losing a favorite sweater that she got at a dance convention. Jake spoke of loss in a much more abstract way. He was speculating on the possibility that he and his mother might have to relocate during his junior year and of the effects that such a move might have on his academic trajectory and social life. He summed it up in the sentence, "I think I'd get lost again." Here, Jake is referring to previous moves that have caused him to feel lost—although he implies that once he has settled down, he is found. It is not only possessions and relationships that can get lost in a move; it is also the children themselves.

Loss was one of the most prominent narratives in these students' descriptions of relocations. Because military kids go through the relocation cycle multiple times, they spend a substantial portion of their formative years in a transitional space, neither fully connected to their former community nor fully integrated into their present community. All students mentioned that integration into a new community took time. For students who move four, five, or six times, this means that they will spend several years of their lives in limbo, feeling like outsiders in old and new spaces. It is a small wonder that Jake felt like he got lost in moves.

Some loss narratives include metaphors of emptiness versus fullness. For example, Alex uses the imagery of emptiness to discuss his community's efforts to "fill the hole" his father had left behind in deployment, echoing Eric's language about a "void." Elsewhere, Alex talks about how his family would work together during their father's deployment to "patch the missing piece." When I asked Jake what it felt like to have his mother gone for such a long time, he replied, "I was very young, but it was kind of lonely…I mean, it was horrible," and in the second interview he said, "it was all the way in Iraq. It was weird. I remember her packing up her

suitcases and basically half the closet in her room was pretty empty… When she returned home, it was this sense of joy and it felt full again in a way.” Similar in content and tone to Jake’s description of his mother’s deployment is Hannah’s description of her father’s reintegration intersecting with an immediate relocation:

> I remember him coming to home a completely empty house since we were moving the next week or something…That was, he came home like a week before we left and then yeah, the house was completely empty. We picnicked on the floor…Maddy didn’t remember him because she was, we had her first birthday while he was gone.

Hannah repeats the phrase “completely empty” to describe the condition of her house before a move. But in another sense, there is a more serious lack in her sister’s memory—she does not remember her father. The empty space in the house and the empty space in memory parallel each other and create an image of deep struggle at the intersection of two challenging events: reintegration and relocation. Alex’s mention of a missing piece, Eric’s discussion of a void, Jake’s description of emptiness/fullness, and Hannah’s description of emptiness in the house are all part of the same set of images in loss narratives. These students were drawing upon metaphors of emptiness and fullness to attach words to a phenomenon that is incredibly difficult for anyone to describe: the emotional landscape of loss.

Narrative 6: Normalization

The story that exists on the other side of many loss and hardship narratives is normalization. In normalization narratives, students are able to restory experiences as a normal part of life, either as variations on events that happen to everyone, military or not, or as events to which they’ve grown accustomed through exposure. Either way, normalization narratives take the sting out of military-related events by casting them in an ordinary light. The structure of the

normalization narrative typically follows a kind of de-escalation pattern: military-related events are ensconced in language that pulls them into the realm of ordinary life. As is the case in the following exemplar from Abby, many normalization narratives appear in tandem with narratives of development (i.e., this is both normal and good for me). Abby told this story in response to a question I asked about whether she thought that growing up military had influenced what kind of person she was.

Setting
I think as a military kid/
I've grown to be used to like
having to move
and things not always being the easiest on me/

Catalyst
So I've accepted that/
so I get past it really quickly
Like I'm adaptable
I can change to different kinds of scenarios/

Complication
And so when I see people that are having a rough time/
I'm like/hey it's okay we all go through things that are rough
And stuff like that/

Resolution
Like I've found a way to adjust to it/
I've found friends that are there for me
I've found something to do that's kept me/

Coda
like a hobby or something/
like find something that will get your mind off what's happening/

Abby opens her narrative by giving us the end of the story first when she says that she has "grown to be used to" relocations and tough situations. In the catalyst section, Abby lists four verbs that provide insight into how she has normalized these difficult events: accepting, getting past quickly, adapting, and changing. These phrases repeat the same concept, but each phrase presents a slightly different take on normalization. The phrase "I'm adaptable" is where Abby moves from action to identity, suggesting that this ability is part of who she is. Normalization for Abby is something in which she actively engages. The faster she accepts and adapts herself to her new circumstances, the less strange her life seems. The 'complication' section is where the narrative extends in the other direction: not only are her experiences common, they are so universal that she can extend help to other people. The word "rough" serves as a connecting thread—other people's rough times are similar to what Abby and everyone else goes through. Abby is normalizing the events of her military-shaped life, ensconcing those events in language that makes them normal and therefore overcome-able. The resolution and coda employ more parallel syntax and repetition of the word "found" ("I've found a way…I've found friends…I've found something to do") that points to the things in her life that have served normalizing purposes. The metaphorical suggestiveness of the word 'found' also presents an interesting foil to the 'loss' narrative.

Two kinds of normalization narratives that surfaced in participants' talk: 'this feels normal to me' or 'this is a version of what is normal for everyone.' The first kind of narrative was characterized by an emphasis on the repetitive nature of their experiences (Jake describing relocating "over and over and over again") and language that suggests that they could not envision a different life for themselves; for example, Abby remarking that she wanted to marry

someone in in the military because she "can't imagine myself not being in the military." The second kind of normalization narrative is recasting events as universal experiences. For example, in discussing the drifting apart that happened with the friends he moved away from, Eric remarked, "I guess being a military kid makes it hard, but it also happens over time naturally." Eric sees losing touch with friends as a "natural" part of life; the military might make it happen more abruptly, but it's an inevitable fact of life. In a move, friendships end "immediately as opposed to the more gradual shift."

NARRATIVES THAT TRANSITION

One of the key findings that emerged from my examination of the representative examples for each of the six key narratives was that the boundaries between these narratives were somewhat fluid. The next segment of this chapter will expand on that theme by examining narratives that morph from one kind of story into another—typically from a negative narrative to a positive. These analyses concentrate on what triggers the shift and how it changes the emotional tenor and narrative force of the account. Observing stories that transition from one kind of narrative another will also further clarify the relationship between the positive and negative narratives.

Observing how these students turn one kind of narrative into another (without changing the topic) provides insight into their efforts to exert agency over their stories. These military kids are applying different narrative frames to their situations and making choices about which narrative frame suits the subject best. Witnessing students transforming their stories is a theme that will be taken up and greatly expanded in the next two chapters about students' literacy practices.

Outcast → Cosmopolitan

In the following narrative, Abby is weighing the pros and cons of military life. The context for this quote is Abby's elaboration on her view that moving has been much more of a benefit to her life than a disadvantage. She starts out with a combination outcast/hardship narrative and shifts to reflect on the cosmopolitanizing effects of her relocations.

Setting
Yeah, I'm, definitely/
I mean when people who aren't a military kid move
they see it as something that is going to end their life or whatever/

Complication
I mean it's hard to make friends/
It's hard to move/

Crisis (Shift)
but at the end of the time
I see so much more than other people do/
and I get to experience different things because of that/

Evaluation
I think that outweighs the con of not being able to make friends as easily/
because I know I will//
Maybe not as soon as I'd like to but I will/
and so yeah/I just see it as an advantage
not necessarily something that's going to break me down or anything/

The setting in this narrative is, interestingly, a presentation of the outsider's perspective. Abby asserts that children of civilians see relocation as a much bigger deal than she does—she hyperbolizes this view with the comment that they see moving as something that "is going to end their life" and then slightly dismisses this perspective with the addition of the phase "or whatever." In the complication section, Abby simultaneously acknowledges hardship, loss, and

outcast status before she makes her big shift in the crisis section. With the definitive-sounding phrase “but at the end of the time” Abby draws attention to life after the transition is over and the situation can be more objectively apprehended; her ability to experience more than other people is what shifts her narrative in favor of the positive. In the evaluation, she reinforces her assertion with the phrase “not necessarily something that’s going to break me down.” Abby has transformed a negative narrative into a positive narrative by weighing the pros and cons and finding that she has the advantage.

Hardship → Development

Eighteen of these students’ development narratives open with some kind of discussion of hardship. In some cases, the hardships themselves were necessary catalysts for development. But in this example, Alex begins with a narrative of hardship that does not seem to have the seeds of development in it, as some narratives do. Instead, he makes a major shift and transforms one kind of story into a very different kind of story. As mentioned in the methods section, both of Alex’s parents served in the air force, and this was part of his response to my question, “What is it about your life that makes you see yourself as a military kid?” His discussion of his family’s dynamics is therefore closely aligned to his military-kid identification.

Setting
then also being raised by military parents is I feel different in some aspects/

Complication
I feel like they’re/they’re very/they’re//
it’s tough parenting//

Evaluation (shift)
But it’s good because it develops like respect
and those sorts of things/

The setting connects Alex's parents' style of parenting to their military identity; the truncated phrases in the complication reveal a struggle to explain his parents' strictness tactfully. What came out in other interviews is that Alex believed that his parents had more rules and higher expectations for him than civilian parents had for their children, which presents his picture of "tough parenting." And the repetition of the phrase "I feel" hedges his assertions—this is just his opinion. But after finally landing on the phrase 'tough parenting' to describe his parents' style, he shifts to a development narrative. He labels his parents' methods of raising him as "good" because of how those methods have formed his character, naming respect specifically. What began as a hardship narrative (using the word 'hardship' quite loosely) shifted to a story of personal development, identification of a positive outcome, and a tone of gratitude.

Loss→ Normalization

The transition from loss to normalization has a stronger sense of serving a coping function than the other narrative transitions. As a means of dealing with separation, sometimes these students told themselves that this was just normal life. Or like Jake, viewing relocation as normal was an essential survival strategy, because he knew it was something he was going to have to experience over and over again. The following quote came up in Jake's discussion of how the experience of relocation changes with age and changes with number of relocations.

Setting
it's just like/the initial first part of knowing that you're moving/
it kinda sucks
you have to say goodbye

Complication (shift)
And then later on, you just kinda get into the swing of things/
Like let's unpack the closet

and let's get all your pillows
and like your blankets
and then all of your stuff that's shoved in that drawer
that you never looked in for like two years/

Resolution
It's just, it really is more of an annoyance/

Evaluation
Because/like/we have to do this over and over and over again//

In this story, Jake provides a window into his thought processes during relocation. He opens with a brief narrative of loss, mentioning that moving involves saying goodbye to friends, which "sucks." Quickly, however, he moves his focus to the minutiae of dealing with personal possessions, evoking the image of a closet, mentioning pillows and blankets and drawers—these concrete images draw attention away from loss and focus it on packing, something that Jake can do well because he has done so many times before. His humorous description of a drawer "that you never looked in for like two years" provides a neat shift to the resolution that moving "really is more of an annoyance," a normalized view that removes the sting of lost friendships. Why pull this narrative from negative to neutral/positive? Because this is something that Jake has had to do (and will continue to do) "over and over and over again." Pulling his experiences into the space of ordinary and normal by focusing on mundane acts like packing most likely makes relocation easier for Jake to deal with.

Discussion

Before discussing why participants might have chosen these six narrative frames and analyzing their positivizing impulses, it is important to note that the patterns I have outlined

account for the majority but not the totality of students' narratives about military life. For example, consider Hannah's description of her family's positive reaction to the news that they were moving: "he [Hannah's father] just came home from work and told us. That was really nice, because we were like, good. We're moving back to more of the East Coast. Closer to family." Her narrative about relocation has a setting, complication, catalyst, and evaluation. Yet it stands out as different from most other narratives, because most students do not have a positive reaction to the news that they will be moving. It is certainly not a negative narrative (hardship, loss, outcast), but it does not fit within any of the positive narratives either (cosmopolitan, normalization, development). Out of all the narrative chunks I identified, eight of them did not clearly fit any of narrative genres.

As I mentioned in the introduction, all seven of my participants engaged in pulling narratives from negative to positive and in total, they applied a negative-to-positive framework to their stories 31 times across all of the interviews. Here is the full quote of Alex explaining where his positivizing impulse comes from:

> I'd say it probably comes from my parents. I know my mom is always telling me to focus on the positive, whether ... I mean, they could apply to any situation, but especially moving and deployment. She would always tell us, or kind of ... She always tries to be optimistic, and it's something that has rubbed off on me and my siblings, I'd say. So, I'd say that all of us try to make the best of any situation, see the bright side.

What I found especially interesting about this quote were some of the rhetorical parallels between Alex's language (both in this quote and in other places in his interviews) and the language of the Airman Handbook, a document that not only would have been required reading for both of Alex's service-member parents, but is also reflective of the Air Force's general ethos and culture. Section 10.7 of the handbook discusses "leadership qualities" deemed necessary

for Air Force personnel to cultivate, and 10.7.1 specifically discusses the importance of having a "positive attitude":

> Leaders must demonstrate the attitude they hope to see emulated by their followers. In doing so, this same attitude will be more easily adopted by their Airmen. Enthusiasm is contagious and can deliver energy to all aspects of organizational operations. Although encouragement is normally considered an action, encouragement is actually attitude related. The inclination to encourage Airmen, as well as oneself, is a powerful motivator and satisfies human needs. Effective leaders constantly embrace positive goals and display a positive attitude.

The section on attitude begins by underscoring the importance of leaders modeling the attitudes they want to see in their followers, paralleling Alex's observation that his mother "always tries to be optimistic" and that this had "rubbed off on me and my siblings." Alex's description of his mother's efforts to help her children "focus on the positive" and "make the best of any situation" sound similar to the handbook's directive to Airmen that they should adopt an attitude of enthusiasm that "can deliver energy to all aspects of organizational operations." The final statement in this section of the handbook that effective leaders constantly "display a positive attitude" is echoed in Alex's learned determination to "see the bright side" in situations like deployment and relocation. The parallels between Alex's language and the language of the Airman handbook suggest that the military training that service members undergo may be powerfully influential in how they shape their own thoughts as well as in how they shape the perspectives of their children.

Not only did students consistently pull narratives from the negative to the positive, they also occasionally expressed a desire to embrace a more positive outlook. For example, toward the end of her final interview, Hannah said:

> My attitude toward the military—I don't want to be negative about it, but I would say I

> do have anger towards the Air Force, because they definitely have changed my life. I don't—yeah. There's a lot of blessings being in the Air Force too, it's taught me a lot of life lessons. I think that's a really positive side. But there's a lot of negative things too, mostly relocating. I'm not sure if I always have the best attitude about being in the Air Force, that's something I need to work on. But I think there's also a lot of good things.

One notable element of this excerpt is how closely Hannah identifies herself with the military; even though she is the child of the service member, she says "I'm not sure if I always have the best attitude about *being in the Air Force*." In part, this quote demonstrates how prominent and powerful a role the military plays in the lives of its service members. It also reveals Hannah's desire for a positive narrative to frame her military-shaped experiences. Despite feeling some "anger" toward the Air Force for how it has changed her life, Hannah believes she can cultivate a better perspective. The last sentence—"there's also a lot of good things"—shows Hannah's efforts to shift her focus to the bright side. Immediately after the statement that becoming more positive is something she needs to work on, Hannah provides a glimpse into how that work can be accomplished. Change the focus; shape the narrative.

Hannah's quote points out a broader takeaway from all of my participants' discourses about military life. Through the stories they told me about their experiences and the way they told those stories, they were demonstrating a desire for genres that were equal to the task of grappling with the challenging or even heartbreaking aspects of their lives. These students' narrative structures, lexical choices, and figurative language all served as linguistic resources for assigning meaning and coherence to their lived experiences. In the cases I've presented above, and I argue in nearly all of the cases of the stories students told me about deployment and relocation, they were engaged in sense-making as they labeled experience as beneficial or harmful. The six genres I witnessed students using, as well as the moves students made to

transition between different genres, served an important function for these military kids, giving them a way to decide how events would influence them. The fact that students' narratives were approximately 50% positive and 50% negative suggests that these military kids view their lives in a carefully balanced way, dealing with and naming the difficult aspects of their experiences, while also acknowledging the upsides of their circumstances. And the fact that so many of them worked to transform negative narratives into positive ones suggests that among these participants, there is a strong impulse toward positivization. They expressed a refusal to dwell on the negative or allow it to have the final word. This is an impulse that I would guess is present among many groups of people, but among these military-connected students, the positivizing impulse took on the particular tone and register of military rhetoric.

The similarities I discovered between the rhetoric of the airmen handbook and the students' genres suggests that their narrative choices were not happening in a vacuum; they were informed by the contexts in which the students were growing up. Students decided what narratives to apply to their experiences, but they were making choices from among a set of options that had been presented to them by the worlds in which they moved: often their parents, who were in turn were influenced by military culture. My findings in this chapter suggest broader takeaways for different groups of people, because all humans carry around accumulated experiences and must tell stories to bring order to chaos. The six narratives I've identified in this chapter represent six of the ways that this particular population made meaning of the events of their lives, but these narratives are simply military kids' variations on a greater theme. We all use language as a resource to attach meaning to our experiences and choose how we are shaped by life events, but our choices are not entirely free. Just as the

military kids in this study were constrained by the narratives of their parents, local and global forces contextualize the stories people tell about their lives.

Conclusion

In the next two chapters, I investigate students' talk about their literacies and their actual literacy practices, while continuing to make connections to what is demonstrated in this chapter about the way they view and talk about their lives. While the examination of students' discourses provides a window into their perspectives, a study of literacy can give insight into ways that their narrative, sense-making acts extended beyond the interviews. Literacy presents a repertoire of resources for developing narrative agency. It is through literate acts that my participants' story-shaping efforts come to fullest fruition. As each interview moved from discussion of lived experiences as military kids into a discussion of various kinds of literacies, I witnessed ways that reading and writing expanded, codified, and ossified students' narrative efforts. Sometimes what I saw in seed form in students' talk about their military experiences was more fully realized in how students talked about what they did with their literacies. Those moments suggested that literacy contributed to an expansion of students' control over their narratives.

However, there are a wide variety of ways to characterize the relationship between the students' narratives and their uses of literacy. Sometimes the connection seemed to be applicational. For example, as I explain in chapter five, Peyton took her interpretation of Guy Montag as an outcast and seemed to apply that reading of the text to her own experiences with relocation. Other times the relationship seemed to be one of reinforcement; chapter five also discusses Alex's reading of *Persepolis* as a use of literacy that reinforced the positivizing impulse

I identified in his narratives about military life. There were also times when the relationship between students' narratives and literacies appeared contradictory. Hannah, for example, expressed a desire for a positive narrative, but in her discussion of the literature with which she most deeply identified, she gravitated toward stories of hardship, pain, and loss connected to relocation. These few examples represent a variety of different kinds of relationships that emerged between the six narratives I identified in chapter three and the four uses of literacy that I explore in the following two chapters.

I provide the aforementioned examples of Peyton, Alex, and Hannah in hopes that readers will be able to hold in mind a range of possible relationships between students' narratives and literacies as they read in greater depth about the literacy practices in which students were engaging. However, the following two chapters do not specifically focus on those possible relationships, in part because the data from the study do not warrant claims about the nature or quality of those relationships (this is a question that future studies could certainly explore). The six narratives do not create a setup for making one-to-one connections between the narratives and the uses of literacy. Instead, they serve an illuminating function, shining different lights on what students are doing with the texts they read and write. As outlined in chapter one, a central theme that emerged from the data was "restorying;" analysis of students' narratives established the story and illuminated their uses of literacy as acts of restorying.

The next two chapters explore a range of complex literacy practices through a framework of "use": how were these students *using* literacy to read and write their own stories? In answer to this question, I discovered uses that were at times creative, at times

subversive, and often agentive, because it was through literacy that students were able to exercise control of their own stories. As we will see in the next two chapters, while these agentive literate acts were (like the narrative genres) contextualized and constrained, they were still powerful ways that students made meaning of their lived experiences.

Chapter 4

Escape and Connection: How Military Kids Used Literacy to Restory Lived Experiences

"Reading was something to escape sort of. Usually I'd be interested in fantasy fiction or sci-fi. It was this whole different door that was opened. It would show me different worlds, different characters…something to get my head around so I could get through it a little bit easier."
-Jake

"We would Skype with him a lot and then they had this thing in Afghanistan where he could take a video of himself reading like a little story book to us…then he could send it back to us. We would watch it on the TV a lot and we would wave and talk to him...that was really special."
-Hannah

INTRODUCTION

As reviewed in chapter one, current research describes military kids in terms of what happens to them. Deployment happens to them. Relocation happens to them. Parental PTSD happens to them. The military's term for the spouses and children of military personnel—"dependents"—underscores not only this passivity, but also the peripheral role into which the military pushes the families of its service members. In these narratives, military kids are cast as passive subjects, with identities determined by events beyond their control. Consider the following quote from an article about how schools can support military kids:

> A decade after the beginning of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, federal policy-makers and educators…have begun to recognize the effects of deployment, reintegration stress, veteran post-trauma issues, and frequent school transitions on the academic

> functioning and social and emotional health and well-being of military-connected students. (DePedro, Esqueda, Cederbaum, and Astor, 2014, p.30)

The DePedro et al. article does excellent and necessary work: the authors identify vexing problems in the lives of many military kids and offer compelling suggestions for ways that schools can better support these students. However, this quote signifies a broader trend of casting military kids as passive subjects or victims of the troubling circumstances of military life, such as "deployment, reintegration stress, veteran post-trauma issues, and frequent school transitions." A researcher drawing conclusions about military kids' identities from these studies might only discuss identity in terms of how these kids are shaped by forces beyond their control.

The previous chapter explored ways that the military kids in my study applied a variety of genres to discussions of deployment and relocation, making choices about what kind of narrative framework to use in considering those life events (as well as how they endeavored, at times, to change their perspectives). This chapter will explore how military kids form and develop their perspectives through literacy. Data from interviews and from students' writing will demonstrate that these military kids are more than passive subjects, more than victims. The students in my study used literacy to retell the stories of their lived experiences, and they were more agentive than the majority of current research might imply about them. An examination of students' agentive acts is a necessary contribution to the narrative about military kids, partly because it goes beyond helping educators and administrators pinpoint potential problems; it can also suggest points of leverage in classroom literacies (as I will discuss in greater detail in the implications chapter).

What I present in this chapter and the following chapter are simply variations on the theme of how humans use literacy. What these participants do with literacy is not unique to military kids; it is merely informed and contextualized by military life. For anyone who engages with texts, there exists the potential to use literacy to agentively restory their experiences and shape their perspectives. While there are important contributions that these chapters make to the literature about military kids, there are also implications for the field of literacy in general and adolescent literacy in particular.

