

The Perceived Impacts of Arts Education on Children in Military Families

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By

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCIEVED IMPACTS OF ARTS EDUCATION ON CHILDREN IN MILITARY FAMILIES

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Children in military families face unique challenges that shape their lives and experiences in a variety of ways. Much research has indicated that the arts improve children's lives, emotional wellbeing, and school performance. This research expands upon current research into the role the arts, conceptualized as a form of play, serve in children's lives and assesses the impact of arts education specifically on military-affiliated children. Utilizing qualitative data and grounded theory, the study explores the ways in which parental military service affects children in every area of life and how involvement in the arts affects children's perceptions of their wellbeing. The analysis was developed from emergent codes collected from 14 interviews and two observations. The sample population was chosen through both convenience and snowball sampling. This study determined the ways in which military-affiliated children experience and use the arts in their daily lives—as a way of creating stability, expressing community, and managing emotions.

INTRODUCTION

Participation in the arts enriches daily life in many ways. Children particularly enjoy painting, singing, dancing, and other creative art forms, both as individuals and in playing with others. The arts are a form of play for children, and research suggests that they benefit emotionally, cognitively, socially, and developmentally from participation in such activities, both structured and free. Arts participation (Appendix A) measurably improves children's wellbeing, cognition, and mental health.

For particularly vulnerable youth populations, including children in military families, participation in the arts provides important support and opportunities for growth. This group faces multiple challenges: frequent location changes, extended and sometime unpredictable family separation, awareness of the myriad risks involved in military assignments, changes in family structure, and academic and social challenges posed by frequent changes in school environments.

The military implicitly recognizes the numerous benefits arts participation provides for servicemembers, families, and children. Several organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, promote the arts within military communities. For example, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs have partnered with the National Endowment for the Arts to form Creative

Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network, a program that promotes creative arts therapy in a clinical setting. Other programs promote arts and crafts, music, and other arts through both the DoD and the private sector.

Evidence¹ for the benefits of the arts is found on many program websites in policy briefs, white papers, pamphlets, guides, and other reports from studies. However, despite presenting the program goals and generally acknowledging the benefits of participation in the arts, few studies explicitly addressed the efficacy of these programs in meeting children's needs, and children's voices are absent from the research. Little of the presented research explicitly addressed children's needs or how arts participation affects children in military families. Outside of these programs, no studies have examined how military children themselves feel about their involvement with the arts. An understanding of the perceived impact of arts education on military-affiliated children could provide direction and clarity for arts programs with support to gain more funding, tactics to improve their work, or show that other programs benefit children more and provide those who work with military-affiliated children with new ideas for how to support military families and their children. Children in military families deserve robust and effective programs to support them in the many challenges present in military childhood. My research explores the benefits of arts and arts participation for children from the child's perspective.

NOTES

¹See Appendix I

BACKGROUND

Parental military service has a range of effects, both positive and negative, on children, affecting family structure, school life, friendships, home life, recreation, cognitive and emotional development, and mental health. Unfortunately, a high percentage of military children struggle with their mental health due to the distinct circumstances that accompany military family life (Cramm, et al. 2019). Prior research indicates that arts participation can improve the cognitive, emotional, and mental health of children in military families. In this study, I conducted preliminary research into how military children's involvement in the arts affects their perceived wellbeing. The research focused on children's perceptions of how the arts add to the overall quality of their lives. The findings, combined with the current body of literature, outline many of the effects parental military service has on children. Artistic involvement is both liberating, creating a "safe space" for children to ground themselves, and a place where children learn certain values and to serve their communities. The arts serve as a socializer for children: engaging in the arts offers kids a chance to find and make friends as their families move from assignment to assignment. Friendships are strengthened through artistic play. Military children regulate their emotions, bond with their siblings, and assert their individuality through the arts.

The current body of literature involving arts participation among military children

lacks exploration of children's perspectives. Despite military arts programs focusing on children, for the benefit of children, the research utilized by such programs does not account for children's narratives. Cindy Dell Clark, in her book *In A Different Voice*, warns of the knowledge that is lost when children's experiences and narratives are left out of research accounts. She notes the importance of conversing with children themselves, and cautions that "adults' views of children are frequently misbegotten or biased." She outlines the ways in which adults' narratives differ from those of children, and stresses the significance of not using reflective adult accounts as substitutes for accounts from young people themselves. My research includes the perspectives of both children and adults; reflective accounts from adults serve to inform of the ways meanings shift or remain throughout a lifetime.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Defining "Art"

Sociologists have conceptualized and framed art in numerous and distinct ways. This research was informed by the work of numerous art sociologists, Pierre Bourdieu, Howard Becker, and Niklas Luhmann in particular. Each theorist provided a different perspective on art. Scholars from many disciplines have examined the nature of art, the structure of art, the intricacies of "art systems," and the organization of "art worlds". My research draws upon prior art research to determine how art functions for children within the structure of military family life. The study of art is particularly suited to studies of children, for whom art is an integral, natural part of life (Balke, 1997). The centrality of art is expressed by Luhmann, who wrote that, "Art becomes a topic in the first place, not because of a peculiar inclination of the author, but because of the assumption that a social theory claiming universality cannot ignore the existence of art" (Luhmann, 2002:3).