Reading and writing can be powerfully agentive acts; Kate Vieira (2013) argues that "literacy is a potent object that enters [people's] lives, that makes things happen" (p. 30). While military-connected students are profoundly influenced by the circumstances of military life, findings from my study suggest that they can also retell the stories being told about them. The ability people have to speak back to identity-shaping events is why Compton-Lilly & Papoi (2017) write about "identity negotiation" instead of "identity construction," because the word negotiation "capture[s] the active, strategic, and agential work that we witness" (p. 117). Much of that "agential" work is done through literacy, which is why the authors argue that "engaging in a particular literacy practice can be an act of affiliation and an enactment of identity" (p. 117) and that literacy practices contain "embedded identity claims" (p. 119). While an individual's multi-faceted, complex identity is not readily observable, what can be observed more directly is people's viewpoints as expressed through their discourses, as well as what they do to change or sustain those viewpoints. Part of the work I do in this chapter is to examine participants' literacy practices with an eye toward the ways in which these military kids actively, strategically, and agentively shaped their perspectives through reading and writing. If the

military is an institution that inscribes a particular identity onto service members and by extension their families, then it is important to also find the counternarratives: how these students are using literacy to speak back. In the context of an institution that presses its people into conformity, it is both difficult and important to find way that people within the institution's aegis are resisting that assimilating pressure. A term that some composition and education scholars use to discuss perspective-shaping through literacy is restorying.

In chapter 1, I referenced Lauren Rosenberg's (2015) descriptions of "restorying" in the lives of her participants, a process which she describes as the way people "work to construct their autobiographical scripts differently" (p. 4). Rosenberg argues that restorying narratives about lived experiences is one way people can "challeng[e] the scripts imposed on them," (p.21) and that it represents a move toward "rhetorical agency." (p. 21) What literacy offers people, and what it offers military kids who are often cast as passive subjects, is the chance to choose how they view events and consequently, a chance to choose how their identities are shaped. As Rosenberg says, restorying not only offers people "a means of negotiating with the world," but it also "makes it possible to reconceive of oneself as a subject" (p. 113). I also referenced Ebony Thomas and Amy Stornaiuolo's (2016) slightly different discussion of restorying: they approach it as an act of social justice and observe the ways that young people speak back to literature that excludes or marginalizes them.

> This process of restorying, of reshaping narratives to better reflect a diversity of perspectives and experiences, is an act of asserting the importance of one's existence in a world that tries to silence subaltern voices….we use the concept of restorying to theorize how young people are using powerful new media tools to inscribe themselves into existence in response to efforts to silence, erase, consume, or ventriloquize them within children's and young adult literature, media, and popular discourse. (p.314)

Both Rosenberg and Thomas & Stornaiuolo discuss restorying as an act of subversion, a way to challenge dominant discourses and produce destabilizing counternarratives. I borrow that term from these authors and expand it to include any narratives students produce about their lives, whether or not those stories include subversive elements (although subversion is more evident in literacy practices than it is in the discourses I analyzed in the previous chapter). One reason I expand the term is because military kids, while they are a sometimes-misunderstood population with a unique set of challenges, they are not necessarily marginalized or discriminated against. The other reason for applying a broader understanding of restorying to my analysis is that I want to avoid creating a hierarchy of agency in analyzing students' literate acts. That is, I want to find the agency present in students' literacies, even if those literacies take up dominant discourses about military life (for example, the narrative that military life is beneficial for military families, that it's up to individuals to turn negative circumstances into positive experiences, etc.). Restorying, as I am using the term, refers to students using reading or writing to apply a narrative framework to their lived experiences, and these acts of restorying are agentive whether or not they subvert common narratives for military kids.

The reason that restorying is possible is because of what Vieira (2013) refers to as literacy's materiality. She argues that "literacy is not only a social product, but…also an object that actively constitutes the social…literacy's materiality is brought into bright relief. Viewed materially, literacy is a tool (though not a neutral one) that has particular potentials to be put to certain uses" (p27). Examining military kids' uses of literacy as a tool allows us to see students being agentive; to paraphrase Ira Shor, the world is building us, but we are still building ourselves. And it is not only military kids who use literacy in this way. It is easy to see

adolescents who experience trauma or challenges (children of refugees or children from low-income families, for example) as passive victims of troubling circumstances, but my findings suggest that, in addition to addressing the systemic inequities these children face, researchers should also attend to how children are restorying their lived experiences. Such attention can open up avenues for teachers to build upon agentive literate practices their students are already bringing to the classroom and to challenge deficit and paternalistic views of children.

While literacy practices can be empowering in the way they allow students to retell the stories that influence their identities, it is important to also acknowledge the ways that society and culture contextualize our attempts to be agentive. In their discussion of sociocultural literacy research, Elizabeth Moje and Cynthia Lewis (2007) argue that "Agency might be thought of as the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories, *as embedded within relations of power*" (p. 18, emphasis mine). The authors' description of "making and remaking of…identities" bears a resemblance to Rosenberg's description of restorying, but the phrase "embedded within relations of power" adds an important caveat to the discussion of literacy's agentive potential. While people can use literacy to make and remake identities, that process is enabled, constrained, affected, and/or suppressed by the power relationships in which it occurs. Compton-Lilly and Popoi discuss the ways in which identity "negotiations do not occur on a neutral playing field…differences matter differentially" (p.135). Drawing on Bakhtin's discussions of agency, Julie Warner (2016) observes that "people have agency as communicators, but are inextricable from their context, linguistically and historically…A person's words are ever populated with historical meanings, even as she or he contributes

authorial intent" (p.167). It is not only our individual life conditions that constrain our agency, but also broader linguistic and historical forces. The very authority we drawn upon to engage with literacy is institutional; Eli Goldblatt (1995) argues that viewing writing as a social activity reconceptualizes authority in writing. Authority, Goldblatt argues, "is a function of the role a writer plays in bringing cultural institutions to life, and the source of authority is not so much in the writer or the writing as it is in the institutions that sponsor the writing" (p.23). Writers struggle to gain authority within the power relations that "lie behind the fairly standard way 'authority' is used to describe writing—the quality of ease and knowingness we recognize in respected writers from any field" (Goldblatt, 1995, p. 23). What happens to authority, Goldblatt asks, when the writer's relationship with the institution is tenuous or fraught, as in the case of basic writers? What happens to authority in the case of the military kids, who must engage with literacy on the terms set by all of the common institutional settings (family, school, religious communities, advertisers, digital culture, etc.) in addition to the overwhelmingly dominant institutional presence of the military?

These military kids' literacies show agency exercised within a struggle with life conditions that they "could not have chosen," an agency that is "neither fully determined nor radically free" (Butler, 2005, p. 19). Current literature provides a clear picture of the constraints placed on military kids' agentive acts, and the discourse analysis chapter provided a picture of some of the sociocultural contexts (and behind them, the power relations) of these military kids' lives. Nevertheless, it is possible to study constraint and agency alongside each other. My study of students' literacies illuminates the power structures that contextualize their reading and writing, while my analytic focus remains on students' agentive work of restorying.

As I read, coded, and analyzed the interview transcripts, I noticed four primary ways that military kids in my study described using literacy: *escape, connection, reflection,* and *refraction.* Restorying is the umbrella term, and each of these four uses of literacy represents a different way that students restoried their experiences. For example, they experienced separation; they restoried that experience through connection, using reading and writing to link themselves to distant loved ones. If they experienced loss and trauma, they sometimes restoried that experience through escape, using books as a door to another world. Stressful deployments and relocations could be restoried by choosing foci and narrative forms for their experiences through acts of reflection (journaling; writing essays) and acts of refraction (reading fiction; creative writing). While not all of students' uses of literacy were as tidy as the representative examples provided above, there are many examples that I will cite in the next two chapters that resemble the patterns I have described. Building on my discussion of agency in chapter one, I interpreted all four acts as agentive in some way, and so I searched each one of them for ways that students were using literacy to shape their perspectives on their experiences.

This chapter will focus on the two uses of literacy that tend to be more immediate: escape and connection. How did these military kids describe restorying their lives by escaping difficult circumstances and staying connected to parents and friends from whom they were separated? The next chapter will examine reflection and refraction, which usually occurred at more of a distance: how did these military kids describe reading and writing about their lives either directly (reflection) or indirectly (refraction) in ways that helped them choose how to process their experiences? These uses of literacy sometimes appeared in tandem, with one

purpose emerging as more dominant or conscious and other purposes sometimes lurking beneath the surface. For example, some students used creative writing as an escape, a fun activity to take their minds off of the stress of deployment or relocation. But what I witnessed, on digging a little deeper in the interviews, was that some students were writing their own lived experiences into a refracted world. One student's efforts to reflect on her daily life in a journal became a means of connection, as she used what she had written about to remember what to tell her deployed father on the phone. There were not always clean boundaries between these purposes; they occasionally appeared together, or one morphed into another over time, or students jumped from one use of literacy to the next. However, the data suggest that all four uses of literacy were ways these students agentively restoried their lived experiences.

Escape is a twofold practice in which students 1) temporarily turned their attention away from a stressful real-world circumstance and 2) turned their attention toward an imaginative, fictional realm that helps them forget their problems for a little while. Using literacy—and especially fiction—purely for escape is often devalued as a lower purpose for reading, sometimes with negative consequences. But Rosenblatt argues that "[t]he term *escape* has perhaps been used too often in an indiscriminately derogatory sense; there are useful and harmful forms of escape. Anything that offers refreshment and a lessening of tension may have its value in helping us to resume our practical lives with renewed vigor" (1995, p.39). For the students in my study, escape was an act of agentive restorying, changing how they experienced difficult events. For example, packing up belongings in preparation for a move is stressful; a

student may choose to stop packing to read a book, leaving behind the difficulty of the moment and stepping into a different world.[12]

I define *connection* as using literacy to support relationships with friends or family across distance, either through relating life events or through creating shared experiences. Students typically engaged in the first kind of connection (relating life events) through writing, while they often accomplished the second kind of connection (creating shared experiences) through reading the same text together. As these students used literacy to escape or to connect, literacy became a means of restorying an experience. Sometimes literacy also became a means of changing a sequence of events or of altering the emotional landscapes of students' sometimes-fragmented lives.

USING LITERACY TO ESCAPE

Escape is perhaps the most straightforward and seemingly least agentive way that these students were using literacy. As they faced the struggles of adolescence intersecting with the additional challenges of relocation and/or deployment, my participants talked about how literacy offered them a way out. In discussing why she liked reading so much, Hannah noted, "Books are another world I can slip into. Just to read about something that takes the focus off your life into a different, completely different world…I've really liked that. It just takes your mind off a lot of things and yeah…I think that's the main thing." There were two different (but related) aspects of escape: first, students used literacy to take a break from the emotional,

[12] What will become evident in the next chapter is that although students were gravitating toward certain literacy practices for the express purpose of escape, there was often more happening in those acts of escape than they realized. For example, some of the fiction they chose replicated some aspect of their experiences in a very different setting, giving them the opportunity to process their experiences from a distance and may even be, at times, an act of resistance. This more subconscious use of literacy will be covered in depth in chapter 5.

social, and sometimes physical labors attached to difficult (sometimes military-related) experiences. Through literacy, they were able to temporarily forget about real-life problems. Second, students used literacy to enter and to immerse themselves in a different fictional world where they did not have to directly encounter aspects of their everyday lives.[13] On the surface, escape did not appear to "restory" students' experiences very much. However, by temporarily sidestepping the impact of a difficult or traumatic event on their lives, there was agency in the way that students chose to let experiences influence them. And although students were quick to point to escape as a primary reason for engaging in literacy, evidence from their interviews and writing suggested that more was happening in many of these literacy practices than just escape. Literacy in general and fiction in particular presents the possibility of both direct and indirect processing, and even resistance. Because the military as an institution places such high value on conformity, speaking back is discouraged. As Eli Goldblatt (2018) observes, "military culture is relentlessly 'realist'; there is little room for storytelling as anything more than a pastime" and that it the military does not create spaces that encourage "poetry or the explorations of fiction as a search for greater truth." Escape for some military kids may therefore provide an outlet for non-disruptive resistance.

"Escape" was a term that three students used in discussing their literacy practices; in response to my question about what role reading played in deployment and relocation for him, Jake said that "Reading was something to escape, sort of." The "sort of" was an important caveat; the escape of fiction is incomplete because it is both temporary and imaginary.

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[13] Although as I will argue in the next chapter on reflection and refraction, sometimes those fictional stories were helping students to consider some aspect of their real lives in a new way.

Although fiction offered some students a respite, the problems from which students were trying to escape remained unchanged and were waiting for them on the other side of the book. Other students talked about escape indirectly; for example, Eric said, in regard to the role that reading played in his life, “Trying to immerse yourself in a book or something like that so you don’t have to—it would make things easier.” He was talking about escape, but he truncated the statement “so you don’t have to…” Eric was discussing military kids’ desire to not face difficult circumstances, but he did not mention what those circumstances were. I interpret the blank space as an indicator that the stressors and challenges military kids face are varied and complex and that Eric, like some of the other participants, does not enjoy thinking about those challenges directly.

Sometimes escaping through literature was a way of simply passing time. Moving involves a great deal of waiting on the kids’ part—hours spent riding in the car, sitting at the temporary living facility office, waiting for shipments of household goods to arrive. Louisa talked about reading as a practice that helped her make it through long car rides during moves: “I remember reading a bunch of books during road trips…sometimes when I start I can’t stop reading. I just have to know what’s next.” She was leaving behind somewhat a certain set of unpleasant circumstances and entering a world where time moved differently and protagonists her age dealt with problems different from her own. Her comment about always having to “know what’s next” in a story has particular resonance in a situation where there were many unknowns and the reality was more uncomfortably open-ended than the text. One book that she read during a move and has re-read several times was the memoir *Smile,* a graphic novel by Raina Telgemeier that is based on the author’s experiences with damaging her teeth and

dealing with the resultant difficulties of orthodontic correction and awkward peer interactions. Louisa told me that the story was "about this girl who one night some of her teeth got knocked out while she was playing tag and fell." Louisa disclosed that she enjoyed the story because it "was such a cool thing to see what she went through and her journey through high school and middle school." More may have been going on than Louisa realized when she picked up a book about a girl whose traumatic experience is the beginning of a long journey, but who comes out stronger in the end. However, on one very important level, Louisa was using this book and others like it simply to restory her experience of boredom during relocation.

In other instances, students talked about more complex reasons why they wanted to escape from reality. Five out of seven of these military-connected students expressed a preference for the fantasy and sci-fi genres; only Peyton and Louisa said they did not read fantasy/sci-fi on a regular basis. When I asked Abby what kind of literature she liked, she replied, "I love to read fantasy and sci-fi kind of stuff. Things that don't actually happen in real life." When I asked her more about her love for these stories, she repeated that the appeal was that "it's just something that doesn't happen in real life." And later in the interview, she connected her reading practices to her military-related experiences. She said, "I like to read specific things, but when he left [referring to her father's deployment], I was reading a lot to try and subconsciously, I was trying to get my mind off it. I consciously didn't tell myself that, but I knew that's why I was reading more than I normally do. It definitely helps." In the second interview, Abby told me more about her book selections: her favorite author is Sarah Maas, who wrote the series *Throne of Glass*, which Abby has re-read numerous times. Abby also mentioned read Maas' "*A Court of Thorns and Roses* "when he [her father] was gone." These

are books about alternate universes, magical worlds with fairies and monsters. In *A Court of Thorns and Roses,* the female protagonist, whose mother has died, is forced leave her family to go and live in a fairy realm on the other side of a mysterious wall. When I asked Abby about her reading selections again in the third interview, she provided a more specific look into the nature of reading-to-escape:

> If I read something realistic and it even just made me think about my dad, I wouldn't want to continue reading it. When it's so disconnected, there's nothing that kind of makes me think about him, I guess, I mean, that's probably one of the reasons why I do like to read more when he's gone.

For Abby, the reading was an agentive act that restoried how she experienced deployment by allowing her to temporarily forget difficult circumstances. Her choice of genre—things that don’t “happen in real life”—appeared to provide an escape of greater distance than reading a more realistic genre, because none of the experiences could directly trigger a painful memory. In the next chapter about reflection and refraction, I examine Abby’s reading selections more closely to surface parallels between her life and the stories she chose to read and re-read.

While Abby’s comments focused on the first aspect of escape (leaving real-world problems behind), Jake and Eric’s comments highlighted escape’s second aspect, which was entering an imaginative world. As part of his discussion of the role reading played in deployment and relocation for him, Jake referred to “fantasy, fiction, or sci-fi” as “a whole different door that was opened. It would show me different worlds, different characters or different things that weren’t exactly existing. Something to get my head around so I could get through it a little bit easier.” Jake was a fan of the Zodiac series; especially book two, entitled *Wandering Star.* In this book, the protagonist is orphaned and exiled, and she must find a way

to escape her circumstances and save the galaxy. Again, as with Louisa's choice of *Smile*, there is the possibility that Jake is taking up novels that replicate some aspects of own narrative (the title *Wandering Star* is in itself suggestive of the military kid experience). However, Jake described the literature he read not as a way to process his experiences. Instead, his description of fantasy/sci-fi fiction as a "door" to a different world turned escape into a conceptual metaphor, a "mapping between domains" (Oatley, 2011, p.30) that affected how Jake approached and thought about the reading he did. And he also indicated the purpose of his escape: science fiction gave him something to "get [his] head around," a mental absorption that could enable him to get through deployment and relocation more easily (even though, as I address in the next chapter, he may have been doing more processing work through these texts than he realized).

Similarly, when I asked Eric about his love for fantasy/sci-fi, he replied, "I guess because fantasy and sci-fi rely so much on suspending your disbelief, like kind of *immersing yourself in a whole different world* that has different rules and magic or super high-tech technology, like that kind of stuff always seems way more interesting to me than, I don't know, stories that take place in just regular places." Although Eric's comment in this instance did not expressly say that he wanted to leave "regular places" behind, he suggested that he found fiction most appealing when it gave him an alternate universe he could enter, complete with a different set of rules and laws by which life could be lived. What is interesting to consider are the ways that the military itself is a different world with a set of "different rules" that often uses "super high-tech technology"; these similarities between the world to which Eric escaped and the world he was part of also create a broader context to consider in interpreting his choices. The books he

expressed a special affinity for were the *Harry Potter* series and *The Hunger Games* series. Both Jake and Eric used the exact same language—"whole different world"—to talk about the books they enjoyed. This is the language of escape, with the emphasis on the completeness of the difference between reality and fiction. Choosing to escape by immersing themselves in fictional realms is one way that these students described restorying their experiences through literacy. These students used literacy as "a means of negotiating with the world" (Rosenberg, p. 113), negotiating their perceptions of difficult life events. However, as I will explore in the next chapter, the worlds to which students were escaping may not have been as different from their real-life experiences as they thought.

It is important to acknowledge the fact that there are many reasons why adolescents in general and these teens in particular chose to read fiction, reasons broader than escaping military-related circumstances and broader than escape in general. Eric's comment in the preceding paragraph suggests that the appeal of fantasy/sci-fi also lies in its inclusion of magic and advanced technology. The ability to more completely leave behind challenging circumstances (including, but not limited to, relocation and deployment) is only one possible explanation for five students' preference for the sci-fi/fantasy. However, the presence of the term "escape" in students' discussions of the books they enjoyed and 24 coded references of students using literature to escape suggest that the purposes of leaving one world behind and entering another were a primary reason why these students enjoyed fiction.

USING LITERACY TO CONNECT

For military service members and their families, separation is a harsh yet common reality of life. With permanent changes of station (PCS) occurring every two to four years, long

periods of training, temporary duties (TDY), and deployment, finding ways to stay connected to friends and family is necessary for military kids' mental health and well-being. As students' interviews demonstrated, literacy played a prominent role in enabling these students to feel connected to loved ones, to help them make it to the other side of transitional spaces, and to suture the pieces of their lives back together, restorying the reality of separation. The dynamics of connection through literacy that we see playing out in the lives of these military-connected students are yet another facet of a larger movement in adolescent literacy practices toward increased engagement across distance, boundaries, and borders through digital literacies. Hull, Schulz, and Higgs (2016) cite a study in which adolescents, communicating across "transnational spaces and multimodal texts….'negotiate[d] proper distance' in relation to their distant, interactive audiences" (p.108). Although the students in Hull et al.'s study were connecting with people they did not know, some of the same dynamics were at work in the literacies of these military kids. The students in the study engaged in "digital multimodal practices" that "enabled them to playfully experiment with notions of space and time and to design novel representations of their own and others' stories" (2016, p.108)

Connection Through Relating Life Events

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, I define connection as using literacy to support ongoing relationships with friends or family across distance, either through relating life events or through creating shared experiences. My findings in this category echo those of Julie Warner (2016) who, in studying adolescents' phone-based literacies, observed that students' practices were "reactive and emergent rather than controlled and planned…Instead of creating planned texts from the ground up, they responded to the world around them digital and physical,

through texts" (p.183). In contrast to almost all of the other categories of literacy (escape, reflection and refraction) students engaged in literacies of connection spontaneously, sometimes reactively, often in ephemeral forms (such as texting and Snapchat). The spontaneous and transitory nature of these texts made them difficult for me to study, so I rely primarily on how students talk about their literacies of connection. Despite the fact that many of these literacies were fleeting and unplanned, they were still crucially important ways that these military kids restoried separation. The students were not alone in this effort; they described ways that their parents worked to facilitate communication through episodes of relocation and deployment. And they were aided by technology as well; connection in the digital age is far removed from the experience of letter-writing as the sole means of maintaining contact across distance. However, there were also situations connected to deployment and relocation that complicated efforts to stay in touch. For example, Abby talked about how her father "had his phone disconnected so he couldn't text," a requirement of his particular mission. Military-related separations involve a loss of control, and by staying connected, these students were speaking back, choosing to remain involved in their loved ones' lives during separation. One type of connection happened through communicating the experiences of everyday life, often through print or digital writing.

Students talked about using emails, text messages, social media messages, and even handwritten letters to remain connected to deployed parents and distant friends. During deployment, most of these literacies involved communicating ordinary events in an effort to make deployed parents feel like they were still part of the family. When I asked him what role reading and writing had played in his mother's deployment, Jake replied, "Writing letters to my

mom was definitely a big part of it." I asked him more about the content of those letters and he said the following:

> **Jake:** I would send her letters and give her little updates about how the Christmas lights are still on even though it's June. How it's constantly raining in England or how it's always cloudy. How the house has not been vacuumed in four weeks. She's always, always on my butt about vacuuming my room or the house or the living-room.

In these letters, Jake both related the events of daily life and highlighted to his mother the way he felt her absence by discussing things that she would not have allowed if she had been home. Jake was the student who used the conceptual metaphors of emptiness and fullness to describe the difference between how it felt to have his mother gone and how it felt to have her home (as discussed in chapter three). These letters restoried the separation of mother from son and provide an example of the overlap between uses of literacy: although the primary purpose of the letters was connection, they also allowed Jake to retell life events to himself and his mother. Eric described writing as

> a more personal way to keep in touch with my dad, because when you do a family Skype call, it's like everybody talking to him at once and you can hear everyone's conversation. So I would send him emails about just smaller stuff I wanted to say. Like it could range from anything like, "Oh, did you hear about this?" Or, "I have a question for you." So yeah, emailing played a big role in deployment.

The connection that Eric was able to have with his father via email differed dramatically from the connection that happened in whole-family Skype calls. Emails made the conversation more personal and allowed for the introduction of deeper topics that might have been difficult to discuss with other family members present.

Students also talked about using literacy to connect with friends and family from whom they were separated due to relocation, and most of those connections involved discussing everyday events. This kind of connection kept students anchored during frequent transitions and gave them a sense of belonging until they found friends in their new location. All seven students in this study discussed writing about everyday events to stay connected to old friends. Peyton talked about communicating with her friends “through social media, texting, Snapchat, Instagram” and that when she lived in Virginia, “I actually used to write letters to some of my friends who lived in Ohio.” Louisa said, “I just try to connect with my old friends through my phone,” although she also mentioned that she connected a lot more with friends in her present location than friends in past locations, noting that her social media and texting connections were “mostly local.” Similarly, Jake said that although he used Snapchat mostly with local friends, “I snap with my friend Erin in Texas.” Eric said, “a few months ago, one of my friends in California started group chat for all of us that were friends in elementary school.” Alex identified Instagram posts as a way to “get to see all kinds of different people, like even that I knew back in California…and that’s always interesting to keep up with them.” Abby mentioned keeping in touch with her best friend in Colorado: “we’ll just text and see how the other’s doing. I’ll see her, like on Snapchat she’ll post something on her story and I’ll be like, ‘Oh, that’s cool, what’s going on?’ and that kinda stuff.” Hannah exchanged handwritten letters, at the rate of about two per month, with friends she had left behind. She and her sister also composed a humorous newsletter to her grandparents each month under the pen names of Eunice A.H. Smoot and Belle Cicilia. Having to move away from grandparents was difficult for Hannah and her family, and communicating the events of their lives through funny news

articles written in third person helped her stay connected. Here is one article from her newsletter:

> **Health Alert: May it be known that Hannah Grace Watkins of Danvers, [State], has been deathly (☺) ill with a bad cold for almost a week now. Please thoroughly "wash your little hands" after reading this news bulletin.** Miss Watkins has been sickly with a cold for almost a week now. She has had to miss ballet practice at the world renowned Montalcino Ballet Studio, where she and her younger sister, Melanie AnnE, take ballet. Ms. Kathy's (the artistic director of Montalcino) face "was full of compassion" when Hannah's mother, Megan A. Watkins, expressed the sorrowful news that Hannah would not be attending class that day. On Saturday morning though, Hannah had to go to ballet, because she had her first rehearsal for Montalcino Ballet's production of Giselle. (See Social Section for more info on this topic.) She made it through though, coughing and extremely runny nose. She has not had any fever. So far neither Cousin nor Belle Cecilia has gotten the disease. That is what is important, you know! Hannah also did not go to church (Shhh, don't tell Ger-rie!!:)), but is feeling better today.

These are the kind of events that grandparents might quickly know about if they live in the same town as their grandchildren; it was the very ordinariness of the subject matter (a cold that made her miss dance class) that made Hannah's newsletter so personal and so connective. Hannah's writing restoried her familial separation by communicating everyday events in a humorous style. It created closeness across distance and allowed her grandparents to feel like a part of her family life. Her use of a familial comedic register also helped her to put a brave face onto the difficult situation of missing her grandparents; it allowed a connection in a way that did not emphasize sadness. In this way, it can be read as another outworking of the positivizing impulse noted in my analysis of student discourses (chapter three). Hannah's published texts served as a contrast to the other literacies of connection mentioned above which were, as Warner (2016) observed, "reactive and emergent rather than controlled and planned," (p.183) a response to the circumstances in which they found themselves. However, all of these texts

point to ways that students were on one level restorying their experiences of separation and on a deeper level shaping their perspectives through the active, strategic, agential work of literacy (Compton-Lilly & Papoi, 2017).

For all of these students, writing about everyday life restoried separations, connecting them with friends and family. Literacy also helped these students stay connected to old friends before fully integrating into new communities that would provide a sense of belonging. And literacy helped restory the experience of separation as students expressed to loved ones both the important personal details of their lives (as in Eric's case) or just ordinary events that they wanted extended family to feel like they were part of (as in Hannah's case). One particularly complicated aspect of these (and many other) military kids' experiences is that relocations force them to continuously break and re-form relationships. In that context, literacies of connection are a means of smoothing out disruptions and making lives feel less fragmented. If ties do not abruptly break, but slowly dissolve over time (according to Eric, a "natural" process that the military simply accelerates), then the effect that those changes have on students' lives is likely to be less emotionally difficult.

Connection through shared experiences

Another kind of connection through literacy was the creation of shared experiences. When people cannot go through life together, relationships naturally erode. Eric observed, in discussing what it was like to talk to his deployed father, "you don't have that emotional connection, it's just not the same talking over Skype." By reading the same text, some students and their loved ones could fight that erosion, sharing reactions to texts and creating the kind of bonding experience that is typically only available in person. The texts that served as shared

experiences could be as long as a novel series or as short as a text message. Students who discussed staying in touch with distant parents on a daily or almost-daily basis also mentioned that they sometimes struggled to find conversation topics. Peyton remarked on this ongoing difficulty:

> What do you say?....Because it's like, you could tell them about what happens in your day, but that's a two minute long conversation. And then it's like, what do you talk about? Because he's not there and he's not engaged in your life, like the situations that really are going on. So it's just different, it's completely different. So it was hard. And it was hard for him too. A lot.

While both Peyton and her dad wanted to stay in touch, the struggle of separation surfaced in their search for things to say during phone conversations. Peyton and her father did not use literacy as shared experience, but other students did. When students had the opportunity to discuss and react to texts with loved ones, they had more things to talk about and another kind of connection was created.

Some shared texts were as short as a single sentence. Louisa's father was deployed at the time I interviewed her, and he texted her on an almost-daily basis. However, rather than texting about the events of their everyday lives, which they did over FaceTime, Louisa's father would text her a daily inspirational quote, which became a bite-sized literary experience for them to share. In discussing the quotes, she said, "I was always waiting for that quote. Sometimes it would never come, but it would just brighten my day." In one of the interviews, she read to me a text message he had sent her: "Okay, he sent one like an hour ago. He said, 'Success is not final, failure is not fatal, it is the courage to continue that counts.'" When I probed a bit more to ask her about her reaction to that quote, she said, "I don't know… it's just kind of a pick-me-up through the day. Just to make myself aware of what I'm doing, like to keep

going." Although Louisa communicated to me an appreciation of these text messages (she discussed the messages in a warm tone, smiling, obviously pleased), she did not indicate that they triggered much reflection on her life; instead she focused on the positive psychological effects of the quotes. In other words, it was not the quote itself, but what the quote represented (her father's encouragement) and what it did for her (helped her keep going) that were the most important. In the midst of the grief of separation, text messages restoried their lives by connecting Louisa to her father in a way that was different from connecting via phone or Facetime. These quotes became hundreds of tiny shared experiences for the two of them.

For four students in this study, reading books was a shared experience that helped connect them with friends and deployed parents across distance, restorying their separation. While she was deployed to Iraq, Jake's mother would videotape herself reading books to him and would then send him the books. His dad would play the video of his mom reading, and he would follow along in the book. Jake said, "she would send us these videos of her in this little tiny cubicle with like little children's books, and then she'd send them overseas." The books Jake's mother sent and the accompanying videos became a way for him to connect to her through an ordinary childhood practice—reading a bedtime story—made extraordinary because of the distance covered. Those books took on a special meaning for Jake, who said of one book she sent that he particularly liked, "my nose was in that book for quite a while." With a child as young as Jake was when his mother deployed, phone conversations cannot be very extended (although he did describe talking to her on the phone). By reading to her children, Jake's mother was creating an alternate kind of connective experience using literacy. Because

she mailed him the actual books she was reading on the videos, literacy also became a material connection between Jake and his mother.

Hannah had a similar experience with her father when he was deployed. She recalled that "we would Skype with him a lot and then they had this thing in Afghanistan where he could take a video of himself reading, like a little story book to us or something. Then he could send it back to us. We would watch it on the TV a lot and we would wave and talk to him back. It was funny….That was really cool. I kept it. That was really special." Hannah said that she was "three or four" at the time, so she does not remember it very well. But she confirmed to me that it was one of her earliest memories of reading, making it a formative episode related to literacy.[14] For both Hannah and Jake, the shared experience happened asynchronously; that is, their parents filmed the video of themselves reading and then sent it home, so that the family watched the video at a different time and could re-watch it multiple times. The fact that it was a video prevented dialogue about the book from happening on the spot, but it created something enduring that could be re-experienced. In terms of connection, more permanent literacy artifacts like these videos are significant, because so much of the interaction between students and deployed parents happens ephemerally, through phone conversations, FaceTime, and Skype calls.

As students grew older, the books they used to create shared experiences changed in length and genre. Eric described using one particular young adult novel to stay connected to his deployed father. Early on in the first interview, he discussed his affinity for the *Harry Potter*

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[14] Unfortunately, neither Hannah nor her mother could remember any of the particular titles that they read together during the deployment.

series. He said, “when I was in kindergarten, my dad and I would read *Harry Potter* together like every night.” A little later, Eric mentioned, “[my dad] was deployed when book seven [*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*] came out. So we were like, you know, comparing notes from—you know through phone calls and stuff like that…Like ‘Oh my gosh, did you get to the part where this happens?’ So yeah.” Eric and his father co-read *Harry Potter*, a series that connected them when his father was present, to create a shared experience when his father was absent. In the second interview, Eric explained how *Harry Potter* helped maintain that connection: “that was a combination of reading and writing, I’d read and then if I don’t get to talk about it with him at night on Skype, I’d email him about it. And so yeah, the reading definitely kept us in touch.” Eric and his father were not able to live their lives together, so reading the same book at almost the same time was something they could jointly experience, something that would prevent relational erosion.

Creation of shared experiences could also happen through writing (though rarely). One example of this phenomenon comes from Eric, who co-created a story by text message with a friend he had recently moved away from. He said,

> So one of my best friends in California, our big thing was we would get really into these imaginary, like playing pretend basically, and so we’d make up our own world that we were having adventures in, so after I moved, we would continue that through text. So like going back and forth writing stories, I would contribute, I would say like, "Okay, this happens," and then he’d say, "This happens next”… it wasn’t a story per se, like there was never any plot or anything like that, it was just we were texting what we were doing in our imaginary world… we kind of blended our actual lives into these fantasy lives and basically characters from every TV show or book that we had ever had would somehow integrate into that story. So it was—I remember we had our own country that I was president of, he was vice president, and we wrote up a constitution and everything. But all of our adventures took place in that country.

When I asked Eric how long he and his friend kept this up, he replied, “A few months.” This was long enough for Eric to become established and make friends in his new location. In the meantime, he stayed connected to a good friend through creative digital literacy. Although I am categorizing this literacy as primarily connection, there is escape happening as well. Eric and his friend temporarily left their real worlds behind and created an alternate world. In reality, they were separated; they restoried that separation by composing a different reality in which they were together. They took an in-person practice and turned it into a digital literacy practice when Eric moved away. Eric’s practice serves as a striking example of what Warner (2016) referred to as “hybridization,” which she said was “common in online communicative practice especially in an age of remix…reblogging or text curation…and cut-and-paste” (p.167). The co-composition of a fictional world via text message is indeed language populated with hybridized authorial intents. Warner observes in her analysis of her participants’ digital literacies that their practice was “focused on demonstrating alignment with others as much as it was about communicating a message” (2016, p. 180). The relational, connective aspects of literacy in the cases Warner cites were as important or more important than the content itself; so it was for Eric and his friend, that creative writing was interwoven with remaining connected across distance.

A slightly different kind of connection through reading happened when students attempted to forge new friendships. This use of literacy pushes against my definition of “connection,” since I argue that connection involves maintaining relationships *across distance*. However, in the case of forming new friendships, the distance was metaphorical; there were no shared memories on which students could draw to bond with new acquaintances, so the shared

experience of books substituted for the relational intimacy of friends going through life together. Louisa discussed how the *Percy Jackson* series helped her make friends with the girls on her dance teams. Because Louisa had already read them and girls on the team were in the middle of reading them, she would say, “Have you gotten to this part yet?” and noted that “Our love for Percy Jackson has brought us closer.” In the third interview, when I asked Louisa for more details about how these books helped her make friends in a new place, she replied,

> I remember one of my dance friends, she was reading a book that I haven’t finished since like 2014. Like I haven’t really gone back to the book because it was so long, and I didn’t have any time. And I saw she was reading it, and I just started talking to her about Percy Jackson, because I didn’t know people still read them…And then another person started getting into the conversation, and yeah, we just talked about it more.

Here Louisa is using the Percy Jackson series in a way that Compton-Lilly & Papoi might call “an act of affiliation and an enactment of identity” (2017, p. 117), a way of affiliating and identifying with other girls through literature. Louisa had not grown up with these girls, but books provided a space for connection, a way to restory the experience of alienation and transition.

Eric did something similar with the Hunger Games series, but instead of using the books to make friends, he stayed connected to friends he had left behind. He said,

> I first heard of the *Hunger Games* in California and they kind of spanned over the time we were moving to when I got here, reading the series. And I still had friends back in California that were reading it at the same time I did, so we would be able to talk about that, too. It wasn’t quite as like our paces were matched up and we were reading the same thing every day, like my dad and I were, but it kind of gave us something to talk about almost.

Contrasting this shared reading experience with the reading he and his deployed father engaged in, Eric presented a picture of connection through literacy. He was missing out on the shared experiences that characterized his relationships with old friends, but he restoried that

experience by reading and discussing books with them. Again, he mentioned the difficulty of coming up with topics of conversation with people you are separated from; these books, Eric observed, gave him and his friends “something to talk about.”

CONCLUSION

Examining the array of literacy practices woven throughout these military kids’ lives and identifying the ways they restoried their lives by escaping tough circumstances and connecting with loved ones in creative ways, it is impossible to continue to see them only as passive subjects or victims of circumstances. They were certainly built by their military-shaped worlds, but the data show ways that they were still building themselves—neither fully determined nor totally free. Across borders and boundaries, students found innovative ways to use literacy to link themselves to people from whom they were separated. Books provided doors of escape from difficulties and the chance for students to immerse themselves in imaginative realms, removed for a little while from real-life problems. These literacy practices had material effects, and they represented active, strategic, agential work in which students engaged as they shaped their perspectives on events. Lauren Rosenberg writes about becoming literate as movement “toward an independent self who has more control over her life” (p.96). The military is an agency-suppressing institution for both service members and dependents, but the general movement of literacy is toward increased agency.

Therefore, literacy had the potential—even though it was still marked by sponsorship (Brandt and Clinton, 2002) and contextualized by asymmetrical power relations—to help these students gain more control by choosing how they viewed and even how they experienced life events. Escape and connection presented students with the possibility of productively

disrupting their own stories. The next chapter, which focuses on reflection and refraction, will take a different look at restorying, examining the ways students retold and reflected on their narratives, and the ways students read and wrote themselves into fictional worlds.

Chapter 5

Reflection and Refraction: How Military Kids Used Literacy to Restory Lived Experiences

"As a child, my mom would sit me down on the floor and point out certain points on the map, interconnected by hand-drawn lines forming an expansive web of cross-country car rides. From California to Massachusetts, Texas to Ohio, I can trace them with my finger and recount my life… Now, I'm ready to draw my own lines."
-excerpt from Eric's essay

INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter explored restorying through escape and connection, but students also talked about a different kind of restorying: using texts both directly and indirectly to make sense of their lived experiences. Using various literacy practices, these military kids sometimes selected the focus of narratives, restructured narratives, recognized overlooked aspects of narratives, and/or offered alternative interpretive frames (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). These students were sometimes using restorying subversively, to "lay claim to identities beyond those typically ascribed to them" (Hull, Schulz, & Higgs, 2016, p. 108) and to "challeng[e] the scripts imposed on them" (Rosenberg, 2015, p.21). Other times, they were taking up common narratives about military life and enacting ascribed identities. But in all of the instances discussed in this chapter, students were shaping how they thought about their experiences for a variety of purposes. As Vivienne (2016) notes, "our lives are made up of a series of incidents,

anecdotes, and interactions that we parse as insignificant or, alternatively, as moments that merit retelling. Put simply, we make meaning of who we are" (p. 45). Students' descriptions of how literacies changed their thinking about themselves and the world attested powerfully to literacy's potential to "make meaning" out of lived experiences and thus to exercise agency in situations where many of the students' and parents' choices were removed.

There were two ways that students discussed using literacy to shape how they thought about events: reflection and refraction. "Reflection," as I use it in this chapter, refers to students using reading and writing to retell or relive their own stories in order to alter the emotional landscape of those experiences and shape their perspectives. I use the term "refraction" to discuss how these students interpreted fiction using the schemas their experiences and how their viewed their lives differently as a result of engaging with fiction. Both reflection and refraction serve similar purposes: to help students restory their lives by assigning meaning to their lived experiences. Reflection happened primarily in the realm of non-fiction, while refraction typically took place in reading or writing fiction. Reflection was a more direct way of students shaping their thoughts about their lives; refraction was more indirect. Reflection was more conscious and intentional; refraction sometimes operated at the level of the subconscious. I should note that the distinction between reflection and refraction is somewhat artificial; they are perhaps better viewed as two ends of a spectrum rather than as distinct categories. For any characteristic I could identify as a distinctive of reflection or refraction, I could easily think of a counterexample. Despite the exceptions to the rules, I do think it is useful to consider patterned differences in the ways that military kids are processing their experiences.

In *reflection*, these military kids retold (writing) or relived (reading) their own experiences, usually in ways that influenced how they perceived those events. Some examples of reflection included journaling about relocation, texting a friend about deployment-related stresses, looking at scrapbooks or old Instagram photos of places where they had previously lived, and writing academic essays about military-related experiences. In each of these instances, students were retelling or reliving real-life events in ways that often altered the emotional landscape of their memories. For example, some of them described their reflective writing as a cathartic process that helped them excise negative emotions or shift their focus to the positive. Reflection allowed these students to read or write their own stories again, and thus they could choose the story's focus, choose its takeaway, choose its plot structure, and choose the ending. As Hull, Schultz, & Higgs (2016) observe, "writing can facilitate youths' agentive self-authoring and fluid identity negotiation" (p.108) and Compton-Lilly & Papoi (2017) remind us that literacy is active, strategic, and agential work. While there is a sense in which reflection involves narrativization--and to some extent, fictionalization--of experience, the way students interacted with the genres of reflection (journaling, narrative essay writing, reading scrapbooks etc.) was different from the approach they brought to fiction genres.

Refraction refers to a set of creative processes people employ to create or enter a world that replicates some of the events of their own narratives in a fictional setting.[15] Rosenblatt

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[15] While both reflection and refraction are physics terms, the word "reflection" has been naturalized, both in everyday language and in the language of composition and rhetoric. The word "refraction" on the other hand still carries some of its metaphorical potency from the world of physics, which merits a more detailed explanation of how I am applying it to students' reading and writing practices in fiction and how it compares to reflection. When light hits certain surfaces, the light waves are *reflected;* that is, they bounce off the surface in a straight line. Since mirrors are flat surfaces, the image we see reflected is clear and undistorted—a fairly accurate representation of the real-life object

(1969) argues that readers bring elements of their backgrounds and experiences to the text, and that what they bring influences how knowledge is co-created between reader and text. Given that people bring aspects of their lives with them to their literacy practices, I see refraction as involving one or more of the following as the processes, broken down according to the acts of reading and writing:

- **Readers** interpret a text through the schema of their experiences; **writers** put some aspect of their own lives into a text or assign a text meaning based on their experiences.
- The **readers** or **writers** reflect on their own lives from a different perspective as a result of that interaction with the text.

While the first point is thoroughly explored through reader-response theory, the second point is not as frequently mentioned or studied in the literature about people's transactions with texts. In practice refraction can involve either or both of these processes. It is also possible for some or all of these processes to occur on a subconscious level; it may be many years between the occurrence of refraction and the meta-awareness of its occurrence. Therefore, knowing that my participants might not overtly describe the refraction in which they engaged in their literacy practices, I analyzed not only what students said they were doing with texts, but also what similarities existed between fictional texts they read or wrote and the real events of their lives. My focus was not so much on proving whether or not refraction was definitely occurring;

(although both literally and metaphorically, mirrors can deceive). Other surface mediums *refract* light instead of reflecting it; that is, the waves change direction and our eyes see an altered image. What we observe through refracted light, we see in a different way.

that kind of claim would be difficult to prove. Instead, when I noticed similarities between text and student, I focused on how refraction might have been happening, and if so, what its implications were. For the students in my study, recognizing similarities between their lives and the fiction they read or wrote was not always straightforward, because those similar features had been estranged, had been pulled into a setting where everything looked different. But it was the very phenomenon of estrangement that allowed students to see familiar aspects of their lives in new ways or to notice aspects of their experiences that might have been otherwise overlooked by their conscious minds.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) took up the term "refraction" in discussing what he referred to as "double-voiced discourse" in novels, a type of discourse that "expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author" (p.324). In double-voiced discourse, Bakhtin argued, "there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions" (1981, p. 324) that are having a kind of conversations with each other: "Examples of this would be comic, ironic, or parodic discourse, the refracting discourse of a narrator, refracting discourse in the language of a character and finally the discourse of a whole incorporated genre—all these discourses are double-voiced and internally dialogized" (p.324). Because Bakhtin was a formalist, he focused on dialogism within the text only. I am using the refraction metaphor differently, because I am also using Rosenblatt's transactional reader-response theory (outlined in chapter one) to discuss an external dialogism: the conversation that happens between the reader's voice and the character's voice. Most people think that term 'fiction' simply refers to a story that is not true, but actually the word fiction comes from the Latin word *fingere* (also the root of our word for

'finger') which means 'to make,' according to psychologist and literary scholar Keith Oatley (2011, p. 7). Fiction is therefore an act of creation, not only on the part of the author, but also on the part of the reader. The reader's creative act has often been downplayed or minimized in many critical theory traditions, but it is a crucial aspect of the process of meaning-making. In the act of reading, there are simultaneously three intentions at work: the intention of the author, the intention of the character who is speaking, and the intention of the reader whose act of reading is itself an act of creation. As Oatley observes,

> We don't just respond to fiction…or receive it…or appreciate it…or seek its correct interpretation…We create our own version of the piece of fiction, our own dream, our own enactment…As partners with the writer, we create a version based on our own experience of how the world appears on the surface and of how we might understand its deeper properties. (2011, p.18)

The refraction in which *readers* engage is reading fictional texts through the refracted lenses of their own realities, ideologies, emotions, and experiences. Bakhtin states that "a potential dialogue is embedded" in discourses, "one as yet unfolded, a concentrated dialogue of two voices, two world views, two languages" (1981, pp.324-325) and so it is with the dialogic potential between text and reader. The refraction in which *writers* engage is a different kind of double-voicing: writing about their own lives in refracted settings, at the same time they write about characters' lives.