Howard Becker conceptualized art as both a world and a system, defining the art world as, "the network of people whose cooperative activity, organized via their joined knowledge of conventional means of doing things, produces the kind of art works that art world is noted for" (Becker, 1982:10). For Becker, the study of art is the study of the systems and types of organization related to the production, distribution, and consumption of art.

Pierre Bourdieu (1992) focused on art as a hierarchical structure in which agents interact with one another and leverage capital (traditional, cultural, and otherwise). He applied class and stratification theories to the art world and further explained the mechanisms of class through his theories of social and cultural capital. Bourdieu challenged the concept of art as a bastion of creative freedom and personal expression, and instead focused on art as a professional field in which agents interact and norms are both created and followed.

As opposed to Bourdieu, Niklas Luhmann (2002) conceptualized art not in terms of a “world” but as a “system”; specifically, a system of communication. He criticized other art theories’ focus on stratification and the way they “attempt to describe their object in terms of normative, integrative, and unifying concepts” (Luhmann, 2002:1). Luhmann focused on systems, rather than function, to reduce the “arbitrariness” of functional analysis. His focus on the communication art facilitates between actors serves as a theoretical framework for this paper’s focus on art as play.

Karkou and Glasman (2004) advocated for a “wide” definition of art, as a wide interpretation of what the arts stand for allows for a number of possibilities: when a wide range of actions are considered to be ‘artistic’, then artistic/aesthetic value judgements are removed and consequently pressures to create something ‘good’ are withdrawn. With this perception of the arts, art-making becomes an egalitarian activity in that all can make music, draw, act or dance (61).

Play

Scholarly literature on play and recreation encompasses several traditions: sociology, psychology, biology, and tangentially, several others. The basic psychological purpose of play—pleasure—forms the foundation for understanding sociological perspectives of

play. Play constitutes a vital component of human nature; adults and children alike play because it engages emotions (Cohen, 1987; Gillin, 1914). Huizinga (1938:7-13) identifies five characteristics of play:

1. Play is voluntary; a free act.
2. Playing is stepping out of “real” life.
3. Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration; it is secluded and limited.
4. Play creates order; it is order.
5. Play is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it.

Another key feature of play is “fun”. While most people innately understand that play is fun, Vanderschuren (2010) maintained that empirical evidence exists to support this notion. He proposed that pleasure demonstrably constitutes a key component of play. Play and pleasure, Vanderschuren maintained, ought to be measured on a neurological level to increase understanding of what constitutes play and how it affects human interaction and psychology. His review of the literature identified a neurological component to the rewarding and pleasurable aspects of play.

Likewise, Ridge (2021) identified fun as a core aspect of play. He outlined “characteristic inputs” and “characteristic outputs” that accompany the state of having fun. Such inputs are:

- a. A perception that one’s environment is safe and a general sense of satiety/satisfaction
- b. A lack of anxiety
- c. Perception of some aspect of one’s environment as incongruous in some way, perhaps especially but not exclusively in seeing something novel in the mundane

Ridge’s list of outputs include:

- a. Enjoyment of the aspect of one’s environment that one finds incongruous, etc.

- b. A tendency to ‘lose oneself’ in the phenomenon, to lose track of time and more mundane matters
- c. Amusement, laughter, etc.
- d. The inhibition of more negative emotions
- e. Positive forms of arousal
- f. An increase in openness to one’s environment – a broadening of perspective which in turn may prime one for creativity (p. 408).

Fun does not necessarily need to contain every factor in these lists, but it must contain at least several.

Play serves numerous functions, enhances neurological processes, and leads to various positive outcomes for children and adults. Play helps to increase autonomy and freedom, yet at the same time, can be social (Ridge, 2021; Vanderschuren, 2010). Play is fun and aids in human development from childhood to adulthood (Gordon and Esbjörn-Hargens, 2007). On a developmental level, play helps humans explore their world, work with others, improve executive function, and create social ties. “It is a kind of pleasure which contributes, moreover, to activities which are biologically and socially useful, though not always as preparation directly for the activities of later life.” (Cohen, 1987:828). Play creates, expresses, and indeed, *is* culture (Huizinga, 1938; Masters, 2007). Children learn about their cultures and participate in creating culture through play; they also use play to learn how to become fully functioning humans. Play, universally understood by people of all ages, serves as a valuable communication tool. When children and adults play together, the transmission of culture occurs more easily. Balke (1997:355-360) stated:

In addition, work for many adults today is often abstract or highly technical, and it does not produce something a child would find tangible. Therefore, it is almost impossible for a child to learn about society from adults by using their activities as

a model for play. Visible and simple work processes have seemed to disappear. At carnival time and folk festivals, by contrast, children and adults act and play together, and use visible symbols and traditions brought down through generations. In such a play space, where people young and old relate to each other, stories of life and death may be reworked and expressed.

While play has many cognitive, emotional, social, and educational benefits, most scholars hold that play is a “free act” (Masters, 2007). Children and adults alike are intrinsically motivated to play (Yogman et al., 2018). Despite the voluntary nature of play and recreation, Sutton-Smith (1997) detailed how Western societies use play for specific educational purposes. The value of the creative process within the arts is frequently overlooked in educational settings, with more focus on explicit achievement goals. Adults manipulate children’s play to socialize children into becoming productive members of society. The transformation of play into structures with specific goals and outcomes often serves capitalist objectives. Certainly, structured “play” is now used to enhance educational, personal, social, and occupational goals. The widely used Montessori Method, for example, explicitly incorporates play and children’s individual interests to promote learning of everyday skills. This further blurs the sometimes ambiguous distinctions between play and work, at least in common understanding. Play thus serves instrumental purposes, even as it offers room for self-expression and bonding with others.