Refraction occurred when these military-connected students read or created stories that replicated some aspects of their narratives and then often interpreted the text and their own lives in light of those similarities. For example, in two stories that involved outsiders--"Rip Van Winkle" and *Fahrenheit 451*--Peyton could see the "outsider" aspects of her own life, not directly reflected back to her, but refracted so she saw her life in a different light. In one case,

she was aware of that refraction (*Fahrenheit 451*). In the other case ("Rip Van Winkle"), she was not aware of it until I asked her about it directly in the interview (both cases are discussed in greater detail below). And she directly connected her experience of feeling like an outsider to her frequent relocations. The work of refraction is more subtle and more complex than that of reflection, partially because of how literature works on readers. As Keith Oatley (1999) observes, "in the simulations of fiction, personal truths can be explored that allow readers to experience emotions—their own emotions—and understand aspects of them that are obscure, in relation to contexts in which the emotions arise" (p.101). However, readers do not always recognize the interaction between their own worlds and fictional worlds. Bakhtin's use of the word "potential" in discussing the dialogue between author and character ("a potential dialogue is embedded," 1981, p.324) brings up another important point in discussing refraction: the full dialogue between text and reader—that is, the reader recognizing him or herself in the text and engaging in meta-aware discourse with the text—does not always occur. Nor is meta-awareness a necessary element of refraction, although it is useful. Because literature does some of its work at the level of the subconscious and readers' brains generate physiological connections to texts without their awareness of it (Oatley 2011), refraction can happen even when readers do not consciously project their own lives onto character's experiences.

Refraction, I will argue, allowed students to do some of the same work of reflection: selecting the focus of narratives, restructuring narratives, recognizing overlooked aspects of narratives, and/or offering alternative interpretive frames (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). However, this work happened in a different world with a different set of rules. Real life events and emotions, pulled into a fictional setting, could be addressed from different angles. As Jake

observed in his third interview, “I feel like in my definition of a journal, it’s like, it stays to the truth, it never goes, it always--a journal to me is a more objective piece of writing and to me, creative writing is subjective. And you can make anything you want to.” As I explore in detail in this chapter, Jake’s description of how he views and uses journaling is dramatically different from how he uses his reading and writing of fiction. Part of refraction’s psychological usefulness to these students was that it allowed them to isolate certain aspects of an experience so that they did not have to deal with the whole thing at once. Perhaps reading an entire book about deployment and relocation would be overwhelming and unhelpful for a military kid, but for these students, reading a book where a character experienced separation from a parent in a different way and for a different reason helped them work through experiences one piece at a time. Fiction also introduced a new kind of agency, because it gave students the opportunity to exercise an unparalleled level of control over their experiences. The fictional world presented them a wealth of possibilities, including supernatural ones, for dealing with real-world problems, and in the case of creative writing, it even gave them a chance to write newendings.

USING LITERACY FOR REFLECTION

Some students described moments of personal recognition triggered by their reflective writing practices, instances of deepened understanding of how their identities had been shaped by their experiences as military kids. When I asked Eric if there was anything in his college application essay that helped him realize something new about himself, this was his reply:

> I guess at the end when I say all the things that had come from me being in a military household, "Chosen career path, curiosity about the world, ability to face challenges I will encounter”... I guess I’ve said this but, I don’t really think about being a military kid a whole lot and how that’s affected me. But when I was going back, and this was for a

> scholarship essay for military kids about, "What's being a military kid meant for you?" I narrowed it down to those three things and thought, "Man I wonder if I hadn't been a military kid. If I lived one place my entire life, if I would be the same as I was." I realized, no I wouldn't have. I would have probably been different. So that was something that made me realize that even if I don't think about it a whole lot, being a military kid really has impacted my identity, some ways even indirectly.

These revelations were things that Eric did not fully realize about himself until he wrote them down. Eric not only pinpointed the ways that growing in the military had shaped his personality, but also demonstrated the ability of literacy to bring latent or unrecognized aspects of identity to the forefront of his consciousness. His literacy practices enabled him to understand aspects of his experiences that might otherwise have lurked in his subconscious mind indefinitely, perhaps unknown or misunderstood. And in restorying those experiences through reading and writing, Eric was also able to exert some agency over his own identity formation.

Of all of the reflective literacy practices that have the potential to change how one thinks about an event, few seem as rich with possibility as journaling. It provided a way for some students to restory their experiences by counter-narrating their experiences. Therefore, I was surprised to find that only two students (Louisa and Peyton, the only two who did not favor fantasy and sci-fi) talked about ongoing journaling practices. Peyton mentioned her journaling dismissively, calling her writing “chicken scratch.” When I asked her if she kept a journal, Peyton replied, “I have a journal that I write in, but it's nothing ... It's all just chicken scratch. It's just whatever I want to write.” I asked her when and why she began journaling, and she said:

> **Peyton:** I probably started writing vigorously in it around when I moved from Utah to here, because that's when I was struggling a lot, so I would just write and I'd be like, ‘I feel like crap’ or ‘I feel better.’ So probably around ninth grade, maybe. End of ninth grade.

> **Interviewer:** What do you think the role of your journal was in that transition? What did it do for you?
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> **Peyton:** I think it helped me because it was just a way to vent to nobody. Just to vent to a piece of paper. You just write it all out. Just write all your feelings, like, I hate the way this happened, or ... You know what I mean? So I think that helped me get them out.

For Peyton, journaling served a cathartic purpose, and "venting to nobody" helped keep her from potentially straining relationships with family members or close friends. In writing statements like "I feel like crap" or "I feel better," Peyton was labeling her responses and choosing how to think about the events that were shaping her life. She wrote about the negative aspects of military life, which was a counter-narrative to the concept that military life is beneficial. In light of the resistant aspects of Peyton's journal, it is also important to note that she did not share the journal with me (even though I asked for examples of out-of-school writing), and that she persistently referred to it as "chicken scratch." Was it because the journal was unpolished writing that she did not want me to judge? Was it too personal? Or was she withholding a narrative the lacked the sanctioned, positivizing impulse that was present in her discourses about military life?

Louisa kept a journal for a slightly different purpose than Peyton. Louisa wrote a "little diary" outside of school, not regularly, but frequently enough "just so when I'm older I can see how I was when I was younger." In this way, Louisa had a chance to reflect the image of her younger self to her older self. She discussed capturing the events of everyday life that stood out to her, that she decided she wanted to remember; she said she wrote about "experiences I've had or what was different about a normal day." Not only did the journal help her with long-term reflection, it also had an important connection to her experience of parental deployment.

As mentioned in previous chapters, Louisa's father was deployed when I interviewed her, and in discussing her diary, she noted that "I would sometimes include like what my dad has said that I found really interesting." I asked her if the opposite was true; if what she wrote in her journal came up in her daily conversations with her dad. She said yes: "Yeah, it serves kind of like a reminder of our next FaceTime call of what I should include, what I should talk to him about." The previous chapter about literacy as escape and connection noted that one of the struggles of staying connected to a deployed parent is trying to figure out what to say to them every day. Keeping a journal or diary became, for Louisa, a way of keeping track of talking points. Through reflection, Louisa restoried her life not only to herself, but also to her deployed father, staying connected to him and exerting control over her memories.[16]

Abby's reflective writing was done through composing text messages. Like Peyton, Abby pursued catharsis through writing down her feelings, but rather than venting to a journal, she would vent via text to her best friend. When I asked Abby what role reading and writing had played in her experience of deployment, she replied, "A lot." When I asked for specifics, she said, "I'm always, like my best friend, she lives in Colorado, so I always text her. When my dad left, I was like, 'Hey, my dad's deploying.' Like we would talk about it." These texting

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[16] What might be the significance of Peyton and Louisa being the only two students in the study who consistently journaled and also the only two students who did not read fantasy/sci-fi books and also the only two students who asked to read my dissertation when it was finished? While there are many possible reasons that these were the only two students who kept journals and did not read fantasy/sci-fi, the fact that these choices indicated a preference for interaction with real world events suggests that the way these two students restoried their lived experiences might be more direct than the other students' ways of restorying. And the fact that they asked to read my dissertation when it was finished might also indicate a desire to delve more deeply into the problems and issues that arise for military kids. My hypothesis is that all three of these things indicated a desire to deal with lived experiences directly, instead of escaping them. However, it is also possible that their similarities are pure coincidence. There is also the possibility that gendered norms or expectations around reading science fiction and writing in a journal could be part of this scenario; however, this is purely speculative.

conversations may have played a role similar to Peyton's "chicken scratch" journal: a place to reflect on how she was feeling and retell her story, as well as an opportunity to express emotional struggles without over-relying on already-taxed family members. Like Peyton, Abby was being honest about the struggles of deployment and not employing a positive narrative about military life (although in other moments, she seemed to take up that narrative, as discussed in chapter three). It is important to note that although both of these students described what they were doing as "venting" about the difficulties of being military kids, they expressed fundamentally opposite views of military life. Peyton said that military life was not what she wanted for her own kids, while Abby said that she wanted to marry someone in the military. However, although their overall views of military life diverged significantly, both young women seemed to be using reflection to restory difficult experiences: relocation for Peyton and deployment for Abby.

Reflection as restorying was not limited to out-of-school texts such as creative writing, journals, and text messages. Several students wrote academic papers that helped them reflect on their military-related experiences. The two brothers in my study, Eric and Alex, wrote the most prolifically about life as military kids in academic assignments. Alex discussed (and shared with me) one research paper and two speeches related to military life. One speech was about relocation, and the experience of reading that text to his classmates showed Alex a way that he was unique in his community. He said, "At the beginning of freshman year in English class we had to write a brief journal prompt about who we are and I chose to write about being a military kid and moving to all the different places I've been." Alex's speech, entitled "2500 Miles," was full of descriptive details that demonstrated the emotional hardships inherent in

relocation. He wrote of leaving, “There I was, staring out the back window of the car, watching as familiar sights and memories of childhood disappeared over the horizon.” For Alex, the loss of these familiar sights and memories (which are accessible to people who spend their lives in the same place) was a profoundly identity-shaping experience. He also described in the speech the questions that flooded his mind when he heard that they were going to move: “[State name]? Where is that? How far? Will I see my friends again?” That night, he laid “sprawled out in front of an atlas, examining the distance between California and [State name]…unable to comprehend how I would be 2,500 miles away from my friends, school, and house.” This was Alex’s fifth move. “You would think that it would become routine, after going through the process 4 times,” he writes, “but you are presented with new challenges and obstacles.” I asked Alex about the experience of writing this speech as well as the experience of delivering it to his classmates. When I asked him if writing the relocation speech affected how he thought about the experience, he said, “Yeah, I’d say that it kind of clears up how I’m feeling. I guess when you’re writing something down you really get to delve deeper into how you feel, and so just exploring some of the ideas as I write it down would probably change my view a little bit. Or I get to see things that I wouldn’t know I felt just by thinking about it.” In this quote Alex surfaces the purpose of his reflection: it allowed him to delve deeper into his feelings, explore ideas associated with the experience, and change his views. All of these purposes accomplished by reflection are kinds of restorying. Alex retold the events of his real life in this speech, but in such a way that it changed his perspective.

In Alex’s writing and commentary, he not only exercised agency by restorying lived experiences, he also subtly challenged one kind of story about military kids. In writing “you

would think that it would become routine, after going through this process four times," Alex gave a nod to the narrative that relocation ought to become easier the more you do it and that it should not affect you so deeply if you have been through it many times before. But this was not the case for him. He reflected poignantly on how deeply he was hurt by the move:

> As we drove further away from our home…I felt an overwhelming wave of sadness come over me as I thought back to all of my treasured memories that were created here, ones that I would cherish for the rest of my life. I felt a cool stream of tears running down my face as recognizable sights diminished…

Alex gently spoke back to people's expectations of greater ease with more experience and openly presented the emotional difficulties present in his cross-country move. However, he chose a positive place to end this particular story, which reflected not only his feelings about the tough aspects of his experience, but also his determination to overcome them. At the end of the essay, he wrote,

> Looking back on my experience now brings an odd sense of nostalgia. A renewed excitement about being here, a curiosity of what life would've been like without moving, but mostly an appreciation for how well everything worked out. Since moving, I have had the chance of meeting incredibly people, and experiencing things that I could've never done before. Most importantly, I learned that change isn't always a bad thing.

In this act of reflection, Alex shifted his story's focus from the emotional upheaval of moving to the advantages and benefits of his new home. His takeaway in the closing statement--"change isn't always a bad thing"--represented another instance of transition from a hardship narrative to a development narrative, as discussed in chapter three.

For Alex, the experience of delivering this relocation speech to his classmates provided another layer of complexity to his reflection. He told me how it made him realize the ways he was different from other students. He said that, "seeing what other kids had written versus

what I wrote, it's different. And yeah, I feel like I learned something about myself that kinda sets me apart from other people." What I assumed from this comment was that delivering the speech reinforced his outsider status by emphasizing the differences between his life and the lives of his born-and-raised-in-Midvale classmates. However, when I member checked this claim with Alex, I found I was mistaken. Alex clarified that he found the experience unequivocally positive, because he said that all of the students' speeches focused on things that set them apart. He said that it helped him to appreciate everyone's uniqueness:

> **Alex:** Well, I definitely saw that I was different from them in some ways. But, having everyone present their speech, you could see how everyone is kind of different from everyone else in their own way…So, even just seeing each individual's differences, I mean, I feel like it kind of builds a sense of community, because you're sharing that part of yourself that you wouldn't share usually as you're relating to someone.
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> **Interviewer:** Sure. Oh, that's really good to know. Okay. So, you felt that that experience--not only showed how you were different from everyone else, but it showed how everyone was different from everyone else?
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> **Alex:** Mm-hmm
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> **Interviewer:** Okay. Great. That's very helpful. Would you say overall, then, that experience of giving that speech in class was completely positive?
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> **Alex:** I'd say I felt that way afterwards. Before, I was to share something that I wouldn't usually share with other people. But afterwards, I mean…it feels good to share that part of you when you usually wouldn't.

For Alex, getting to share his military identity, although it set him apart from his classmates, happened in a setting where everyone shared things that made them different. While he did not look forward to the event, it helped him reflect on his experiences in a non-threatening, non-alienating setting. Would this outcome have been as positive for some of the other

students? Perhaps not. On the other hand, the students who would have felt alienated by delivering a speech about their military identity would probably not have chosen to write about it in the first place.

Louisa discussed a school assignment that enabled her to reflect on her life and understand her differences from her classmates in a situation similar to what Alex described. Louisa wrote an autobiography at the end of her eighth grade year. This bound and illustrated collection of essays included her retelling of events that had shaped her identity. In the first essay, “The Early Years,” she wrote from her parents’ point of view about a trip to Bulgaria to visit her mother’s family and an early cross-country move. This essay ended with a third person reflection: “All of these adventures have somehow influenced how [Louisa] acts today. From newborn to two years old, [Louisa] had really been quite the adventurer. Later, this would impact [Louisa] on her love for traveling. She also loves to try new things.” In these concluding sentences, Louisa reflected on an aspect of her identity—her adventurous nature and love for travel—that she linked to her early relocations and visits to her mother’s family in Bulgaria. In connecting her personality to her history, she was making identity claims. She made a similar link in her first interview, when I asked her how she would describe herself apart from being a military kid. She responded, “I’m really adventurous. I like going to different places.” When I asked her why that was so, she said, “I don't know, I really like how things are different than [midwestern state]. It's like new people and new customs and everything.” The annotated map in her autobiography vividly illustrated her adventurous side; it was covered with markings of the places she had lived and visited. While creating the autobiography was an enjoyable experience that helped her to reflect on her relocations (she confirmed my inference during

member checking in the third interview), the reactions of her classmates highlighted her outsider-ness. She said that when everyone was submitting their autobiographies and comparing them, other students saw her map and remarked, “Wow! So many places!” Louisa did not view this as a negative experience; she said that “the map has made me extremely thankful for where I’ve been.” Nevertheless, it visibly reflected difference; as Alex mentioned, the map showed a way that she was unique from her classmates. Other places in Louisa’s autobiography took up the positivizing impulse discussed in chapter three. In the chapter entitled “Life Messages,” Louisa reflected on a few of the quotes she lives by. This was the first quote and her commentary on it:

> “There is a positive in every negative.” This quote means that if you ever find yourself in a negative situation, you would have to find a positive way to get yourself out of it. Or, instead you can turn the situation into a positive one. At times this will not be easy because you have to find it…If you find the positive, this will make whatever you are doing overall to be positive.

Louisa’s essay explained the emotional labor that she put into restorying negative situations. Finding the positive could happen either internally or externally, either through “find[ing] a positive way to get yourself out of it” (internal) or “turn[ing] the situation into a positive one” (external). However, she acknowledged that this process was difficult (“at times this will not be easy”) because the positive is not always obvious. Even though in this essay Louisa was not going back over the actual events of her life, it was still an act of reflection, because she explained how she altered her emotional landscape. Furthermore, she was not talking about fiction (as in refraction) but was focused on finding the positive in real-life events. For Louisa, the reward of her emotional labor was that finding something positive made the entire experience positive. In this case, she was agentively taking up the narrative of negative-to-

positive that is often part of military life. Louisa not only engaged in reflective restorying of her experiences, but also provided insight into the narrative framework she had chosen and how she applied it to her life.

Even though they were all high school students, the ages and developmental stages of the participants affected the kinds of reflection in which they were able to engage. Eric was the oldest of my participants, and his college application essays helped him develop meta-awareness about things that had influenced his identity. He discussed how writing about deployment, relocation, cross-cultural heritage, and soccer connected the dots between who he was as a person and the experiences and contexts of his life. There was a move from passivity to agency in some of these essays; he began by describing things that had happened to him, and then he finished with the locus of control in himself, as he prepared to go to college and make his own choices. He was, to paraphrase Rosenberg, reconceiving of himself as a subject and negotiating with the world. The following is an excerpt from Eric's college application essay about relocation and deployment:

> One of my most cherished gifts I received as a child was a 1995 AAA road atlas…. As a child, my mom would sit me down on the floor and point out certain points on the map, interconnected by hand-drawn lines forming an expansive web of cross-country car rides. From California to Massachusetts, Texas to Ohio, I can trace them with my finger and recount my life. The pencil mark over Boston represents the place that sparked my curiosity. The excitement of the city's skyscrapers and subway system inspired a passion for engineering that I now hope to develop into a career. A faintly sketched line meanders down the East Coast and across the South to San Antonio, a journey that gave me a perspective of how life differs between regions and a desire to explore the unique locations across this country and around the world. Then, in Sacramento, I grew up. Three deployments in five years thrust me into new responsibilities as my mom's main anchor. I learned to be calm in the face of stress and disciplined in my work, making sure I set an example for my younger siblings and gave my mom the emotional support she needed. There, I gained an appreciation for the concepts of service and sacrifice. Finally,

> the line comes to a temporary stop in Camden… My chosen career path, my curiosity about the world, and my ability to face the challenges I will encounter throughout my life have all come as a result of my experience growing up in a military household. Now, I'm ready to draw my own lines.

Eric's reflection on his lived experiences and their connection to his identity was of course shaped by the purpose, audience, and genre of this essay. He was writing to admissions committee members with the purpose of being accepted to their college in the rather singular genre of the college application essay. All of these features influenced his self-presentation. Eric opened with the road map as a symbol of his highly mobile life and discussed how each place he lived had influenced his identity, pointing to skyscrapers and subways of Boston as something that "sparked my curiosity" and his move to Texas as something that gave him a greater knowledge of and appreciation for diversity. He also reflected on ways that his father's deployment had developed his character, helping him learn to "be calm in the face of stress and disciplined in my work," attributes that would serve him well in a collegiate context. All of these events are descriptions of things that had happened to him, retold with connections to his identity. But the definitive expression of agency occurred in the final sentence of the essay, in which Eric declared that he was "ready to draw my own lines." In this phrase, Eric moved from a somewhat passive stance, as someone shaped and re-shaped by circumstances, to an active stance in which he asserted that he was in control of his journey. Across all of my study data, I would point to this sentence as the clearest example of reflection as agentive restorying. In the third interview, I asked Eric specifically about that line and the move from passivity to agency that it seemed to represent. He replied:

> I didn't intentionally say that 'this is gonna be passivity, this will be agency.' It just kind of happened that way. But the, "I'm ready to draw my own lines." I kinda saw that as,

> being a military kid has shaped who I am but *it's not going to determine my future, cause that's my choice*. I meant to put that in there, so I guess I did intentionally shift to agency but I wasn't intentionally thinking about the structure of the essay in any way like that.

Following the reflective acknowledgement of the identity-shaping effects of military life, the statement “it’s not going to determine my future, cause that’s my choice” goes beyond counter-narrative; it is a declaration of agency over the future of his story. Eric is going a step beyond restorying in this quote; he is picking up the pen to write his own future story. In contrast, this is the response I received from my study’s youngest participant, Hannah, when I asked her if she had ever written about the experiences of deployment or relocation:

> Recently, I tried to, I don't think it will ever work, but I tried to write a little story about just moving around and my experiences. It didn't, I don't know if it's going to actually work, because I would love to publish it one day. I did write a little bit about that and just some memories and some hardships.

Hannah did not articulate exactly why her attempt to write about her experiences with relocation was unsuccessful. However, other places in her interviews indicated that it was difficult for her to put into words her perspective on military life. In light of their age gap, the contrast between Hannah’s and Eric’s efforts to write about relocation may highlights the role of students’ developmental level in their ability engage in reflective literacy practices.