The military recognizes some of the external benefits of play for children. While play can be solitary, filled with intrinsic value and personally satisfying, the military creates play opportunities for children with specific objectives. To the military, play and art are useful as socializers for children, and as bonding mechanisms. Much of the

research presented by military arts programs for children focuses on some of the concrete ways children, and by extension, the family unit, are improved by involvement with art and play.

Art Within Capitalism

Within capitalism, the boundaries between art and work collide, tangle, and meld (Hauser, 1982). Art can both work and play simultaneously; or merely work; or merely play. The ways in which art is conceived of as a profession (particularly within structures similar to wage labor, or as seen in the self-employed artist) is distinct from many historic notions of art and artist. Prior to modern capitalist society, “formal” art and its creators were supported through patronages, royal courts, religious organizations, and other institutions and organizations. Church musicians, royal sculptors, painters employed by the wealthy, palace dancers, temple chanters, and more were supported as they “did” their art. The shift to modern capitalism transformed the perception of art and artist in myriad ways. The value societies placed on art shifted, and slowly, art became in many ways a luxury—merely non-profitable play; except for when it was profitable, at which point it became merely work.

Caillois (1961:45) commented on art as a profession in modern capitalist society, writing:

For professional boxers, bicycle riders, or actors, agon¹ or mimicry has ceased being a recreation intended as a relaxation from fatigue or a relief from the monotony of oppressive and exhausting work. It is their very work, necessary to their subsistence, a constant and absorbing activity, replete with obstacles and problems, from which they properly find relaxation by playing at a game to which they are not contracted.

NOTES: ¹Caillois outlined 4 categories of play: Agôn (competition), Alea (luck), Mimicry (simulation), and Ilinx (vertigo).

In capitalism, art is frequently understood in terms of secondary function—art serves a purpose beyond intrinsic value, human connection, fun, or expression. For children, this is manifested in discussions of the multiple ways art measurably improves children’s educational attainment. Foster and Jenkins (2017:399-443), studied the relationship between performing arts and music education and child development in a secondary data analysis. Their findings expanded upon Huizinga’s (1938). As they note, these analyses suggest that public discussions of the value of the arts cannot avoid the issue of “values” per se through a linkage to test scores and measures of a child’s achievement” (437).

This doesn’t imply that art doesn’t also serve important functions outside of itself. Rather, it can be difficult to discern where art ends and other phenomena begin. Art is valuable *because it is intrinsically valuable*, and also because it is innate, ageless, human, culture, connection, expression, joy (Bruscia, 1988). While Huizinga (1938:2) criticized studies that “start from the assumption that play must serve something which is not play,” sociological studies have outlined the many secondary benefits of play. Play helps form and serve communities, create culture, and allows humans to connect with themselves and others through their emotions (Masters, 2007; Gillin, 1914). Balke (1997) and Karkou and Glasman (2004) maintained artistic play is a natural way for children to build social ties. This research embraces that art is all of this at once, possibly existing as intrinsically valuable, profitable, and serving secondary purposes simultaneously. “The assumption that play must serve something which is not play” ignores that play simply

does serve things that aren't play. Play, art, and "things that aren't play" are so frequently the same, that to attempt to analyze them separately proves fruitless.

Challenges Experienced by Children of Military Service Members

Children of military service members face a variety of challenges. Various instabilities, military culture, and parental deployments often leave children with a host of psychological problems (Sogomonyan and Cooper, 2010).

Instability

Children in military families experience frequent disruptions to their daily lives (Kim, et al., 2019; Mmari, et al., 2010; de Pedro, et al., 2011). They may change schools frequently, leaving friends behind when their families move. Moving itself can contribute to a child's sense of instability, from living in a new house to adjusting to life in a new city, state, or even country. Any move can be stressful and destabilizing for a child, not to mention relatively frequent moves.

Even when children are not in the process of moving, the demands of military service on a parent can destabilize a household (Lieberman and Van Horn, 2013). Service members may arrive at and leave the house at unpredictable hours, experience sleep loss, work over weekends or holidays, and be unable to uphold commitments to their families due to unforeseen job duties. All of these challenges occur when the service member is at home and do not account for the effects of deployments. Deployments can be extended or shortened with little notice, scheduled phone or video-chatting sessions between deployed parents and children may be impossible or difficult, and letters between children and parents may be lost. The deployed parent's exposure to increased risks or

dangerous conditions can heighten children’s sense of fear and uncertainty (Mental Illness in Families, 2015.)

While such challenges are relatively common for low-income families and can also manifest in high-income families where parents work long hours or relocate and travel for their careers, parental military service poses a “triad” of challenges unique to the military. Children in military families:

...relocate with little choice as to location and duration at a much higher frequency than their civilian comparators, experience family separation frequently due to protracted training and deployments and live with the heightened awareness that the high risks associated with military service could result in physical or psychological injury or death (Cramm, et al., 2019).

When a parent returns from deployment, or any dangerous or stressful situation, they can exhibit changes in behavior, mental health challenges, and increased stress. Even the return of a previously deployed parent to the household can interrupt a child’s sense of normalcy. Parental mental health and stress, as well as parental role adjustment, can further exacerbate stresses and instability for children (Bóial et al., 2017).