Alex was the student who spoke most directly about why and how he used reflective in-school writing to restory his lived experiences as a military kid. He said that military-related experience was “actually a subject that I would write a lot about at school. And I’d say putting it down on paper is easier than talking about it.” When I asked him why that was, he replied, “It’s a tricky subject to talk to someone about and not everyone can really have the same point of

view on it. But when you're writing it down, I guess it feels more personal and it's easier just to speak what's on your mind, I guess." By sharing his in-school essays with both teachers and classmates, he could make himself better known and understood by a community where there were not a lot of other students like him. In addition to writing directly about the experience of relocation in his speech, Alex wrote two other texts that were tangentially connected to military life, but still served a reflective purpose. One was about homeless veterans, and the following passages are excerpted from the essay:

> Picture this, you are walking down a busy city street and you spot a homeless man, with a battered cardboard sign, a cup containing some spare change, and a blank stare, drained of all emotion. Sadly, most would avoid eye contact and hug the other side of the sidewalk as they walk past, not thinking twice about this encounter. What they don't know is that this man has sacrificed the life he knew to serve his country and protect its people…. Veterans give everything to serve their country, sometimes this includes a place to call home. Veterans are put at a disadvantage in society due to a combination factors, often resulting in homelessness, so we must make an effort to protect those who have protected us.

Later in the essay, Alex made an impassioned call to action: "I urge our community to come together as one to stand up for the veterans who have given everything to protect us." Although he did not disclose his personal connection to the military in this essay, it was clear that this was something he cared deeply about. His pathos, expressed through vivid descriptions ("battered sign" and "blank stare"), was connected to military culture and ideology, which included acknowledgement of the debt society owes to its veterans. There was a different kind of reflection happening in this text; Alex wanted to raise awareness in his community about issues connected to military life. For him, creating meaning from his lived experiences involved reflecting on the reasons behind those experiences: the military values of

duty, service to one’s country, and personal sacrifice. Alex’s writing about homeless veterans is what Compton-Lilly & Papoi might call an act of affiliation that contains “embedded identity claims” (p. 119). He did not identify himself as a military kid, but he drew upon his connection to the military to make his emotional appeal. In the third interview, Alex told me more about the thought process behind this essay:

> I do want to raise awareness and issue change if I can. I think I have the privilege of seeing that, or seeing military sacrifice from a perspective that maybe someone who is not in a military family could see. So, and one thing I was going for in the essay, because I have that perspective, I was trying to, I guess, explain it to the rest of my classmates, so they could see the sacrifice that's behind each veteran…. I hoped that they could see the sacrifices that they make, and that could persuade them emotionally to try to change the issue.

Because Alex began from his own understandings of the sacrifices involved in military life, I categorized this text as reflection (though it could be argued that the writing contains refractive elements). Alex felt obliged to explain the urgent needs of homeless vets to classmates who were not positioned to see vets’ needs as clearly. Alex felt that his essay could help open their eyes and provide a needed perspective, a kind of restorying that he was doing for his audience that also gave him a chance to reflect on experiences with sacrifice as a military kid.

Finally, another way that these students used literacy for reflection was via scrapbooks, reading news from foreign websites, and reading old posts on social media. All of these acts of reading were a way of reliving their stories (rather than *retelling* their stories, as was the case with their writing). No students discussed making scrapbooks for themselves, but three students—Jake, Eric, and Louisa—talked about scrapbooks that were made for them by other people. Using a combination of text and photographs, scrapbooks became a way of reflecting on the past and reliving memories of previous places. For these military-connected students,

who lacked a sense of place-rooted identity, scrapbooks helped them relive the patchwork of places and people that constituted their identity. Jake told the story of receiving the scrapbook from his two best friends.

> In Texas my friends gave me…this giant scrapbook of everything we did. I kept that from the move to Texas to here and it made it a lot easier. I could text them and be like, "Hey, remember this time whenever you did this or I fell and almost cracked my head open?" That was a fun time. Yes, that happened.

Since, as Alex mentioned in his speech, familiar sights and memories had disappeared over the horizon, scrapbooks filled in as a reminder for Jake and Eric. While for students who live in one place, scrapbooks may serve simply as a scaffold for memory, for these three students, scrapbooks were a memory structure unto themselves. They may never again see the places where they used to live, but scrapbooks restoried repeated experiences of separation and starting over. When I asked about what his scrapbooking collection meant to him, Eric said the following:

> **Eric:** My mom's big into scrapbooking, so I swear, every year of my life she makes a new scrapbook. And these are digital, so online scrapbooks, picture books, so I've got scrapbooks from preschool ranging up to elementary school all the way up to my last high school soccer year. And so that collection I have taken everywhere. And I've always kept it in my room.
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you go back and look at those?
>
> **Eric:** Sometimes, yeah. There are times where I'm just going through stuff in my room and I'm like, "Oh, yeah, these exist." And so I'll spend some time looking through them. And those are good because they kind of jog your memory about various events in the past that I would've otherwise not thought about.

Eric did not have daily physical reminders of memories he had made in different places, but he did have scrapbooks that represented those memories. Eric's reflective reading was also tied to

his mother's act of creating a curated, edited text where images and captions worked together to retell events. Eric's mother's retelling and Eric's reliving of his experiences through his scrapbook was a kind of joint restorying.

Jake's literacy practices around news consumption gave him a way of reflecting on his experiences living overseas. He followed news via Stay Tuned, an international news network, and he connected this preference to his family having been stationed in England as a child. Describing to me how he followed the news, Jake said that Stay Tuned was "like this little international news network that just tells me about everything." When I asked him why he had an interest in international news, he replied, "I guess a part of me always wanted to stay attached to the European side." Jake wanted to stay connected to an identity that he did not get a chance to enact in his everyday life. In his third interview he talked about the connection between following the news on Stay Tuned and reflecting on his past:

> So yeah, it's like Stay Tuned is more of a way to remember certain things. Cause sometimes they'd bring up some stuff from the traveling we did in Europe, like they would cut to Paris and I would think of the Notre Dame, that cathedral's so beautiful. And then sometimes it would go to Spain, it would cut to the Alhambra, and that was such a pretty church. And then I would just go on this giant spree of thinking of all the stuff I did there. Like living in a mountain home in Spain. And then driving through Portugal a little bit. And going to Ireland and Scotland and getting stuck in Ireland after that volcano blew up in Iceland.

The literacy practice of following international news called to mind memories of the places Jake had lived and visited; the news site reminded him of who he was via where he had been (roots/routes).

These military kids' identities were uniquely tied to geography. Alex echoed this same sentiment when he mentioned watching his "childhood disappear over the horizon." Remaking

oneself in a new place every few years created a different relationship to geographical space and literacy took on different meanings for these students as they read and wrote across communities, borders, and boundaries. Kate Vieira wrote about a similar phenomenon when she states that, "My interests lie in the transnational, in the ways that literacy and people travel across borders, and in the ways that these trajectories are intertwined…I am beginning to see literacy as a navigational technology that opens up some paths and closes off others, that orients and disorients, that routes and reroutes" (27) and later in the same article, Vieira argues that literacy "places and displaces…it includes and it alienates" (30). For both these students and for the immigrant populations that Vieira was writing about, literacy was a paradoxical practice (orienting/disorienting; opening/closing) that played an important role in how these people conceptualized and interacted with themselves, and other people across ever-shifting contexts.

Louisa elaborated further on the theme of reflection—and reliving experiences through reading—when she talked about her Instagram practices. I had initially assumed that Louisa mostly used Instagram to stay in touch with other people (connection), but in the following exchange, I discovered that I was mistaken.

> **Louisa:** This morning I was scrolling through my Instagram, and…it was kinda nice to see all my old pictures, and I could see, I posted different inside jokes with other people from a different state. And I thought that was really cool. And I remember comments on the posting, like "I miss you"…
>
> **Interviewer:** Yeah. So going back through those pictures helped you to feel more connected to where you were at that time? And the people who were commenting on it?
>
> **Louisa:** Yeah. Mm-hmm.

> **Interviewer:** So…is that just a way of revisiting memories, or would you then maybe reach out to those people on Instagram or by text or anything?

This question revealed my assumption about how she was using Instagram, but in her response, Louisa corrected me:

> **Louisa:** I think it was just a way of revisiting old memories. I kind of noticed how everyone else has changed drastically…

I was intrigued by this purpose and wondered if it surfaced in other literate activities.

> **Interviewer**: You're talking about you staying connected to your own memories….Are there other ways that you do that?
>
> **Louisa:** Um, well my mom has done—she hasn't really recently done it, but she loves scrapbooking. So she would scrapbook dance competitions or vacations and certain years or the summer. And I just, like it's really cool looking back and seeing everyone that used to be on my dance team, or different summers that I've had with different people.

On Instagram, Louisa engaged in both reflectively retelling her life as she created her posts and reflectively reliving her life as she read through her old posts. Her linking of scrapbooks with reviews of old Instagram posts suggests that the practices served similar purposes. With her scrapbook, Louisa engaged in the same kind of reflection-in-tandem as Eric: her mother retold her life in photos and captions, and she relived those experiences. Each of these reflective acts served a variety of purposes. Louisa was able, first of all, to mourn the losses that happened as she lost touch with friends over time and distance ("it's kind of sad…it's kind of hard to stay connected"). But it was also a chance for her to revel in her accomplishments and good memories made. Her re-reading of those scrapbooks and Instagram restoried her experience by helping her reflect on memories connected to places she had lived. Many people keep

scrapbooks and like to revisit old memories; that is not unique to the military community. However, in any highly mobile community, there is an additional need for children to understand who they are in light of how transient and fragmentary their lives have been. The military kids in this study needed ways of not losing pieces of themselves as they left familiar sights and memories behind. Reflective reading and writing offered these students opportunities to stitch the torn pieces back together and understand themselves more fully as whole, coherent beings.

USING LITERACY FOR REFRACTION

While reflection is a more straightforward kind of restorying, refraction is often harder to identify. Part of the difficulty lies in the way fiction works on the human brain. Non-fiction texts such as journals, blogs, posts, and essays tend to work at the level of the conscious, but literature often does its work at the level of the subconscious, showing us aspects of our lives that reflection alone might not allow us to see. It is possible for refraction to do its unique work because of the nature of art. Oatley (2011) observes that "art is a disproportioning (i.e., distorting, throwing out of proportion) of realities, to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which if merely copied or reported inventorially, might possibly be observed, but would more probably be overlooked." As Jusdanis notes regarding the use of fiction, "literature defamiliarizes life" (p.63), and when we pick up a story that replicates some aspect of our narrative, we may not immediately recognize ourselves in the story. Refractive literacies are possible because literature "challenges us…to think about the transition from semblance to truth and back again" (p.63).

Although the Russian formalists, such as Bakhtin and Shklovsky, tend to use the term ‘defamiliarization’ to talk about how literature can draw our attention to things we overlook because they are so ordinary, literature can also draw our attention to previously unrecognized aspects of extraordinary experiences. There are three psychological processes that determine what kinds of emotions we feel when we read fiction: identification, sympathy, and autobiographical memory (Oatley 1999). Although all three processes come into play in the literacies of my participants, autobiographical memory is particularly salient, because I am looking at how these students’ identities interact with their literacies. Oatley (1999) observes that

> A primary function of narrative and drama is to allow the reliving of emotional memories from the autobiographical past. *In ordinary life…emotions can sometimes be overwhelming, so their meaning is not recognized.* In other instances, one distances oneself from emotions and suppresses them. In either case, the effects of such experiences can leave one in emotional arrears, because events have occurred that have profound emotional significance but that one has not assimilated. Drama, novels, and certain kinds of rituals allow re-evocation of such emotions, neither underdistanced nor overdistanced but at what Scheff called *an optimal aesthetic distance at which they can be understood and assimilated*. (p.114, emphasis mine)

It is important to restate that all of the psychological processes involved in reading literature tend to operate at the level of the subconscious. Therefore, while reflection can be studied in a forthright way by looking at students’ writing and asking them questions about it, refraction requires more diligent unearthing. In the course of my three interviews with each student, I asked them many questions about their purposes in reading and writing. When I asked them if a particular literate act was refractive (which I usually phrased in the form of a question like, “Do you see some part of yourself in that character?” or “Did that story remind

you of your own life at all?") one of two things would happen. Most frequently, students would agree that refraction had happened (although their levels of agreement varied) but would state that they did not realize this before the interview. My question made them consider that they might be reading or writing some part of their own stories in a fictional setting. Second and much more rarely, the student would disagree with me that refraction was going on. For example, when I pointed out to Eric some similarities between his story and the story he was reading with his deployed father, he said that he did not see himself in the text. But as I will explain in greater detail below, there is evidence that contradicts Eric's conclusion. Identifying refraction in students' literate acts required me to do four things: 1) get to know the student's experiences, 2) research the text that I suspected the student was using for refraction, 3) identify connections between real life and the fictional text, and 4) propose those connections to the student. Like reflection, refraction could be done through reading (which involved reliving aspects of their experiences in a different context) and/or writing (which involved retelling their experiences in a different context).

Refraction through writing

Both Jake and Abby wrote fiction, and I argue that both of them were engaging in refraction by writing their own stories into different settings. One affordance of refractive writing was that students could retell aspects of their stories with creative control over the outcomes. Jake was aware that he was doing this refractive work as he was writing. Abby, on the other hand, did not realize how her own experiences were refracted in the worlds she created for her characters until I brought it up in an interview (after I had previously interviewed Abby about her experiences, read one of her stories, and found some similarities

between her life and her fictional narrative). In both cases, refraction allowed for agentive restorying in which students chose the character's reactions and responses in addition to the plot's resolution. These acts echo Eric's declaration that he was "ready to draw my own lines."

The first time I asked Abby about the writing she did outside of school, she mentioned that she enjoyed creative writing. She said, "it's a longer story, I haven't written on it in a while. But it's about this girl and it deals with a lot of like, not religion, but the aspect of having powers and being related to angels and stuff like that. So I had a lot of influences of guardian and protectors." She noted in the second interview that one of the reasons she liked creative writing so much was that it gave her the ability "to control what would happen," although at the time she did not connect her life to the story. She agreed to let me see the "longer story" she had been writing for a while. The story was called *Forgotten Past,* and this was the novel blurb: "Margeaux Faith Thomas may not be able to remember her past, but she sure does seem to know a lot about everyone's future. Too bad she can't change the future of the human race, or will she able to save the world with the help of a monkey sidekick and stubborn guardian angel?" The tale's heroine, Margeaux, is visited by an angelic being who tells her that he is her guardian and she is the Protector of the Human World. Later she learns that she is the fulfillment of an ancient prophecy, that "with the help of her Guardian…she will come to know who she really is," and that she will be the one who saves or destroys the world in "The ultimate battle of Lightness Vs. Darkness."

In terms of a young woman coming of age and finding her place in the world, this story contained themes that would resonate with any adolescent. However, I also noted themes that resonate with someone whose father has been through multiple deployments, someone who

feared for his safety and felt at times a lack of control in the difficult emotional situations that deployment presented. In this dramatic, supernatural narrative, Abby gave a protagonist with whom she identified power over difficult life circumstances. The girl in the story has the ability to heal herself and protect the people she loves. In the third interview, when I presented to Abby my theory about the connections I saw between her life and her protagonist's story, this is what she replied:

> I mean, I've never thought about that, but when you just said it…I'm like, "That would make sense"…I mean, a guardian, protector, they're protecting us, they're protecting our freedom, and they are not necessarily the light or whatever but they're going against something that we don't believe in so it's kind of darkness to us.

Abby made a connection between the concept of the protector she wrote about in the story and soldiers as the guardians and protectors of people's freedom; she was pulling an aspect of her experience into the defamiliarized fantasy setting of the story. She also framed the struggle between good and evil in her story using military-esque language like "ultimate battle," again taking an aspect of the real world and writing it into a in the fictional world. However, in this setting, Abby also gave her character the power to save the world. The military is an institution that removes a lot of control from families, and in this act of refraction, Abby gave her protagonist control even as she followed the character's journey to "come to know who she really is." Although Abby did not keep a journal, engaging in refraction through creative writing allowed her to agentively restory parts of her life in an estranged context.

Like Abby, Jake pulled parts of his experiences into a fictional context and then was able to fulfill different purposes through his refraction by having the characters' situations sometimes turn out well and sometimes turn out badly. In describing the characters in his

stories, he said that, "the beginning of the story, the character…would just be moved from somewhere…Maybe they would move from Europe to the United States, or maybe they would go from the United States all the way to Asia." The first move that Jake remembered was a cross-cultural move, from England to Maryland when he was in first grade. Writing about these kinds of events, even though it was fictional (and ultimately in the fantasy genre; his characters had super powers) created a space where Jake could restory his protagonist's narrative, and by extension, his own story. Jake first told me about his creative writing in the first interview, and in the second interview, I asked him if the creative writing helped him understand his experiences. He responded, "I feel like it might have, a little bit. I felt like someone in the story might have related to how I would feel. Moving somewhere new is a completely different experience every time." I asked him if things turned out all right for his relocated characters in the story, and he said, "Yeah…it was pretty rough at first, what the characters would face. It would slowly build up into a more comfortable situation." Jake created a world where controlled the outcome. Unfortunately, he did not have any creative writing to show me; when I asked if I could read one of these stories, he said that he had lost them. As a result, I made some assumptions that did not all prove accurate during member checking. When I presented him with the claim that creative writing gave him a way to write about some of his experiences but make things turn out better, he clarified that his stories did not always have happy endings. Sometimes things would go poorly for the characters. Here is how he explained it to me:

> You can either really amplify on a situation that, say, I've been through, I can amplify and say, it could have been worse for the characters or it could have been better. But it would always refer back to the specific moment that I remember and then the characters would go through it as well. But it would either be in a better way than how I experienced it, or it'd be in a worse way.

Jake confirmed that he was indeed restorying his life through his creative writing; he pulling memories in a fictional setting where he could control the narrative. However, he did this refraction in two very different ways. So I asked him:

> **Interviewer**: What affects your decision to make it better or worse do you think?
>
> **Jake**: I guess it's just how I'm feeling at that point? Cause like, for the initial move from Texas to Ohio, it was grueling. It was a grueling experience. It was really draining, and I felt disconnected from everyone I knew. I felt kinda lonely…So I guess in a sense *if I made the characters go through something that was harder, it would make me see the situation I went through as not as bad.*

Jake sometimes found solace in putting his fictional characters into even tougher situations than he was in, an act which put his experience in perspective. He said that "writing in a sense is kind of like--almost a relief." Although none of students' discourses transitioned from positive to negative, at least one student's fictional depiction of relocation landed in the negative. Jake's cathartic purpose in refraction is not unlike what Peyton mentioned regarding the reflection she did with her journal—that it was a way to vent her feelings. Jake was adamant that he did not write in order to change how he felt about things:

> **Interviewer:** Do you think there's any way that the writing you did caused you to think a little bit differently about your experiences?
>
> **Jake:** Like experiences in the move? No. I think my writing is definitely a direct reflection of how I felt in those times.
>
> **Interviewer:** So it wasn't about changing how you felt, it was about expressing how you felt.
>
> **Jake:** Right.

Jake was not directly writing about his own life, so this does not fall into the category of "reflection." The fact that he characterized his writing as a "relief" suggests that he was using restorying to find catharsis and regain control of his narrative. As I have already discussed, the military tends to take control away from people. Controlling the destinies of fictional characters whose lives resembled his own was one way Jake could feel a greater sense of agency over his own story.

There were two instances where refraction occurred through writing texts other than fiction. For Alex, it was writing down a memory of riding a roller coaster and turning that experience into a metaphor for other aspects of his life. He described in rich, vivid detail the gut-wrenching experience of waiting for the ride, anticipating what it will be like, feeling the fear of the unknown. But he then described the ride's joyous adrenaline rush:

> My eyes drifted downwards, to the expanse of people, floating around aimlessly like meager specks of dust. In an instant, my presentement [sic] and cowardice dissolved into thin air and I was filled with a newfound sense of wonder.

The lesson he took from that experience was that he should not be afraid to step outside his comfort zone:

> After nearly three minutes of inclines, drops, and inversions, I found myself back where I began the ride physically, but not mentally. The ride was exhilarating and enjoyable, the antithesis of what I had expected. I enjoyed the ride so much that I found myself hungering for more. This was the turning point in my life where I truly began to test the boundaries of my comfort zone. Now anytime that familiar flock of butterflies migrate back to my stomach, I find myself asking a different question. "Why not?"

In the interview, he connected his extended roller coaster metaphor to many different lived experiences, including relocation. I asked him to describe each piece of writing he chose to show me and talk about why he chose it. This is what he said about the roller coaster essay:

> I wrote about the first time that I went on a roller coaster and I connected that to getting outside of my comfort zone. And so I'd say that's also something that I feel you gain from being in the military, you get outside of your comfort zone and meet new people, that sort of thing. And so, yeah I guess it's kind of metaphorical in a way, for really any new experiences. And you get a lot of those through moving and being in different parts of the country.

Although this essay could be about any new, daunting experience, Alex specifically (and without explicit prompting) connected it to military life. In the essay, he followed the trajectory of negative to positive, taking an event that was difficult or challenging and focusing on positive outcomes. Alex restoried his life through refraction using a writing assignment to choose, how to think about his experiences, including the fear and trepidation that typically accompanied transitions. He chose to focus on the benefits and upsides of major life change, a theme echoed in the "development" narrative in students' discourses (chapter three).

For Peyton, refraction also occurred through an academic writing assignment, and like Jack, her refractive writing resisted the positivizing impulse. Peyton's teacher assigned students to write a journal (essentially, a short essay) about Rip Van Winkle and provided the prompt, "What is the purpose of Rip climbing the mountain?" In response, Peyton wrote a journal that focused entirely on independence and isolation—Rip's desire to seek out isolation, his reasons for doing so ("to give himself independence") and some of the resultant negative effects. Here is an excerpt from her writing:

> I think the purpose of Rip climbing the mountain was to isolate him from everyone else and give himself independence. I as a teen even isolate myself from my family or friends at times. I like to be independent at times and free from the stress of my brothers or my parents. In Rips case, it separates him from his wife, kids, and everyone else in the town. Since Rip is isolated we are focused in on his own encounters and his thoughts. Through this we can recognize how the venture up the mountain could represent Rips effort to escape his life in town. This isolation from everyone could cause change that Rip wanted

> to occur …since Rip is isolated, he is solely focused on the changes he wishes would occur in his life…The journey up and down the mountain was to change his life in this way.