Types of Instability Common for Military-Affiliated Children

Continuity, stability, and predictability are critical to children’s wellbeing. Discontinuity in children’s environments (environmental instability), strongly correlates with developmental adjustment in children (Ackerman et al., 1999; Adam & Chase-Lansdale, 2002). Different types of instabilities intersect to create long-lasting consequences for children; military-affiliated children experience these consequences with increased frequency (Merrick et al., 2018). These instabilities include family structure, residential, social, academic, and deployment-related challenges.

Family structure

Family structure, the ways in which families are organized and operate day-to-day, affects children's health and wellbeing. Changes in family structure present numerous challenges and significantly affect children of all ages in a variety of areas (Sylva et al, 2004; Kim, et al., 2019). While much of the current body of literature focuses on the effects of parental marital or relationship status, many of the challenges associated with these statuses overlap with the structural changes found in military families.

Family structure often shifts during a parent's military service. The most obvious has to do with deployment and distant duty stations. Deployments overwhelmingly have negative effects on children's quality of life (Gorman et al., 2010; James and Countryman, 2012; Flake et al, 2009). When a parent deploys, the structure of the child's family changes; similarly, when the deployed parent returns, the family again must adjust to new family patterns and structures (Kim et al., 2019; Mmari et al., 2010; de Pedro et al., 2011).

Bóial et al. (2017) found that military parents handled deployments in three separate phases: pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment. Families must adjust and make accommodations during all three phases (de Pedro et al., 2011). Parental attachment to children shifted before deployment. During deployment, the non-deployed parent increased their household duties and changed the ways they interacted with their children emotionally. They actively tried to maintain continuity in their children's lives and many reported growing closer to them. After deployment, the military parents

discussed “progressive restructuring,” and difficulties with reordering family routines and responsibilities (Bóial et al., 2017).

Parents must navigate these structural shifts within the family before, during, and after deployment with purpose. The maintenance of routines is critical for children during parental deployment (Pincus, et al. 2001). Lieberman and Van Horn (2013) also highlighted the importance of stability for children experiencing a parental deployment:

The importance of continuity and predictability of daily routines and enforcing behavioral expectations cannot be overstated. The caregiving parents may be too fatigued or feel so much sorrow for the child’s distress that they may relax their expectations for age-appropriate social behavior. This is a disservice for the child, who must receive continuous guidance toward socialization to maintain a healthy developmental course (p. 289).

Residential

Military families experience frequent, often very sudden, moves (Mmari et al, 2010; Clever and Segal, 2013). Such residential instability is correlated with worse academic and social outcomes for children when compared to children who experience lower rates of residential instability (Sandstrom and Huerta, 2013). A 2017 multi-branch survey of 5,650 individuals revealed the extent to which military families experience residential instability. Nearly 54 percent of respondents have moved in the last two years; 30 percent had experienced more than five military moves at the time of the survey (Kimball, 2017).

To reduce frequent moves, families sometimes come up with a compromise: living apart from the servicemember for extended periods of time. 43 percent of survey respondents reported having, at some point, lived apart from the servicemember rather than move to the servicemember’s new duty station. Even though such decisions may

reduce the number of times a child move, it might not always lead to a better situation for children, since changes and discontinuity in family structure also manifest as problematic instability for children.

Social

Researchers reported both positive and negative outcomes for children's social ties associated with parental military service. While children often struggle with making and sustaining friendships, as well as integrating themselves into new social situations, they may also benefit from the support systems and sense of unity that military-affiliated organizations provide. Military-affiliated schools and bases serve as support systems for children and youth, as well as their parents. When parents have strong social ties and feel integrated into their neighborhood, their children benefit from parenting that supports their autonomy, development, and learning (Hartis, 2014).

Even still, children in military families experience challenges with social relationships (Chandra et al., 2009; Kimball, 2018, Wooten et al., 2019). Some research suggests that military-affiliated children's social ties suffer due to residential instability; others suggest that children benefit from exposure to a range of people and learning to create new connections (Lyle, 2006). Either way, school support systems, such as extracurricular activities, enhance children's social lives (Strobino and Salvaterra, 2000; Astor et al, 2013). Supportive school and community environments help children execute social transitions, such as making new friends and coping with leaving old ones (Astor et al., 2013). The researchers also note the importance of accessible, flexible extra-curricular activities for helping children form social connections.

Academic

Children in military families experience instability in their educational lives (Mmari et al., 2010; Lucier-Greer et al., 2013; Lyle, 2006). Chandra et al., (2009) found that children in military families experience greater academic difficulties compared to children in civilian families. Lyle (2006) performed secondary data analysis using military-affiliated children's standardized test scores and found that their scores were negatively impacted by parental absence due to military service.

Lucier-Greer et al., (2014) also identified academic achievement as a critical area in which military youth experience increased risk. They studied the intersection of a variety of challenges present in the lives of adolescents and noted the compound effects within military youth populations. When the challenges of adolescence combine with the particular challenges that accompany military-affiliated childhood, the negative effects are heightened. Like other researchers, Lucier-Greer et al., (2014) found that children's academic performance is directly affected by the challenges related to parental military service.