In this assignment, Peyton made connected Rip's isolation to her own experiences with isolation (which blurs the line a bit between reflection and refraction). She discussed being in her room, separating herself temporarily from her parents and brothers, and she discussed the ways in which a life can change (speaking mostly of Rip Van Winkle) through experiencing isolation. Her teacher remarked in red pen in the margins "is this really isolation?" in response to her discussion of being alone in her room. But connecting this writing to other things that Peyton said to me in the interviews about feeling like an "outsider," an "outcast" and "out of place" demonstrated that there might be deeper processing going on here than just analyzing Rip Van Winkle and drawing on a random example from her own life. I asked Peyton about this during member checking in interview three:

> **Interviewer:** I wondered in reading your Rip Van Winkle essay if there was some processing that was going on indirectly. Because that is…an essay about isolation.…I felt like there were some connections to some things that you said in the interview about feelings of isolation that you had.
>
> **Peyton**: I mean, honestly when I was writing it I did not think about that sort of stuff, but it was probably just—obviously in the back of my mind there. And just my feelings of isolation were, I mean all of them were pretty much because of moving and because of the military. I probably just didn't connect the dots then, but it was definitely—that's where it all sparked from.

Peyton was restorying her life in a refracted way. She projected onto a fictional character her own experiences with isolation and interpreted his motivations and feelings through the schema of her military-shaped experiences. In the member checking session, Peyton provided

insight into how refraction worked for her when she observed that "I feel like in this essay [referring to the "Rip Van Winkle" text she wrote] I didn't even realize it had that connection until I go back and look at it. When it really did because it's always probably just in the back of my mind and I don't even know it." Until Peyton revisited the texts she had written, she did not realize how she was reading her experiences with isolation into the "Rip Van Winkle" text, causing refraction to occur. Peyton noted that being a military kid is what taught her about isolation. Having moved six times, she had spent years in spaces where she was separated from her old home and not yet integrated into her new to understand what feeling disconnected from her surroundings. In the essay, she talked about an agentive rather than an imposed isolation. However, in the interview she said that "my feelings of isolation were, I mean all of them were pretty much because of moving and because of the military." One explanation for this blurring between chosen and imposed isolation is that because Peyton was so often forced into isolating situations, choosing isolation at times became an agentive act. She saw Rip Van Winkle doing the same thing: he was an outcast, which is a kind of isolation, and he responded by isolating himself further still. In so many rich and complex ways, military kids are finding ways to negotiate their identities through the active, strategic, agential work of literacy. Peyton's agentive restorying of isolation adds a layer of complexity to the outcast narrative described in chapter three.

Refraction through reading

Refraction also happened through reading as students identified with characters, read aspects of their own lives into texts (with varying degrees of recognition), and from the optimal aesthetic distance afforded by fiction, considered their own lives in a new way. It is perhaps

even more difficult to identify refractive reading than refractive writing, because there are many reasons that people choose books, other than stories' refractive potential. Furthermore, literature often has effects at the level of the subconscious, and it can take years for readers to realize why they may have been inclined to read (or re-read) a particular book. I did not fully develop the theory of refraction until long after my data collection was finished, but what I did notice and ask further questions about were the connections between students' lives and the books they were reading. I noticed that students talked about identifying with things that characters were going through. So in subsequent interviews, I not only asked students whether there were aspects of favorite books that they identified with, but I also asked them to name texts that they liked *because* they saw part of their own story in that fictional story. For teachers, awareness of reading's refractive potential could influence selection of texts, ways of discussing texts in class, and the kinds of responses teachers build around texts (to be discussed further in the implications chapter).

Students in the study described refractive reading as they discussed how they identified with specific fictional characters and plots. Reading some part of their own story in a fictional setting gave students the chance to view their lives in a slightly different light. For example, in the first interview, when I asked Alex about something he'd read recently and enjoyed, he talked about the graphic novel/memoir *The Complete Persepolis*:

> Yeah, she—the girl in the story—she was raised somewhere, I believe it was Iraq[17], where there was war going on and she constantly had to move. And at the end of the story she had to leave her friends and family and leave the country, which is something I'm able to relate to somewhat. Not to that extent. But it was neat seeing someone else kind of going through some of the same situations.

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[17] This detail is incorrect; the story is set in Iran.

Without my prompting him to pick a story he identified with or saying anything about similarities between his story and *Persepolis,* Alex talked about how he related to the protagonist Marji. War, relocation, and separation from family were all circumstances with which Alex was familiar, and relating to Marji's story helped Alex see his situation as less of an outlier. In one poignant scene at the airport, Marji has to say goodbye to her parents to go live in Austria—family goodbyes at the airport were a situation with which Alex was intimately familiar. Told through speech bubbles and illustrations, the farewell at the airport unfolds in the following way:

> Mother: You'll see. Everything will be ok. Don't cry. Think of your future. Europe awaits you.
> Father: As soon as you get to Vienna, go and eat a sachertorte. It's the most delicious chocolate cake.
> Mother: And in six months we'll come see you. No tears. You're a big girl.
> Father: You've got to go now. Don't forget who you are and where you come from.
> Marjane: I love you! (p.152)

Marji's parents encourage her not to dwell on the negative, but to anticipate the wonderful new experiences that await her on the other side of her relocation, echoing Alex's mother's encouragement to her children to always look on the bright side. There is also a hint that an identity shift, catalyzed by the move, is imminent; Marji's father tells her that she must not forget who she is and where she came from. Like Marji, Alex had an identity that was shaped by a blend of cultures and by the intersectional experiences of war and relocation. She not only gave him a story to identify with, but a new way to look at his own life. As Marji works to integrate into her new community, her identity work and negotiation of cultural norms becomes increasingly complex: "The harder I tried to assimilate, the more I had the feeling that I was distancing myself from my culture, betraying my parents and my origins, that I was

playing a game by somebody else's rules" (p.193). That final metaphor—playing a game by somebody else's rules—is a succinct summation of the complexity of integrating into a new community. The game is the same in that the players are still searching for the same things: respect, connection, acceptance, belonging, feeling seen, feeling known. Yet for the military kid, in each new location that game is played with a slightly different set of unwritten rules. Military kids must watch others playing, discern the rules, and then attempt to play.

In the second interview, I asked Alex more about how identification with Marji had helped him think about his own life. He said:

> the author kind of related to me with moving and that kind of thing. So I'd say it shows me that I'm not the only one who goes through these things and that there's a lot of other people. She talked about a lot of the same ideas that I've brought up about learning different things through experiences, and so I guess it kind of showed me like a reflection of myself and cleared up some of the ideas that I would think about.

There are two different, related purposes in Alex's refraction: feeling less alone through identifying with what a character was going through, clarifying his own thinking about experiences he'd had that were similar to Marji's. Living in Midvale and growing up off base, it was easy for Alex to view his experiences as anomalous. Reading *Persepolis* gave him a chance to restory his narrative by identifying with a character who lived through similar extents in a defamiliarized—and hyperbolized--setting. He still chose the narrative that military life was good for him by mentioning that he had "learn[ed] different things through experiences," but his identification with a character who had a tragic life also suggested that he wrestled with the downsides to being a military kid. Marji presented him with a refracted version of his own life and restoried his perspective.

Peyton described a similar act of refraction when she talked about reading *Fahrenheit 451* the summer after she had moved to a new city. In analyzing Peyton's narratives about her lived experiences, as described in chapter three, I found that she employed the "outcast" or "outcast to cosmopolitan" narrative 19 times over the course of her interviews. Focusing on how she felt different from her peers was a key component of how Peyton viewed herself and she explicitly connected that perspective to her military experiences. Reading *Fahrenheit 451* helped restory her experiences as she read the tale of an outcast and came to see outsiderness as not entirely negative.

> **Peyton:** Recently, I read *Fahrenheit 451*, you know that book? I read that one over the summer and I liked it.
>
> **Interviewer:** What did you like about it in particular?
>
> **Peyton**: I just liked how it was just the story of a guy who was different and out of the box and saw the way society was wasn't okay, and wanted to try and fix it.
>
> **Interviewer**: Yeah. Why do you think that you connected to that character?
>
> **Peyton**: I think probably just because that's how I feel sometimes. An outcast. Or even when I was moving here, and I had one friend or two friends that I had in the third grade last time we lived here, and so I connected with her when I moved back here recently, and I just became friends with all of her friends…I felt different. My friends in Utah were different than that group of friends I made friends with, and I just think that I was either trying to stray away from them or I would try to change them to be like me, which I feel like that's how he was in the story. He felt outcast and he either wanted to get away from it or try to fix it.

In the second interview, I asked her follow-up questions about *Fahrenheit 451* and asked her to say more about why and how she identified with the book's plot and protagonist. She repeated some information from the first interview, but also elaborated further on why she connected

with Guy's story:

> I had to read it the summer before 10th grade here, which was when I was in my house here, alone, I didn't have any friends really, cause I'd just moved here. And I was reading, and I was just like, "this is me!" I just felt like, outcast, I was like, I have no friends and, I don't know, and then especially having the friend group that I was pushed into, I realized that I just didn't want to be a part of it anymore. Although it was hard, and obviously in the book, it was such a struggle, and he almost felt like he was weird for thinking that he should—that it's not okay how people are acting. He felt like he was wrong for having those thoughts, but then eventually realized that he wasn't and he needed to do what was best for himself in the end. And so I kind of connected with that.

In negotiating the complexities of friendship that were further complicated by relocation, Peyton found solace and a way to reconceive of her experience—and of herself as a subject—through the refracted lens of Guy Montag's struggle with feeling like an outcast in society. Her struggles took on a different light when they were pulled into a world of dystopic, speculative fiction. Guy was not an outsider for the same reasons as Peyton, and neither relocation nor separation is a strong theme in *Fahrenheit 451*. However, one key similarity between them is that both Guy and Peyton appeared, on the surface, to blend in. They were not marked by difference in terms of race or class or ability. But they sensed an internal difference between themselves and their communities. Sensing this difference created, as Peyton said, "such a struggle" and Guy "felt like he was weird for thinking…that it's not okay how people are acting." But in the end, Peyton remarked, Guy "needed to do what was best for himself…And so I kind of connected with that." In the refracted world of the story, Peyton identified not only with the problem of feeling like an outsider, but also a possible resolution for that feeling, which was to choose what was best for oneself. While reflective writing seems like a clearer path to agency, the restorying Peyton described here was agentive as well. Through her personal-schema-

influenced reading of a text, she was choosing how she thought about what had happened to her.

Hannah described refractive reading that she did along with her family members. She talked about a series that they read together called *The Wingfeather Saga*:

> **Hannah:** It's about a family, it's a family-centered story. It's a very involving kind of story. It's really interesting the way they're working towards protecting each other and keeping everyone together. It's really sweet.
>
> **Interviewer:** What happens to the family in the course of the story?
>
> **Hannah:** Well, the three kids are the kings and queens, but they've had to leave their homeland because it was burnt by invaders. They had to leave but they don't know that they're royalty, because they were very little when they left and so they're trying to escape the invaders. Because the invaders are looking for them to capture them. They're always on the move, trying to stay away from them, so.
>
> **Interviewer:** Okay. That's really interesting. Are there aspects of that story that you identify with?
>
> **Hannah:** Yes. Yes. I definitely, yeah. I feel like I'm always on the move, too….I can definitely identify with that.

There are echoes of Jake's description of creative writing in Hannah's description of how this story presented a different version of her experiences. Hannah identified with the characters' emotional difficulties, but she saw in this text a narrative of overcoming to which she could aspire. There was a measure of commiseration, but Hannah did not want to stay stuck in negative emotions; she wanted a story that showed her a way up and out of difficult situations and presented a world in which life's difficult events had a purpose, a meaning, and an end.

When I presented this analysis to Hannah during member checking, she agreed with the inferences I had made. I asked her if there were any other books that provided similar

experiences, where she felt like she could identify with the protagonists in some way. She immediately named two texts: *Once on This Island* and *A Time to Be Silent. Once on This Island* is a novel set on Mackinac Island during the French Indian War. As Hannah described it to me, the 13-year-old protagonist's family has "moved around a lot and then they're stationed in Michigan. And in the second books she travels to England, she travels around a lot and gets this whole new perspective of the world." Like the protagonist Mary O'Shea, Hannah had gained a perspective that was shaped by her experiences in different places, and she could also identify with the setting of war and deployment. In one pivotal scene, Mary's father tells them that he is leaving to join the colonial army: "I am going to Detroit. If they will have me, I will join my country's army" (p.35). The first-person narrative gives the reader Mary's response to the news: "I was too frightened to say a word. I could not believe that papa would go away and leave us" (p.35). In the absence of male relatives, Mary and her sister run the family farm and keep things going at home. Soon after the war, Mary travels to England to live with her sister. Contemplating an overseas relocation, she muses "Leave this island and go all the way across the ocean! I couldn't. But already I was imagining myself walking through Westminster Abbey or boating on the Thames or even going down to Windsor Palace to pay a visit to King George" (p.156). In this passage, Mary's hardship narrative morphs into a cosmopolitan narrative: she is simultaneously afraid of leaving the familiar and intrigued by the new experiences that await her. At the end of the series, Mary returns to Michigan and purchases her family's farm. In the beginning, she passively absorbs the difficult circumstances of relocation and deployment; by the end, she makes her own choices and controls her own life. For someone like Hannah, who

expressed frustration with frequent displacement, it is easy to see the appeal of seeing those events depicted in a plot that had a triumphal ending.

Another book Hannah mentioned identifying with was *A Time to Keep Silent*. The protagonist of that book is a young girl named Clair. Describing the plot, Hannah said, “[Clair’s] dad is a pastor and is a widower and they have to move to some remote territory so he can be a pastor at a church, and that’s really hard for her. She just decides to be mute, because she has to deal with that. I obviously don’t want to do that, but that was kind of interesting. I was like, wow.” In this act of resistance, Clair protested her metaphorical voice being taken away by controlling her literal voice through a rhetorical silence. Clair’s choice to be silent when she has been silenced is similar to Peyton’s analysis of Rip Van Winkle choice to isolate himself when other people isolated him. As mentioned previously, the military suppresses agency, leaving many military families with fewer opportunities to express their own wishes. Hannah was intrigued by Clair’s unique act of opposition: she had been silenced, and so she chose a deeper and more literal silence. Hannah viewed aspects of her experience in a defamiliarized world, and although there were many key differences between her life and the book’s plot, Clair’s story helped Hannah interpret the experience of relocation as so profoundly difficult that selective muteness was one possible response. In contrast to the positivizing impulse that surfaced in the students’ discourses, this book gave Hannah the opportunity to travel deeper into the pain she had experienced.

With some of the students I interviewed, books came up in the conversation, but I was not yet tuned in to looking for refraction. Therefore I can draw parallels between the students’ lives and the texts, but I did not go the extra step to ask them whether they saw some part of

their lives in the books they were reading. In Abby's case, I was more attuned to the purpose of escaping a challenging circumstance (as discussed in chapter four) than I was to the possibility she had chosen books that replicated aspects her narrative. Abby mentioned the fantasy novel series *The Throne of Glass* as the books she re-read during her father's deployment. I initially thought that she chose stories that were as different as possible from the circumstances of her life. *Throne of Glass* is a series about a young girl named Celaena who is separated from her family and does not have a strong sense of home because she has lived all over the empire. She is also an assassin who suffers a loss of power in the beginning, but who gains increasingly more control over her life as the story progresses. So for Abby, an escape also created the possibility of refraction.

There were likely many reasons for the appeal of *Throne of Glass*, but the fact that Abby chose to re-read it suggests that she many have connected with the story on multiple levels. Reading a story in which a character (with whom Abby identified) becomes increasingly powerful and agentive could also have created a more hopeful lens through which to view the challenges she faced. And some passages in the book would resonate deeply with many military kids and students who feel like outcasts. For example, consider the character Dorian's perspective on a ball he was attending: "He felt as if there were something inside him that didn't fit in with their merriment, with their willing ignorance of the world outside the castle…it had became apparent that he's always be a step away. The worst of it was that they didn't seem to notice he was different—or that he felt different" (p.129). In this glimpse into an interior monologue, the reader finds a character grappling with an invisible identity; Dorian is lonely and disconnected in a crowd because he feels different from everyone. In some ways,

blending in on the surface while feeling misunderstood underneath is a near-universal adolescent experience. For Abby however, the ways in which she felt “a step away” from her peers, the frustrations she felt with people’s close-mindedness, were directly connected to her military-related experiences.

Reading Dorian’s thoughts in the passage quoted above reminded me of something Abby said in the third interview. She described traveling to her mother’s hometown in Louisiana and having a conversation with one of her mother’s friends, who asked if Abby was planning to move back to Louisiana. When Abby said no, the woman “was flabberglasted. She was like ‘Why wouldn’t you want to come back down here and live here?’ I’m like, ‘It’s just not a good place.’” Abby explained to me that the people from her mother’s town had inflated views of where they live “because they’ve never moved away and experienced the better things that I have.” She wants to keep moving because “I don’t want to be in my own bubble.” There are connections here between Abby’s view and Dorian’s frustration with people’s “willing ignorance” of the broader world. In this moment, Abby expressed feelings of disconnection and mutual misunderstanding with people who stay put and believe that their towns are the best places to live.

Abby consistently chose fiction, even over potentially helpful non-fiction texts. When an understanding and supportive teacher, who was an “air force brat herself” gave Abby a book about how to adjust to “teenage life and high school,” Abby was so touched that she kept that book through all her moves. But she never read it. It was a book that dealt directly with difficult life experiences, and Abby preferred books that let her escape. However, her choice to re-read a series about a girl who experiences relocation and family separation as she moves toward

increased agency and power over her own life suggests that Abby's fiction-reading practices allowed her to consider her experiences in new ways in a refracted, defamiliarized world.

Finally, there was one instance where there was evidence for refraction, but the student said that he did not personally identify with the story. This was the case mentioned in the previous chapter, where Eric and his father were reading and discussing the final book of the *Harry Potter* series concurrently. The *Harry Potter* books are compelling for many reasons, but a strong recurring theme is Harry dealing with separation from his deceased parents. The book that Eric and his father co-read and discussed—sometimes privately—during deployment was *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. Toward the end of that book, Harry prepares to meet his mortal enemy, Voldemort, in a final battle of good versus evil that may result in his death, and he feels terribly alone. Using the Resurrection Stone, he summons apparitions of his family, who comfort and strengthen him for the ordeal he is about to face. His father says to him, "You are nearly there…very close. We are so proud of you." Harry says to his father, "You'll stay with me?" and his father James—bodily absent but spiritually present—replies, "Until the very end" (Rowling, 2007, p.699). Eric and his father read that dialogue together while they separated by oceans and continents and while they were communicating with each other's projected images and voices via Skype. Part of this book is about an absent father who stays connected to his son across distance and gives him strength to face daily battles. In an essay about one of his father's deployments, Eric wrote that when his father returned home, "he was greeted by a young adult that had grown up in six months, who now stands ready to take on the challenges of life and make his father proud." I saw connections between what Eric wrote and some of the themes and plot developments in *Harry Potter.* However, during a member checking session, when I

asked Eric about ways he identified with characters in the fiction he read, he said that this was something he did not do. Here is our dialogue:

> **Interviewer:** So some students are also using reading to process their experiences. They find characters in books that they identify with to some extent, and it helps them reflect on their own experiences in new, different ways. Was that true for you at all?
>
> **Eric:** Honestly, I don't know that I've really done that. Used a character that I relate to, to process what was going on…I don't really project myself onto the characters in books. For me, they're just fictional characters. That's interesting how people have different views on that.

Despite Eric's comments on his reading practices, I would argue that he engaged in refraction in ways he didn't realize. We interact with fiction on the basis of our experiences, and reading a fictional story inevitably involves picking up some aspect of our own lives as we co-create a story "as partners with the writer," generating a version of the story that is "based on our own experience of how the world appears on the surface and of how we might understand its deeper properties" (Oatley, 2011, p.18). Similarly, Rosenblatt argues that that whenever a person reads, "there will be selective factors molding the reader's response. He [sic] comes to the book from life. He turns for a moment from his direct concern with the various problems and satisfactions of his own life. He will resume his concern with them when the book is closed. Even while he is reading, these things are present as probably the most important guiding factors in his experience" (1995, pp.34-35). Part of what Eric brought to the reading of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* was his father's deployment. He did not need to consciously project his life onto Harry's life; he was making sense of Harry's experiences through the schema of his own experiences. Whether or not he realized it, Eric was likely seeing an aspect his life in a defamiliarized setting. What could have allowed me to collect evidence for this

hypothesis was to ask Eric to retell to me that section of the book and compare his version with the book's version to see what details he emphasized, altered, or left out. It would have been perhaps even more generative to ask for this retelling while Eric's father was deployed.

CONCLUSION

In literate acts that were at times subtle, overt, subversive, reifying, complicated, simple, or multilayered, students shaped and reshaped their stories through the texts that were woven throughout the fabric of their everyday lives, both in and out of school. These acts of restorying changed how students thought about what had happened to them and gave them the chance to exercise agency in developing their perspectives. As Stuart Hall (1996) notes, "[identities] arise from the narrativization of the self, but the necessarily fictional nature of this process in no way undermines its discursive, material or political effectivity, even if the belongingness, the 'suturing into the story' through which identities arise is, partly, in the imaginary (as well as the symbolic)" (p.4). Through fiction and non-fiction texts, students were retelling and reliving their experiences, suturing into the stories.

Students' agentive restorying did not always take the form of subverting the dominant narrative handed down to them via their parents' military training: sometimes these students chose a positive narrative and sometimes they did not, but in using literacy to choose a narrative framework, they were always restorying their lives. Unlike escape and connection, which more immediately affected present experience, reflection and refraction allowed for more developed and enduring restorying as students shaped the emotional landscape of their memories. The levels of awareness of restorying varied across students and across contexts—for example, some students were more aware of how they were using nonfiction texts (such as

writing essays about military life) than how they were using fiction texts (such as novels). However, students did not need to be fully aware of these processes to experience the effects of reflection and refraction. As chapter six will explore more fully, all four uses of literacy present opportunities for educators to think more deeply about the role literacy plays in adolescent students' lives, the ways that significant life events might shape adolescent identity, and how academic literacies might be more effectively leveraged for student agency.