Creating Stability

Children naturally seek to create stability and predictability in their lives using various strategies to compensate for stress in their family life, and employ various methods to cope with the stresses of military family life. Education, connectedness to peers, and military child-centered programs help children increase stability and continuity in their lives (Mmari et al., 2010). School measures and extracurricular activities all

appear to significantly improve children's sense of stability and wellbeing, connectedness to peers, and academic performance.

In a study of military-affiliated children, the interviewees reported that one of the biggest strains in their lives was frequent moving and moving's effects on their peer-connectedness (Mmari et al., 2010). Specific groups and activities for military-affiliated children increased their connectedness and mitigated some of the effects of frequent moving. The built-in peer groups that military-based activities provide for children appeared to increase children's social lives and helped maintain continuity. The military's investment in playful, artistic endeavors for children aims to support children's connection to their peers through the natural ways children engage with one another. Children enjoy play and build connections through playing.

Many researchers have focused on how the arts affect children's emotional states. Drake and Winner (2012), Dingle et al. (2017), and Ofra and Enju (2013) outlined numerous ways the arts help children regulate their emotions. Creative pursuits, particularly drawing, provide children with a means to manage their moods. In their research, Drake and Winner (2012) examined the effects of creativity and drawing on children's emotional regulation and focused on two different types of mood regulation in children: "venting" and "distraction". They provided children with the opportunity to draw and induced a negative mood by asking the children to imagine a disappointing event. Children's moods improved significantly—they used drawing as a distraction tool, rather than a venting tool. Similar results emerged in research with adults.

In other forms of engagement in artistic and creative activities, research indicated that the arts can increase emotional stability (Ofra and Enju, 2013). The researchers reported the ways in which dance helped improve emotional regulation in children. Their study found strong correlations between circle dancing and improvements in children's emotional stability and self-control.

Dingle et al (2017) found comparable results in a study with adults: "Choir singing and creative writing enhance emotion regulation in adults with chronic mental health conditions." After measuring people's experiences with choral singing and individual and interpersonal emotional regulation, they concluded that both mentally healthy adults and adults experiencing mental health challenges or disorders benefit from participation in arts-based groups.

When adults think back to their childhood arts experiences, they report multiple benefits arts participation provided them. Shira and Lev-Wiesel (2016) interviewed 20 adults about their childhood experiences with expressive arts group therapy (EAGT). The participants, 10 women and 10 men, reported that the therapy improved their wellbeing in a variety of ways: it improved their sense of trust in themselves and others, it created a warm, reassuring environment in which they felt safe to create and explore, and helped them learn to reach out to others.

Children's Physical, Mental, and Emotional Health During Parental Deployment

Entire families experience distress due to their relative's service in the military (Lester et al., 2013). Pincus et al. (2001) reported the time leading up to a deployment is frequently rife with conflict between service members and their spouse—leading to stress

for children who may feel inadequately cared for. Children's experiences of heightened stress and increased instability during the pre-deployment phase can cause regressive behaviors (inconsolable crying, apathy, and tantrums), and children feel less grounded. In some cases, pre-deployment conflicts between parents cause such feelings of instability that children feel increased fear that their serving parent may not return.

Instability related to parental deployment directly affects children's mental and physical health problems (Flake et al., 2009; Gorman et al., 2010; James and Countryman, 2012; Lieberman and Van Horn, 2013; Merrick et al., 2018; Sogomonyan and Cooper, 2010; Wooten et al., 2019). Lieberman and Van Horn (2013) and Wooten et al. (2019) found that children's medical diagnoses increase during parental deployment. Lieberman and Van Horn (2013) reported that diagnoses of behavioral disorders in children increased 18% and diagnoses of stress disorders increased 19%. Emotional instabilities such as anxiety, and mood, behavioral, and adjustment disorders presented frequently in children of deployed parents (James and Countryman, 2012; Gorman et al., 2010; Wooten et al., 2019). Physical health suffered, as well; children experiencing parental deployment had increased visits to medical professionals (Wooten et al., 2019).

Official diagnoses or referrals may underestimate the prevalence of mental health issues. Flake et al., (2009) and colleagues reported that one-third of children with a deployed parent were at "high-risk" for psychosocial issues. James and Countryman (2012) determined that children with military parents had abnormal amounts of aggression. They identified symptoms that commonly present in children in military families, including sleep problems, higher anxiety, declining grades in school, and higher

rates of child maltreatment. Their findings suggest that boys are more negatively affected than girls.

The Arts, Cognition, Mental Health, and Wellbeing

Participation in the arts and children's cognitive abilities.

Arts participation has been shown to improve children's cognitive abilities, according to research conducted by Posner et al (n.d.). Their paper, "How Arts Training Influences Cognition", focused on arts training and the development and strengthening of attention and focus. Focusing on a group of children and a control group, they used a variety of methods, including a questionnaire, in-person observation of tests designed to measure attention, and electroencephalograms (EEGs) to measure brain activity. They found that arts training improved children's attention spans; the EEG data showed that children who had received art training had attention networks that were similar to those of adults. These children also scored higher on intelligence tests when compared to the control group. The researchers also noted some differences in areas of the brain that help regulate emotions, corroborating the findings of Drake and Winner (2012), Dingle et al. (2017), and Ofra and Enju (2013). They concluded that arts training improves cognition in children. The strengthening of cognition benefits children across all areas of life and may help them gain the resiliency that they often need when growing up in a military family.