Chapter 6

Implications of This Study for Research on Military Kids, Research on Adolescent Literacy, and Pedagogical Practice in the ELA Classroom

When I was a high school English teacher, I gave my students a journal prompt that asked them to describe one of their early memories of reading. Over the years, I collected hundreds of stories about parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors, older siblings, friends, and extended family members sharing beloved texts like *The Giving Tree* and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* Some memories were heartwarming; others were painful (e.g., the person in the story had passed away). These powerful recollections wove together text with identity and showed me something not only about who my students were as people, but also how they approached texts. This knowledge informed my instructional practices, because it deepened my understanding of what identity-shaped literacies my students were bringing with them to the classroom.

A version of that journal prompt became one of my interview questions for this study. During the first interview, I asked my first participant, Jack: "What is an early memory you have of reading?" Jack replied that when his mother was deployed to Iraq, "she would send us these videos of her in this tiny little cubicle with like little children's books and then she'd send them overseas." Nothing changed in Jack's expression when he told me this memory; nothing about the narrative appeared to strike him as unusual. For him, this was a slice of normal life. Even

though I am a military kid and I have heard a lot about the challenges about military life, I had to work to keep my face neutral and not betray my strong emotional response to his story. Jack's early memory of literacy was interwoven with the trauma of separation from his mother, who was reading her children bedtime stories from a war zone. His response illustrates not only how different military kids' formative experiences are from those of many civilian kids, but also the role that literacy plays in mediating those experiences. Jack and his mother were physically separated, but they restoried that experience across space and time by using technology to asynchronously read together: a multilayered, multimodal literate act. Just as an understanding of my students' literacy histories informed my practice as an English language arts teacher, so teachers of military kids—and students like them—should know how students are using literacy inside and outside the classroom in relationship to their experiences with relocation, parental separation and interaction with large bureaucratic institutions. The people who are providing academic and socioemotional support to Jack should know about his literacies and the role that those literacies have played in developing his perspective on his life.

When I reflect on my own challenging experiences growing up as a military kids and when I think of the statistics of military kids who struggle more than civilian kids do with depression, with violence, with suicidal thoughts and actions, these are the questions that come to mind: given all the things that happen to military kids that take away their sense of control over their lives, given the things that make them feel helpless and adrift, what resources might we draw upon to give them a greater sense of agency? How can we empower military kids to focus on the aspects of their lives, including their own perspectives, that they do

have control over? How might military kids begin to restory the stories of their experiences, and how might literacy practices themselves become powerful acts of restorying?

THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS RESEARCH TO THE FIELD OF LITERACY STUDIES

Previous research about military kids has fostered a needed sense of urgency in providing supports and resources for this unique population; however, most studies have been deficit-focused and have used methodologies that do not elicit the voices or perspectives of military kids themselves. Kris DePedro, who has researched military kids extensively, recognized the methodological gap, and he and his colleagues (2014) called for research that "incorporate[s] students' perspectives" (p. 29). The authors believed that information about military kids' perspectives "could be used to inform how teachers, principals, and school staff adapt evidence-based practices for military-connected students facing deployment, reintegration, and other military stressors" (p.29). What I set out to do was to elicit those perspectives in as rich and complex a way as possible, not only by conducting multiple interviews, but also by engaging deeply with what students were reading and writing, both in school and out of school. A necessary first step is understanding what kinds of literacies students are engaged in, but my findings suggest that teachers and researchers should attend closely to what students are *doing with* literacy—the function it serves in forming and developing their perspectives on their lives. Jack and his mother engaged in multiple literacy events (reading by videotape) that formed part of their literacy practice of bedtime stories, but they were also using literacy to sustain a connection with each other across distance. What Jack's story and what the other students' stories in this dissertation suggest are a series of questions to ask and things to look for in any population about literacy's role in their lives. This

study also contributes a methodology for exploring the connections between people's lived experiences and their literacy practices; by first understanding how my participants talked about their lives through discourse analysis, I was better able to understand the complex ways that they were using literacy in relationship to those experiences. Analyzing students' discourses and literacies illuminated new facets of military kids' experiences and produced findings that extend current theoretical understandings of literacy.

My study also tells a story about the role that reading and writing play in helping adolescents agentively shape their identities. Given that there is a "scarcity of information in how youths use literacy to make meaning" (Crooks, 2014, p. 8), my research provides a glimpse into the agentive acts of restorying in which seven adolescents engaged. The findings that emerged from my genre analysis of my participants' discourses suggest that exploring adolescents' narrative patterns may not only yield rich information about how they perceive their lived experiences, but may also shed light on the role that literacy plays in forming and developing those perspectives. Even though my participants are from a specific population, they suggest ways that all people use literacy to make meaning from their lived experiences. Examining a group that had formative experiences in common helped highlight patterns in the interactions between my participants' lives and literacies.

One particular life-literacy pattern that has currently captured scholars' attention is the concept of mobility as it relates to literacy. Wargo and DeCosta (2017) argue that when scholars advocate a view literacy that is rooted in people's specific lived experiences and sociocultural contexts, they do not always account for the ways in which "these experiences and contexts shift. They merge, transform, and create new conditions" (p.103). What this means is that

researchers need to study literacy as a complex, networked, interconnected web that includes dynamic movement as one of its essential features (Wargo & DeCosta 2017). Wargo & DeCosta conceptualize mobilities in literacy metaphorically, focusing on the movement that happens in digital spaces, but in addition to this kind of movement, my participants' mobilities are also literal, physical, and geographical. Studying more literal kinds of mobility can provide insight into the more metaphorical kinds of mobility that happen online. For example, my study showed that literacy played a prominent role for students in transitional spaces, where they were physically separated from former communities and not yet fully integrated into present communities. What other kinds of transitional spaces might exist, even for students who do not physically move? What role might literacy play in smoothing out transitions and cultivating a sense of belonging and psychological well-being in shifting contexts?

Similarly, Stornaiuolo's (2016) concept of worldmaking suggests that researchers ought to attend to the ways that people use tools from a variety of different settings to construct meaning with (and within) texts. She writes that "people's literate activities in the context of globalization are practices of worldmaking (cf. Goodman 1978; Holland et al. 1998), a process of constructing shared worlds through symbolic practices that intertwine the creative, ethical, and intellectual in the act of making meaning from the multiple and dynamic cultural resources at hand," (p.1). If people construct shared worlds through symbolic practices using the cultural resources at hand, then it follows that the tools multiply as the available cultural resources shift. My participants' discourses and literacies around the concept of cosmopolitanism suggest that these military kids recognized the ways that their frequent relocations expanded the set of tools by which they made meaning in the world. Stornaiuolo (2016) observes that "[l]iteracy

scholars have explored how cosmopolitan theories might offer a fresh approach to understanding difference in a world characterized by accelerated transnational flows of people and materials, one that takes account of how the global and the local interpenetrate our meaning making practices" (p.4). My research provides affirms Stornaiuolo's theory and provides examples of the ways that global and local forces can work together to produce meaning, as well as a look into a world that has long been characterized by "accelerated transnational flows." Military kids' worlds are changing at the same rate as everyone else's when it comes to the impact of digital technology on their everyday literacy practices, but those changes are compounded by the realities of frequent relocation and parent deployment.

My study also tells the next chapter of how people use literacy to restory their lives. Thomas and Stornaiuolo (2016) saw restorying as disruptive, a way for marginalized students to counter-narrate the dominant narrative about them, and they viewed the concept of "struggle" as essential to the act of restorying. Subversion was not as central to Rosenberg's definition of restorying, but she did note that through restorying, people could "challenge the scripts imposed on them." Rosenberg's definition of restorying was broader than counter-narration; she viewed restorying as a rhetorically agentive way for people to "theoriz[e] about their own experiences" (p.21). Sometimes my participants engaged in restorying as Thomas and Stornaiuolo defined it; they used literacy to disrupt the dominant narrative within military culture that military life is good for you. However, there were times when they took up that dominant narrative and applied it to their own experiences, which resulted in the positivizing narratives I observed both in their discourses and their literacies. I argue that even though these acts were not subversive, they were still restorying, because they involved taking up an

aspect of their lived experiences and choosing how to tell their story. Sometimes my participants engaged in restorying as Rosenberg defined it: not necessarily using literacy to subvert, but theorizing and making meaning from their experiences. Restorying, as I have seen it emerge in this study, involved these adolescents taking the stories of their own experiences in hand and using reading and writing to give those stories a shape, a name, an emotional tenor, and most importantly, a meaning; and as a result of that process, to have a say in how the things that had happened to them influenced their identity. One implication of this finding is that restorying through literacy can empower students to gain increased agency over their identity formation.

Another way that my use of restorying extends other scholars' use of the term is that I identified four specific literate acts of restorying: escape, connection, reflection, and refraction. By breaking restorying down into sub-categories and examining more closely the patterns and differences that emerged across these cases, my study complicates our understanding of what restorying can look like. Viewing escape as an act of restorying affords a more complex view of the literacies in which students engage for fun, outside of school. Examining acts of connection provided insight into ways that restorying can be collaborative, dynamic, and ephemeral. In the case of connection, restorying is not necessarily retelling the story of one person's experiences, but it influences how people interact with each other across space and time. Reflection is perhaps the act of restorying that aligns most closely with the work that previous scholars have done; many of the literacies that Rosenberg documented in her study of adult literacy learners would fall into the category of reflection, as they wrote directly about their own lives. Refraction provides perhaps the most complicated look into acts of restorying, because it

suggests that some restorying takes place at the level of the subconscious (more on refraction below). Within all four of those literate acts, both reading and writing constituted material ways that students restoried their lives.

Previous studies of restorying through literacy have examined writing almost exclusively, but my study demonstrated that reading could be an equally powerful way that students used texts to give their experiences a name, shape, tenor, and meaning. Viewing reading as restorying requires the active, creative, combustive view of reading for which Rosenblatt (1995) argues. If students can restory through reading, then there is no way that reading is merely "the printed page impressing its meaning on the reader's mind or the reader extracting the meaning embedded in the text"; instead, reading must be "a constructive, selective process over time in a particular context" (p.26). Although the reader's side of the process is often overlooked, Rosenblatt (1995) goes so far as to say that "The reader, too, is creative…the literary experience has been phrased as a *transaction* between the reader and the author's text. Moreover, as in the creative activity of the artist, there will be selective factors molding the reader's response" (pp.34-35). A previously unexplored implication of Rosenblatt's transactional reader-response theory is that if reading is a creative act whereby readers take materials from texts and rework/remix/remediate them together with their own backgrounds and experiences to produce an interpretation of the work that is uniquely their own (a phenomenon that occurred repeatedly in my participants' uses of literacy), then those creative acts will have identifiable genres and generic patterns. While I have framed escape, connection, reflection, and refraction primarily as uses of literacy, they can also be seen as the genres that may emerge from the co-creative acts of reading.

Refraction is a particular contribution that my work makes to the study of how people read fiction. While Rosenblatt and other reader-response theorists have studied the processes by which people draw upon their experiences to interpret literature, what is widely assumed to be true and also under-theorized is the parallel process by which the reader views her own life differently as a result of her encounter with a fictional text. By observing a group of students with a set of shared experiences in common, I was able to identify patterns in the ways that students viewed their experiences through the lens of fiction. These students used their lives to help them interpret texts and used texts to help them interpret their lives. While fiction lovers and English majors hold the latter phenomenon as a self-evident truth (that fiction interprets life), my work assigns it the name refraction, elaborating our understanding of the transaction that takes place between reader and text. Rosenblatt (1995) argued that in the act of reading, "[t]he reader, drawing on past linguistic and life experience, links the signs on the page with certain words, certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes. The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to *him* [sic]" (p.30). What my participants showed me is that this process of drawing on lived experiences to determine the meaning of a text (and to decide what it communicates to us personally) is only one process that can occur in refraction. To repurpose Rosenblatt's words, the words, concepts, experiences, and images of things, people, actions, and scenes on the page may determine for readers what their own experiences communicate to *them*.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR POLICY AND CURRICULUM

While current literature about military kids tends to overemphasize deficits, military kids do face a set of unique challenges that requires specific, targeted social and academic supports. Sullivan et al. (2015), in their review of data from the California Healthy Kids Survey across multiple years, noted that "when compared with data from 2011, the rates of…negative outcomes appear to be increasing. These findings suggest a need to identify and intervene with military-connected adolescents and reflect a larger concern regarding the well-being of military families during wartime" (922). Interventions must take place on multiple levels—among families, health care professionals, policymakers, and of course, in the schools that military kids attend.

Civilian schools have a key role to play in the development and maintenance of support systems for military families, because Department of Defense schools are not the primary places where military kids are educated. DePedro et al. (2018) state that "every school district in the United States has children and adolescents from military families," (p. 95) and "[a]bout 90% of military-connected students are educated in civilian public schools" (DePedro et al., 2014, p.1). And research has directly connected school support to improved outcomes for military kids: "findings show that multiple components of school climate are associated with a lower likelihood of depressive symptoms and suicidal ideation and increased likelihood of well-being among [military-connected] students…after controlling for student demographics, military connection, and deployments" (DePedro et al., 2018, p. 93). DePedro et al. (2018) focused on several dimensions of a supportive school environment, including relationships with caring adults, school connectedness, and feeling safe. Unfortunately,

> a sizeable proportion of school administrators (about 25 percent) *believe that MC* [military-connected] *students should not be viewed as a distinct group*…Given the belief that MC students are not a distinct group, it is not surprising that less than a quarter of school administrators reported that they had an special school activities focused on MC students….most reported that they were not currently implementing programs that focused on military students as a group (77.4%) (DePedro et al., 2014, p.23, emphasis mine).

My research adds to the work of previous studies to reinforce the claim that military kids should be viewed as a distinct group with unique needs, strengths, and challenges. Students' outcast narratives, as described in chapter three, suggest that schools should focus on creating a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere for military kids who often undergo multiple school transitions.

For administrators and policymakers, part of creating that inclusive atmosphere is working to mitigate the disruptions in curricular scope and sequence that can arise with transitions and working to create greater continuity for students. Current discussions in education address the need for greater inclusivity, but do not as thoroughly address the need for continuity, a salient issue for an increasingly mobile population. Common Core standards can begin to address the need for continuity across contexts, but although many states have adopted Common Core, the implementation and assessment of these standards differs widely from one context to the next. All of the public-school students in this study discussed feeling the disruptive effects of switching schools and curricula, but some students more specifically felt that there were concepts, skills, or other types of knowledge that they had missed because of their transitions. Abby pointed to differences in school curricula from state to state as the reason she struggles with English, particularly on standardized tests. She said, "Arizona was behind on English, so I would learn things that they were learning and then I moved to Colorado

and they were advanced. So…there's still some things I don't get. Sometimes it's hard for me to pick out a subject or an object." Louisa described her deep frustrations with having to figure out, from one state to the next, what math class she should take:

> I remember for math in Texas I was in Algebra I and when I moved here, I went into Algebra 2 thinking that like—because in my Texas school we had geometry and algebra together in one subject. So then when I moved here I didn't know there was a separate subject called geometry. So I went into Algebra 2, but then I missed geometry. So I went back to geometry, but there was still some Algebra I stuff that I also missed. So I went back to Algebra I, and that was really hard…and then now I'm in geometry.

Louisa's misconception about what she already knew—that she had already covered basic concepts in both algebra and geometry—led her to take a class that was too difficult for her, so she had to skip from class to class until she finally had the basic concepts she needed to progress. Peyton described a similar situation in which she tried to describe to her counselor what kinds of things she had learned in her previous math class so that the counselor could figure out where to place her. Ultimately, she landed in a math class where she alternated between boredom and confusion: "last year I remember thinking that the math was too easy, but then at times it would be too hard. So then I was like, I guess maybe I'm in the right spot. But I didn't really know." It is this state of uncertainty regarding whether or not the students are learning what they will need for success at the next level that seems to characterize, for most of them, the essence of the academic struggles they face in relocation.

Another problem that arose for students due to differences in curricular sequences was repetition of concepts. Abby stated that because of her moves "from Louisiana to Arizona and Arizona to Colorado," she "had basically three years of the same science." In that case, she felt that some content was unnecessarily repeated because of her moves. It is difficult to know

what these students actually missed; the disruptions they perceived in their curriculum were based on comparisons with their peers and comparisons with what they learned in previous classes at different schools. However, even if these students do not have as many gaps in their knowledge as they think they do, they believe that they are missing or unnecessarily repeating concepts and skills. The perception of academic disruption had both academic and social effects: it negatively influenced their feelings of self-efficacy and it increased their feelings of being "outsiders." For Peyton, being taught a different citation format at a previous school made her feel like an outsider. She said, "I was the only one who didn't know what MLA format was. Everyone was like, 'What? You don't know what that is? What's wrong with you?' And I was just like, 'Sorry, I can't really help it, I didn't—I don't know.' Most of Peyton's classmates had been through the Midvale school system together, and this gap in Peyton's academic knowledge intensified her feelings of being a social outsider. In the third interview, Peyton went on to say that "there'll be just some instances in class where somebody will say something that they read last year or they did last year in the class that everybody else took, and I'm like, 'Oh, well, I didn't read that book, or I didn't do that, like I didn't learn that.'" Jake did not feel that there was any content or skill set he really missed that he could not catch up on independently, but his teacher's references to prior learning did have a social/emotional effect on him:

> **Jake:** When we moved to [midwestern state], sixth grade in that curriculum they focused on ancient Greece and ancient Rome…I missed out on all this and then sometimes she would refer back to it…I would feel lost but then I would eventually pick up on it. It didn't generally matter. It was something that felt left out I guess.

Although Jake's feelings of self-efficacy in this subject area do not appear to have been influenced by his teacher's references to material he did not know, he did experience the

undesirable situation of feeling "left out." Even if differences in curriculum did not end up academically harming these students—and I would argue that they probably did—there were also negative effects that curricular differences had on students' feelings of belonging.

While there are limits to what administrators, guidance counselors, and policy-makers can do to accommodate the unique curricular needs of students who relocate, they can certainly increase their awareness of the academic and socio-emotional effects that curricular differences between schools have on the students who move among them. De Pedro et al.'s study (2018) suggests that a school climate that helps military kids feel seen and understood can lower the negative effects that military life can have on these students. Expressions of understanding and attempts at inclusive practices extend beyond helping with relocation; studies also show that it is helpful to create spaces in schools for students to process their experiences with deployment (De Pedro et al., 2018).

These same policies and practices can support the needs of many different students who undergo experiences with parental separation, relocation, and conformity-oriented institutions. I am writing this chapter during a year in which the enforcement of a zero-tolerance immigration policy meant that thousands of children experienced multiple relocations, traumatic separations from their parents, and experience with a bureaucratic institution that suppressed their agency and likely impressed itself deeply—and permanently—on their identities. Many of these children will participate in our educational system, and our schools need to be aware of their needs. Similarly, children in the foster care system experience the trifecta of relocation, separation, and bureaucracy. While there are many important differences between the situations of these groups of children and military-connected students,

there are key similarities as well, and some of the same questions we ask about military kids, we should also be asking about other populations.

Current educational policies provide some support, but my research suggests that these efforts are not sufficient to address military kids' academic and socioemotional needs. On January 19, 2017, the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children went into effect for all 50 states and the District of Columbia. The Department of Defense Education Activity website asserts that the compact "will ensure that the children of military families are afforded the same opportunities for educational success as other children and are not penalized or delayed in achieving their educational goals by inflexible administrative and bureaucratic practices." While this compact does include essential policies—for example, requiring that administrators provide military-connected students with additional flexibility in course placement, waiving some graduation requirements, and accepting testing scores that students received in other states—it does not create policies designed to address the socioemotional effects of both relocation and deployment. Guidance counselors are often completely overwhelmed, and additional resources need to be allocated at the district, state, and perhaps even federal levels for personnel who can help students make successful transitions—academically and emotionally. Teachers need professional development that specifically trains them to create inclusive classrooms for students who transition and who experience parental separation.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: THE ELA CLASSROOM

One of the first ways that classroom teachers and instructors can support their military-connected students is to develop greater awareness of the unique needs of this population and

a deeper understanding of how these students view their experiences. My findings suggest that students communicate how they make meaning of their experiences using a variety of narrative genres as they engage with literacy and that they draw on literacy to shape their perspectives (and ultimately, their identities). As mentioned in chapter three, Rosenblatt (1995) argued that "students' reactions [to texts] will inevitably be in terms of their own temperaments and backgrounds" (p.50) and that this transaction between the student and the literacy means that "the nature of the student's rudimentary response is, perforce, part of our teaching materials" (p.50). To build on Rosenblatt's argument, my research suggests that these students' discourses and literacy provide rich contextual information about their backgrounds and viewpoints, and Rosenblatt would say that this information is part of what should constitute teaching material.

When I asked my participants if there was a teacher who had made an effort to understand their situation and provide support, there were only two students who immediately and enthusiastically responded "yes." Both of those teachers were themselves military kids. Abby said, "In Colorado I had a geography teacher from 7th grade. And I faculty assisted for her 7th and 8th grade year. She was the teacher who understood best, because she was an Air Force brat herself." This teacher also gave Abby a book about how to adjust to teenage life and high school (Abby skimmed, but did not thoroughly read this book). Alex said, "Yeah! My fourth grade teacher Mrs. McLuhan. She also came from a military family, so she knew what it was like." Other students in response to the question about teachers who supported them said things like, "I don't think any of them really took any special notice or anything" (Eric). The rest of the students paused, thinking back over their schooling and then responded ambivalently or expressed a wish for more support. As someone who taught high school for 11 years, I

understand that classroom teachers tend to be completely overwhelmed by all of the responsibilities they have to shoulder. Often kept busy responding to the needs of students who are more visibly struggling, it would make sense that they may not be aware of the quieter needs of these military kids, who may present themselves as strong and independent. But my participants' discussions of the difficulties of school transitions suggest that they want to feel acknowledged and understood by their teachers, and that such support is essential to their well-being and development (although, as Eric and Abby both mentioned, they do not want to be openly singled out; in fact, Eric referred to that as his "biggest nightmare").

While support begins with teachers understanding and developing relationships with the military kids in their classrooms, it continues through well-informed and responsive pedagogical practice, and future research should explore how to best leverage students' literacies for learning and engagement. My findings suggest that students use both in-school and out-of-school literacies for escape, connection, reflection, and refraction, but that they are not always aware of how they are using those literacies. However, my findings do not address the extent to which these literacies can and should be leveraged in the ELA classroom. Future studies should explore whether teachers' facilitation of restorying—helping students become more aware of how they are restorying and encouraging them to engage in restorying practices—is beneficial to military-connected students. Creating a study of military-connected students that focuses on classroom contexts would provide additional necessary information to inform pedagogical practice; to go a step further, a design-based intervention that explores the effects of teachers' increasing students' meta-awareness of how they are using literacy would help develop a set of concrete implications for classroom practice.

Further studies could also investigate the effects of designing assignments with the possibility of restorying in mind. Rosenblatt argues that part of the ELA teacher's job is to

> create a setting that makes it possible for the student to have a spontaneous response to literature…Once the student has responded freely, a process of growth can be initiated. He needs to learn to handle with intelligence and discrimination the personal factors that enter into his reaction to books. Through a critical scrutiny of his response to literary works, he can come to understand his personal attitudes and gain the perspective needed for a fuller and sounder response to literature (1995, p102).

Could well-worded journal assignments can prompt various kinds of reflection over lived experiences and provide opportunities for catharsis? Might assignments to read or write fiction with which students identify encourage imaginative meaning-making or even help students process their experiences in a less direct, more nuanced way? Could assignments that connect students with communities past and present, local and global, help students feel anchored and nourish a sense of belonging? Can assignments that give students a chance to escape enhance their enjoyment of literacy and help them to see the myriad possibilities that exist within literacies? While my study only examines the presence of these literacies in the lives of a small group of military kids, future studies can explore how the combination of integrating assignments that build upon students' already-existing literacies and fostering students' meta-awareness of the way that these literacies are sustaining or altering their perspectives on their lives might be powerful ways of making school-based literacy practices more engaging, relevant, and responsive to students' needs.

My findings also suggest steps for future research regarding teachers' text selection. If military kids are using literacy in connection to their identities, studies should consider the effects of selecting different kinds of classroom texts that might encourage different uses of

literacy. These studies could consider questions about how certain texts might support students' management of their emotions. If teachers choose readings that replicate aspects of students' experiences, either directly or indirectly, what effect does that have on the development of students' identities and literacies? For example, if teachers allow students to choose texts that provide an escape experience, that may have an effect on students' out-of-school engagement with literacy and ability to engage in reflection and refraction. While more work needs to be done to establish how teachers can best leverage the literacies that military kids are bringing with them to the classroom, wisdom of practice would suggest that developing students' understanding of how they are using literacy and how they might use literacy could be beneficial to all kinds of students, not just military-connected ones, and not just students who go through relocation and parental separation.

Because it has the potential to restory students' lives and to allow them to counter-narrate dominant discourses about their identities, literacy also has the potential to be a political space, an agentive space, and a space rich with possibility for socially just pedagogical practices. It is not a given that literacy will empower students to develop agency and voice; sometimes literacy practices simply reinforce dominant paradigms by reproducing dominant discourses; there was evidence in my analysis of my participants' narratives that they were drawing upon military rhetoric to frame experiences more positively. What this means for future studies of teaching is that studies should explore the extent to which creating space for restorying through literacy serves an emancipatory function.

Similarly, future research should assess how teacher education programs—and specifically methods classes—can train pre-service teachers to develop knowledge of their

military-connected students and learn how to use that knowledge to inform their teaching practice. While many teacher education programs are attuned to creating inclusive classrooms based on visible difference, students such as military kids and children in foster care bring invisible identities to the classroom. It is important that pre-service teachers are taught how to learn about students' visible and invisible identities and well-equipped to build inclusive learning environments for all students, across all kinds of difference. In order to make all students feel included and welcome, pre-service teachers are often taught strategies and educational activities for building classroom community in which students are invited to share aspects of their lives with their classmates. But in light of the fact that military kids (and other children) may not feel comfortable publicly disclosing their invisible identities, future studies should explore the implementation of less-public activities and assignments such as written surveys, journals, letters to the teacher, in-person conferences, and other means by which students can, if they choose, disclose salient aspects of their backgrounds.

More research should also explore ways pre-service teachers can cultivate awareness of students' uses of literacy and develop an array of high-leverage practices (Ball and Forzani, 2009) that might support students' acts of restorying (and therefore encourage literacy's emancipatory possibilities). Building upon the important work done by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995, 2014) and Django Paris (2012), the concept of culturally relevant or culturally sustaining pedagogies holds key implications for highly mobile students, because these approaches are asset-focused and acknowledge the "heterogeneity of cultural experience" (Ladson-Billings, 2014, p.75). While it may be tempting for teachers to adopt a deficit view of students who relocate frequently, teacher education programs can help pre-service teachers develop

counter-narrations of deficit stories by helping them learn what literacy practices all students are already bringing to the classroom. If additional research reveals that there are benefits to students learning more about using literacy to restory their experiences, then teacher education programs should ensure that future teachers are equipped to amplify and leverage students' literacies.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH: MILITARY KIDS AND LITERACY

More work needs to be done to understand the viewpoints of military kids and the role that literacy plays in developing those viewpoints across different groups of military-connected students. Studying how literacies unfold across space, time, and culture is a current trend in literacy research (Stornaiuolo, 2016; Compton-Lilly & Papoi, 2017), and military-connected students present a promising microcosm for that kind of study, a glimpse into what it means to read and write across shifting contexts.

While my research suggests numerous possibilities for follow-up studies among military kids and populations who undergo similar experiences, it also opens avenues for different kinds of discourse analysis and literacy research among all adolescents. The narrative genres that emerged in my participants' discourses—outcast, cosmopolitan, loss, normalization, hardship, and development—were influenced by their military experiences, but nothing about my research suggests that they are exclusive to military kids. A brief analysis of prominent themes in young adult novels would suggest that many, if not most adolescents identify to an extent with feeling like an outcast. Military kids' feelings of not fitting in and being misunderstood just happen to be connected to their experiences with relocation and military culture. Likewise, loss and hardship can be considered themes universal to human experience. What would be

particularly interesting to see is if the positivizing impulse that I discovered in my participants' discourses is something in which many adolescents engage.

Similarly, my findings about participants' uses of literacy present a series of questions to ask and things to look for across the literacy practices of all kinds of people. While many studies of literacy focus on the nature of the practices in which participants engage (and lately, many of those questions have focused on the extent to which those practices incorporate digital and multimodal elements), my study encourages teachers and researchers to look at literacy through the lens of use: how are people using reading and writing to shape their perspectives on their lives? How are people using literacy in ways that they are aware of and ways that are operating to some extent at the level of the subconscious? How can we make people more aware of how they are using literacy, how else they could be using literacy, and the possible purposes it might serve? As teachers, how can we leverage the complex and nuanced uses of literacy that students are already bringing with them to our classrooms? How can we begin to value students' out-of-school reading practices as serving the important purpose of providing an escape and also, perhaps, providing a way for people to process their lives through the space afforded by aesthetic distance? How can we select texts and write assignments that create spaces for many different uses of literacy? What role does literacy play in the development of agency and students' ability to find and use their voice?

Although my study began to address some of these important questions, its limitations of included branch of the military (all students' family members were Air Force personnel), socioeconomic status/rank, race/ethnicity, location/housing, and school type. Further studies should be conducted across different branches of the military—do similar patterns appear in

the discourses and literacies of Army brats, Navy brats, and Marine brats? What about the children of special ops personnel? It is likely that the type of work in which the parent engages, particularly during deployment, would have an effect on the child's development. This kind of study could be conducted among children of parents who engage in combat and who return from home with both visible and invisible wounds. More studies need to be done across different socioeconomic statuses, which are clearly denoted by military rank. All of the students in my study are the children of high-ranking officers, but similar research should be conducted among the children of enlisted service members.

Additional studies should be conducted among more racially and ethnically diverse populations of military kids. While there was some diversity among my participants, there were races that comprise a significant number of military personnel that were not represented in my study, which included only students who identified as white or Asian. The military, like other federal agencies, has five racial categories: "white, black or African-American, American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander. Ethnicity…is divided into two categories: Hispanic or Latino and not Hispanic or Latino" ("Demographics of the U.S. Military," 2018). Diversity in both branch and in the officer/enlisted categories would very likely allow for greater racial diversity as well, since "among enlisted recruits, 43 percent of men and 56 percent of women are Hispanic or a racial minority" ("Demographics of the U.S. Military," 2018).

Since my study focused on students who lived primarily off base, future studies of students' perspectives and literacies should focus on students who spend the majority of their lives on base; I hypothesize that military culture and rhetoric is much more visible in the discourse of

these students and that it has distinct effects on the development of their literacies. Similarly, it would be useful to study students who grow up attending Department of Defense schools to examine the effects of engaging in literacy practices in a community of military kids. Narratives like "outcast" which were prominent among the students in my study who lived off base and attended a civilian school may not be as prominent among students who are deeply immersed in military culture. How do students' lives and literacies interact when their military-shaped identities are not anomalous, but an ordinary aspect of their environment? At what point then (College? First job? Church?) do they begin to realize how their lives differ from the mainstream? What does the agentive development of identity look like for students whose worlds are even more profoundly shaped by military life?

The military is an agency-suppressing institution. It takes away the control that many families have (or feel they have) over their lives—where they will live and work and go to school and whom they will befriend. Because of the ways in which it operates, the military requires conformity, and some of those requirements extend, formally and informally, to the children of its members. While there is no doubt that military life is difficult, the students in my study showed me a more complete picture of the military kid: resilient in transition, brave in separation, loyal to their families, relentlessly optimistic. Their literacies showed me how resourceful, clever, innovative and at times subversive they could be when it came to writing their own stories. One thing that my study's findings suggest about adolescent identity is that even under the aegis of a mammoth bureaucracy that seeks to inscribe its culture on its members and their families, adolescents still find ways to exert agency; in Eric's words, to draw their own lines. This research suggests that literacy can provide powerful responses to pressing

questions about students who grow up across shifting contexts, and that community members—from parents to teachers to college instructors to school liaisons to guidance counselors to administrators to policy makers—ought to consider literacy a key resource in strategizing how to provide academic, emotional, and social support to military kids and students like them. Our societies and cultures hand to each of us a story about our lives, but that need not be the final word. Reading and writing empower us to take our stories in hand and to tell them again, in our words, in our own way.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Sample Interview Protocol

[NOTE: The questions in bold are prioritized.]
• **What kind of work does your parent do (or do your parents do) in the military?**
• Was your parent ever deployed (were your parents deployed)? For how long?
Okay, now we're going to get into questions that have to do with growing up as a military kid. While the questions I ask have to do specifically about military life, I understand that in addition to being a military kid, you have a lot of other roles in your life and you have different ways that you describe yourself. Please feel free to also talk about those other features of your life.
Military identity questions:

- **You mentioned in the survey that you think of yourself as a "military kid" or "military brat." Can you describe for me why you think of yourself that way?**
  - How do civilians respond when you tell them you're a military kid? Why do you think that is? Can you give me an example?
  - Can you tell me about a conversation you've had with someone about growing up as a military kid?
    - How do people usually respond to hearing that you're a military kid?
    - How does that make you feel?
  - Would you say that you relate to other military kids differently than you do with the children of civilians?
    - If so, why do you think that is?
    - Can you give me an example?
  - What kind of stereotypes do you think people have about the military?
    - Why do you think that is?
    - Can you tell me about a time when you heard a military stereotype? How did you respond?
    - Do you have experiences dealing with other stereotypes?
- **Besides being a military kid, how else would you describe yourself?** If I say, "Tell me about yourself," what are some things that come to mind?
  - What makes [insert identity affiliation that interviewee mentions] important to you?
- **When people ask you where you're from, what do you say? What is it about that place that makes it feel like home to you?**
- **Can you draw for me a timeline of your life, and mark all of your moves, different schools you attended, and whether you lived on or off base?** [Note: as part of this exercise, we'll discuss the following questions about school, relocation, and life on

base.]

- **Can you tell me about the last time you relocated?** How did you hear you were moving? How did you feel? What was it like fitting into your new school/neighborhood? What was it like making new friends?
- **Do you live on-base or off-base now?**
    - **What is that like?**
    - **How is it different from (whichever one was opposite)?**
    - How often do you go on base? What kinds of things do you do on base?
    - What do you think a civilian might think about life on base?
- **Did you ever live overseas?** (If yes, then…)
    - Where? Where did you go to school?
    - Can you tell me a memory that you have of living there?
    - How did you feel about coming home?
- **What kinds of schools have you attended?** What kind of school do you think was the best fit for you? Why was that?

- **What groups are you part of (**clubs, sports, extracurriculars, activist groups, Facebook groups, etc.)? [NOTE: identify the group that is most meaningful to the student and ask follow-up questions about that group; ask briefly about other groups.]
    - **How do you participate?**
    - Why are you involved? Why are those groups important to you?
    - **Are any of those groups military related?** How so? How does your interaction with those groups differ from your interaction with other groups?
- **What kinds of "insider" knowledge or perspective do you have about the military that most people don't have?**
    - Where do you think that knowledge (or that perspective) came from?
- **Can you tell me about a time when growing up in the military was especially difficult or challenging?**
    - How do you respond to that challenge?
- Have you ever (or would you ever) consider joining the military? Why or why not?

Okay, now I'm going to ask questions about the reading and writing you do.

Literacy questions:

- **Describe an early memory you have of reading or writing**
    - What were some of the key events in learning to read/write?
    - Who were some of the key people involved, and what did they teach you?
- **How do you feel about reading?** (If they say they enjoy it, then) Do you consider yourself a reader?
    - **What kinds of things do you like to read?**
    - **Can you tell me about a time recently when you wanted to read something and why you wanted to read it?**
    - **Can you tell me about a time recently when you had to read something you didn't want to read?**
- **How do you feel about writing?** (If they say they enjoy it, then) Do you consider yourself a writer?

  - **Can you tell me about a time recently when you enjoyed writing something?**
    - What was the purpose/audience/genre?
  - **Can you tell me about a time recently when you had to write something you didn't want to write?**
    - What was the purpose/audience/genre?
- **What kinds of writing do you do outside of school?**
  - What do you see as the purpose for those different kinds of writing?
  - Describe something you wrote recently that wasn't for school.
    - Why did you write it?
    - Who was it for?
    - What did you get out of it?
- **How often do you write for social media? Text? Blog?**
  - **What kinds of things do you write about?**
  - What motivates you to do this kind of writing?
- How would you describe your writing style?
  - What kinds of things in your environment have influenced your writing style?
- **How do you stay in touch with people?**
- **Do you keep a journal?**
  - If so, what kinds of things do you journal about?
  - Why do you journal?
- **Have you ever written directly about the experience of being a military kid?**
  - What did you write and when?
  - For what purpose?
- **Do you follow the news?**
  - Where do you get your news from?
  - Can you tell me about a recent news story that you felt strongly about?
  - Do your experiences as a military kid influence how you read/react to the news? (If yes, then) how so?
  - Do you think those experience affect how you feel about America?
  - **Do you think your experiences influence how you view other countries? Global events?**

What else would you like to tell me that I haven't already asked about?

APPENDIX B: Codebook

Deployment: student references an event related to or emanating from a parent's deployment.

Pain of deployment: discussion of one or more of the emotionally painful aspects of deployment. Emotional responses to a phase of deployment.

Shifting family dynamics: ways that family roles shifted, new/different responsibilities assumed by the student or other family members, additional stress of having to make up for how the deployed parent contributed to everyday life/household management.

Staying connected: discussion of frequency and means by which student stayed or is staying connected to deployed parent.

Digital literacy practices: student discusses engaging with digital/online literacies. Includes social media, texting, reading news or other articles online, etc. [NOTE: these practices are challenging to analyze objectively because they are so ephemeral. Snaps disappear after 24 hours; the text story that 06 wrote with his friend is gone. I have to go off of how students describe these practices.]

Disclosure of military identity: discussion of when, how, why, and/or to what extent the student chooses either to hide from or to disclose to other people that he or she is a military kid.

Family dynamics (general category referring to references to the status of or interactions between parents, siblings, and/or extended family)

Relationship with parents: discussion of the quality of interaction with either service member or civilian parent(s).

Uneven effects-siblings: discussion of comparison of student's experiences with his or her siblings' experiences.

Fantasy and sci-fi: discussion of reading or writing within the fantasy/sci-fi genre

Insider-outsider: the social dynamics of communicating with former communities and integrating into present communities, focusing on discussion of feeling like an insider (integrated, participatory, communicating, understanding, feelings of community) or feeling like an outsider (alienated, isolated, lonely, not communicating, not understanding).

Intersection with other features of adolescence: discussion of ways that being a military kid complicates, enhances, and/or otherwise intersects with other features of being an adolescent.

Literacy events: any time students mention a specific engagement with a text. “occasions in which written language is integral to the nature of participants’ interactions and their interpretive processes and strategies” (Heath 1982, p. 50). “Discrete, observable happenings” (Brandt and Clinton, 2002, p. 342).

Reading: discussion of reading a particular text or series

Re-reading: mention of a text read multiple times

Writing: discussion of writing a particular text

Literacy practices: students’ description of their habits, patterns, or attitudes toward literacies. “the socially regulated, recurrent, and patterned things that people do with literacy as well as the cultural significance they ascribe to those doings…abstract, enduring and not wholly observable” (Brandt & Clinton, 2002, p. 342)

Reading: habits, patterns or attitudes involving reading

Writing: habits, patterns, or attitudes involving writing

Military identity: why students think of themselves as military kids.

Attitude toward military: what they think of the military as an institution, as well as some features of military life

Description of military life: the student’s representation of what it is like to live and grow up as a military brat.

Emotional recasting: students’ description of changing their emotions from negative to positive.

Military culture and ideology: references to values that the military holds, as well as it symbols, holidays, and other cultural artifacts.

Other identifications: students’ descriptions of ways they identify themselves other than as military kids

Parent

Parent’s military identity: explanation of how the service member parent views his or her military identity, from the child’s perspective; how they feel about their work, according to the child

Parent’s work: what the parent does for the military

Relocation: discussion of any of the phases of relocation

Cross-cultural: discussion of the features of relocating and living cross-culturally

Relocation benefits: the positive sides of relocating, according to students

Relocation hardships: the disadvantages to relocation generally or to specific relocations

School transitions: references more specifically to academic and social aspects of switching schools.

Disruptions in curriculum: students' discussion of concepts, skills, or other kinds of knowledge they feel they missed because of relocation.

School or teacher support: discussion of the ways that administrators, staff, and/or teachers either supported students well OR discussion of feeling a lack of support

Uneven effects of relocation: discussion of the uneven ways relocation influences students based on age, number of relocations, what is being left behind, and what is anticipated.

Uses of literacy

Connection: connecting with a distant parent or old friends. Also, establishing connections with new friends.

Escape: using literacy to escape from challenging circumstances, get their minds off of things like deployment or relocation.

Identifying with or as: seeing one life's experiences represented, usually in a book, and identifying with or as that character

Processing and making sense: using literacy to grapple with or better understand one's lived experiences; also refers to working through the emotions associated with various lived experiences.

APPENDIX C: Sample Informed Consent for 18-Year-Old Students

Consent to be Part of a Research Study

Title of the Project: Literacy Practices in the Lived Experiences of Military Kids
Principal Investigator: Emily Wilson, doctoral candidate, University of Michigan
Faculty Advisor: Chandra Alston, Assistant Professor in the School of Education, University of Michigan

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

I'm inviting you to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be ages 13-18 and have at least one parent who is a military service member (active duty). Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Important Information about the Research Study

- The purpose of the study is to better understand military kids and the reading and writing they do. If you decide to participate, you'll complete a very short survey and up to 3 interviews. The **total** amount of time that you **could** spend is 3 hours spread out over 3 months.
- The study will help schools better understand how to teach military-connected students and will hopefully help the students better understand their own experiences.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether you want to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why am I doing it?

Right now, what researchers know about military kids is mostly based on surveys taken by parents and reviews of medical records. Not very many people have talked to military kids and asked them to describe their lives in their own words. There's even less research about the role that reading and writing play in the lives of military kids. My goal is to help educators better understand what it's like to grow up as a military kid and how to improve the quality of military kids' education.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to take part in this study, you'll be asked to fill out a 5-minute survey. I'll collect surveys and select 15 students who are the best fit for this study. In a quiet yet public space provided by the administration, I'll interview those 15 students for 30 minutes each. A month later, I'll do follow-up interviews with 6 or 7 students for 60 minutes each. A month after that, I'll do a third interview with those same 6 or 7 students. The interviews need to be audio

recorded (if you do not want to be audio recorded, you won't be able to participate). I will also ask you to share some writing samples with me. I will ask about life in the military, and I'll ask about reading and writing habits. I'll check in with you about how I am interpreting your words and I'll ask you if there's anything you'd like changed or left out. Please email me if you'd like to see survey or interview questions.

How could you benefit from this study?

My hope is that many military kids will eventually benefit from this study, because it can help schools better understand how to teach military kids. You might also personally benefit from being in this study, because you'll get the chance to reflect on life-shaping experiences.

What risks might result from being in this study?

There are some risks you might experience from being in this study. The main risk is that I could accidentally reveal your information. However, I am doing everything I can to make sure that doesn't happen. Another risk is the discomfort involved if an emotional topic comes up during the interview (for example, two interview questions are, "Has your parent ever been deployed? What was that like?"). However, you don't need to answer any question you don't want to answer. And Midvale High School has Guidance Offices in each unit with a staff of counselors (including an intervention counselor) who are available to help students process painful experiences.

How will I protect your information?

I plan to publish the results of my study. To protect your privacy, I will not include any information that could directly identify you. I'm going to change or remove revealing details (like your name and the school name). Any information that could directly identify you will be stored separately from the data collected as part of the project**.** All of the study data will be stored on the University of Michigan's secure MBox site; no student information will be stored on computer hard drives. Any hard copies of you writing will be stored in a locked office until the end of the study. All of your data will be destroyed once the study is finished (files deleted and hard copies either returned to you or shredded). As soon as I'm done transcribing the interviews, I will delete the audio recordings. It is possible that other people may need to see the information I collect about you. These people work for the University of Michigan, and they are responsible for making sure the research is done safely and properly.

What will happen to the information I collect about you after the study is over?

I will not keep your research data to use for future research. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be deleted from the research data collected as part of the project. I will delete anything that can identify you from your writing samples right away, and I'll destroy the surveys as soon as I've analyzed them. I'll delete the interviews once they are transcribed and analyzed.

How will I compensate you for being part of the study?

Each student selected for a 30-minute interview will receive $10. Each student selected for a 60-minute interview will receive $20 per interview. The total amount that a single student

could receive is $50. If you take the survey but you're not selected for an interview, you'll be entered into a drawing for a $20 Starbucks gift card.

Participation in this Study is Voluntary

It is totally up to you to decide to be in this research study. Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may stop at any time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer. If you decide to withdraw before this study is completed and tell me that you do not want me to use your data, you may request that your data not be used.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. I will give you a copy of this document for your records. I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I understand what the study is about and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.

____

Typed Subject Name

____

Signature   Date