In addition to neural changes, positive behavioral changes have been found in children who participated in the arts. Hyde et al. (2009) studied 15 children over a period of 15 months and found statistically significant correlations between musical training and

cognitive and behavioral development. The researchers provided 15 children with private piano lessons over the course of the study; the control group, consisting of 16 children, received no musical training during the time of the study. They used deformation-based morphometry (DBM) to track the size of brain regions. The researchers had both groups of children perform a series of tests to measure motor skills before and after the study, in addition to measuring the different regions of their brains. They also administered tests in object assembly, block design, and vocabulary, and the Auditory Analysis Test.

At the end of the study, the children who had received musical training demonstrated behavioral and cognitive improvements. They improved their scores on the motor skills tests. Several regions of the brain showed an increase in greater relative voxel size, including regions of the brain associated with motor skills and auditory. The researchers concluded that musical training improves neuroplasticity in children and noted that musical training could be especially helpful for children with developmental disorders. Other research supports my conclusion that training in the arts can provide a range of cognitive and emotional benefits for children.

Habibi et al. (2018) drew further conclusions about the relationship between music training and children's cognitive abilities. They recruited 75 different 6 and 7 year old children from public schools and tracked them as they began either sports or music activities. They included a control group that did not participate in extracurricular activities. The authors noted substantial neurological improvements in the group of children with musical training, compared to the group of sports participants and the

control group. The authors concluded: “our findings already suggest that music training plays a significant role in childhood development at both behavioral and neural levels and that these findings concern children from disadvantaged backgrounds who would normally not have access to music instruction” (p. 80). Moreno and Farzan (2015) arrived at similar conclusions.

The arts and adolescent depression.

The arts can reduce depression in adolescents. Rahmania, Saeedb, and Aghilic (2016) presented their findings on the relationship between art, music, and teenage depression in their paper, “Integrating effect of art and music therapy on depression in adolescents.” They performed a controlled clinical trial with 24 adolescents who had been diagnosed with depression. The teenagers were divided into a control group and a group that received seven two-hour sessions of art and music therapy. The study showed that depression was significantly reduced in the adolescents who received treatment. The researchers stated, “On account of significant improvement of those adolescents who were subjected to art and music therapy, the present study implies that adoption of non-pharmaceutical interventions should be first considered in order to treat adolescents with the symptoms of depression.”

The arts not only help to prevent some of the consequences of having a parent serve, but they can actively help reduce mental health problems. Castillo-Perez, Gomez-Perez, Velasco, Perez-Campos, and Mayoral (2010) studied the effects of music therapy on mild to moderate depression. The researchers conducted a randomized clinical trial in adults with mild to moderate depression. Half of the group received music therapy and

the other half received psychotherapy for a total 50 minutes a day every day for eight weeks. At the end of the study, the group who had received music therapy showed fewer depressive symptoms than the group that had received psychotherapy. The researchers concluded that music could be a useful tool in enhancing mental health treatment. More research is needed to see if these results are replicated in children. However, this study still supports the idea of providing arts programs to military families as parental mental health so frequently impacts children's quality of life.

Karkou and Glasman (2004) noted that arts-based therapies are extensively used and effective. They remarked that the arts seem to have a particular way of bringing underlying issues to the surface. Art therapies are used to address a wide range of issues in children, including those with emotional or behavior issues, those at risk of social exclusion, and those experiencing crises or stress.

The arts and improvement of child wellbeing.

Multiple studies have outlined the effects of arts participation on children's wellbeing. Children experience improvements in wellbeing both as consumers of and participants in arts activities (Piscatelli, 2020). Arts engagement can improve children's self-esteem, which is associated with lifelong measures of wellbeing beginning in early childhood (Mak and Fancourt, 2019).

Art therapies, with an emphasis on creativity and play, bolstered children's sense of self and improved their sense of wellbeing (Moula, 2021). In this study, the researcher analyzed 62 children's engagement with a pilot study utilizing random controlled design. Arts-based therapies were imbedded into the children's education. The researcher then

analyzed the children's perceptions of these therapies on their wellbeing. Children who engaged in story-making and story-telling, drawings, puppetry, and songwriting conveyed an improved sense of wellbeing.

...children reflected on the positive feelings that they experienced and the positive impact on their well-being. They mentioned that the sessions made them happier, calmer, more relaxed and allowed them to find the potential in small objects, such as fabrics, leaves and recycling materials. In addition, children noted that they felt better able to take some distance from uncomfortable experiences and emotions, focusing more on what is going well in their lives.

Ennis and Tonkin (2018) reported similar findings in their study, “‘It’s like exercise for your soul’: how participation in youth arts activities contributes to young people’s wellbeing.” Using retrospective interviews, the researchers explored the mechanisms by which participation in organized youth arts activities, including drama, story development, script writing, rehearsals, performances, and direction improve young people’s sense of wellbeing. The researchers found improvements in social connectedness, confidence, sense of identity, and mental health. The arts helped children find community and have fun in a space where they felt a sense of freedom and safety.

Piscatelli (2020) investigated the relationship between children’s arts engagement and wellbeing through a series of surveys and focus groups. The study focused on 105 children ages 7-9 and found that children identify play and the arts as crucial components of their wellbeing. Children derive social, emotional, and physical benefits from arts engagement; arts also help children create a sense of identity. Furthermore, the children in this study were able to speak clearly about the positive aspects of their arts engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Methodological approach—grounded theory

I chose to use grounded theory in this research. Grounded theory, a methodological framework, aims to generate theory from data. Grounded theory methods developed within sociology, created and systematized by sociologists Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss. Glaser and Strauss presented grounded theory as a methodology to be used alongside “overemphasized” (at the time) deductive approaches, wherein the researcher develops hypotheses and tests them in relation to established theories. Grounded theory emerged as a methodological approach particularly suited to sociology, and the social sciences in general.

Most writing on sociological method has been concerned with how accurate facts can be obtained and how theory can thereby be more rigorously tested. In this book we address ourselves to the equally important enterprise of how the discovery of theory from data—systematically obtained and analyzed in social research—can be furthered. We believe that the discovery of theory from data—which we call grounded theory—is a major task confronting sociology today (Glaser and Strauss 1967:1).

Glaser and Strauss viewed grounded theory as a way for social scientists to avoid “opportunistic use of theories,” leading to more accurate findings and the development of new theory. They also emphasized its use as a sociological method; whereas other methods are utilized by researchers in other disciplines, grounded theory was developed by and for

sociologists for the purpose of generating sociological theory. The use of grounded theory has gained acceptance especially with ethnographic and quantitative studies and has moved beyond sociology into other disciplines.

My motivation for using grounded theory was based on my desire to understand the experiences of children and their perceptions of how participation in the arts has affected them. The lack of established theories related to my research topic informed my decision to use grounded theory for this project. I wanted to discover new information about military childhood, art, and wellbeing, as well as identify the interactions between them. Grounded theory, which enables the researcher to uncover and expand upon sociological phenomena and their specific mechanisms, was the obvious method for this project.

A core component of grounded theory, coding facilitates the transformation of raw data into theory and involves several phases (Holton, 2010). As codes and categories emerge during open coding, the researcher uses this information to refine and establish new codes (emergent coding). The constant comparative method of coding, created by Glaser and Strauss (1967), blends coding and analysis and expands upon the type of coding that exists purely to generate theory. They identified four stages of the constant comparative method: 1. Comparing incidents applicable to each category; 2. Integrating categories and their properties; 3. Delimiting the theory; and 4. Writing the theory.

Interviews

I conducted both ethnography and interviews during the course of this study. To gain more understanding about the role the arts play in the lives of children, I wished to both observe children actively engaged in artistic endeavors, as well listen to personal accounts. Interviews, with their ability to create in-depth knowledge, provided the opportunity to learn directly from people whose lived experiences are related to the research problem. Semi-structured interviews allowed me to learn specifics about children's experiences with military life, arts, culture, parenting, home life, school life, and stability; they also provided a space for me to learn from the participants more about ideas, structures, and phenomena that they may not have anticipated. Semi-structured interviews provide space for the exploration of concepts deemed important by the interview participant—crucial for the research process, since not all mechanisms are obvious to outsiders. I conducted interviews both in-person and over Zoom video chat. The interviews (14 in total) ranged in length from 12 to 45 minutes.

Interviewing both children and adults was crucial to gain an understanding of how childhood arts participation affects people throughout their lives. I wanted to relay an understanding of how children interpret their experiences, highlighting children's voices and experiences in their own words. Likewise, interviews with adults provided a space for them to retrospectively view their experiences and then interpret them through the lens of adulthood. I hoped that this project would provide context to previous research—lending authentic accounts from children through adults to existing datasets, numbers, and evaluations.

Observations

I believed that observations would lend context to the interview data. I reached out to the director of a children's military music program for permission to observe classes. I attended two separate children's choir rehearsals at a USO Center at a military base in Virginia. The rehearsals lasted approximately one hour each. I sat in the back of the room with the parents and observed while jotting notes. On one occasion, the parents were invited to make a recording along with the kids to send to a director who was out sick. I was invited to join in and did so: we practiced a song and a movement routine several times, then created a recording. The recording session and practice was boisterous, filled with laughter, and gave the children opportunities to implement their own creative ideas.

Sampling

I conducted convenience and snowball sampling for this project. I reached out to personal contacts to find interview participants. These participants then gave me the contact information for other potential participants. I also reached out to military arts programs in the area. The sample consisted of both children who live in military families, and adults who grew up in military families. I chose to interview people of all ages in order to gain a breadth of understanding about how military children perceive their situations across their lifetimes. All but one participant grew up with an active-duty parent; this participant had a parent who was a high-ranking member of the United States Army Reserves.

I wanted to analyze a range of perspectives and experiences, which is why I chose to interview both children and adults. All the participants had some degree of

involvement in the arts. I attempted to create a sample population with varying degrees of involvement in the arts so as not to skew the study by only interviewing people who are heavily involved in the arts (and therefore potentially more likely to find value in them). No restrictions with regards to race, class, sex, or gender applied. The study focuses on the experiences of children affiliated with the United States, so I only conducted research within that population. Limitations of this study included sample size, age range of sample population, potential issues with memory recall, and specific challenges due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Data analysis

I received consent (or assent when applicable) to record the interviews. After completing an interview, I transcribed the recordings. After field observations, I turned my jottings into field notes. I coded the transcriptions and field notes in open, line-by-line coding as well as focused coding. Utilizing the constant comparative method, I compared the line-by-line codes between one another, created focused codes, reformulated focused and open codes, and analyzed the focused codes to identify major themes. The emergent themes allowed me to create micro-level theories and conclusions about my data set, as well as expand upon the work of prior researchers.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Interview Participants

Name	Short Biography
Paige	Woman, 25. Father served in Coast Guard her entire life. Sister of Ryan and Joel.
Ryan	Man, 21. Father served in Coast Guard his entire life. Brother of Paige and Joel.
Ted	Man, mid-20s. Father served in Air Force until Ted was in middle school.
Joey	Boy, 9. Brother of Michael. Mother and father have both served in the Army his entire life and are still active duty.
Michael	Boy, 7. Brother of Joey. Mother and father have both served in the Army his entire life and are still active duty.
Phillip	Man, 20s. Father served in the Air Force until he was around 8 years old.
Bec	Woman, 30s. Father served in Marine Corps until she was approximately 8 years old.
Joel	Boy, 16. Father has served in Coast Guard his entire life. Brother of Paige and Ryan.
Alex	Boy, 5. Mother has served in the Army his entire life. Son of Julia.
Julia	Woman, 30s. Father served in the Army National Guard and Reserves her entire life.
Carly	Woman, 20s. Father has served in the Army her entire life.
Sophia	Woman, 20. Father has served in the Army her entire life.
Miles	Boy, 16. Father has served in the Army his entire life.
Jordan	Boy, 16. Father has served in the Army his entire life.

Parental Military Service as a Source of Challenges for Children

As outlined in the existing literature, the military leads to a variety of challenges in children's lives. All of the interviews explicitly discussed the challenges of military-childhood. The field notes from the rehearsals on base also contained references to these challenges. In several instances, these challenges interfered with the creation of a stable life; instability is a prominent feature in the lives of military children, and the interview participants in my study corroborated this. Deployments, separations, and irregular work schedules pose challenges for children both before and after such separations.

Paige's father served several decades in the Coast Guard. Her family was able to stay in one location, although they considered moving many times. To allow for the family to stay in one place, Paige's father deployed frequently and was away for long stints at a time. Although he served in the Coast Guard, which typically operates in the US, Paige's father's specific job required frequent international travel, often with limited access to communication devices. Paige recalled,

I had kind of an unusual child of a military parent experience in that instead of us moving my dad would be away longer, um, and he would...he would fly to the location where he was needed there and back every week instead of us moving. So, so on one hand, we didn't have to move as much. But on the other hand, my dad was gone more since he had much longer transportation. (Interview 1).

Miles expressed annoyance at his father's unpredictable work schedule:

"Sometimes it's frustrating when things pop up last second, or like this summer he has a (inaudible) so he can't really do anything over the summer break, which is unfortunate."

Most interviewees mentioned the difficulty of having a parent gone for long stretches of time and how such separations can affect the parent/child relationship.

Deployments change a child's relationship with both the deployed parent and the parent who remains at home. Participants detailed feeling sad, missing the deployed parent, and feeling disconnected from the deployed parent. They described changes in the relationship with the parent who remained at home, from how the parent handled extra stress during separations, and in some cases, how they relied on their children for emotional support and to ease loneliness.

Sophia (Interview 12) talked about the difficulties of deployment, saying "I'm lucky enough to really like the relationship I have with my dad, but in turn it also makes deployments really hard. Ryan (Interview 2) noted: "...which made it all the more sad when he would leave again, but again, we were fortunate enough that that didn't happen in close succession or happen very often." Paige echoed these thoughts: "it was definitely also harder on my family, like, I remember my mom would be really sad and sometimes my brothers and I would all have a sleepover in her room. She would be missing my dad a lot." (Interview 1).

Carly remembered her mother struggling during deployments and noted how that affected her home life.

What happened with my mom is she would get very sad and angry. She would sometimes take it out on us—not in an abusive way, just like in a "mom is angrier than normal and she's holding us to a higher standard than normal, and she's, like, asking more of us than normal." It makes sense, because she didn't have a partner to help her. That was the shift I saw. She was just angrier and sadder more of the time. So that came out on us a lot of the time. She definitely couldn't take it out on him because he was deployed (Interview 11).

Military separations and deployments change children's home lives and relationship with both the distant parent and the one remaining at home, yet further

challenges appear upon the return of a deployed or travelling parent. As Bóial et al. (2017) discussed, the re-integration of a parent back into family life after an extended period away can pose challenges. Sophia said:

I would say, I'm noticing more when looking back at the deployment, it's not the deployment itself, but when he came back. So, this most recent one was Europe, and I'm sure that quarantine was difficult for him, but he's not in the battlefield like he was with previous deployments. I think one that comes to mind was when he was deployed to Afghanistan, so at that time I was around 12. And when he came back, only now am I able to look back see there were things going on, that as a 12 year old I didn't realize. Having to readjust to being home.

Carly detailed other ways in which a deployed parent's return presented difficulties.

So, there is a weird thing...where you feel almost detached from your dad. I went through a thing where I was scared that he would be ashamed of me or not proud of me. He stops being this person you know and starts being this figure almost. It's not any fault of his or any fault of yours, it's just what happens. So for me I went through a period where I thought my dad would be ashamed of me, like ashamed I haven't done as well in school, ashamed I've gotten fat, ashamed I haven't done as well in sports. And I was doing fine in school, I was doing fine in sports, and I was doing fine with my weight. It doesn't matter. Because he's so removed from you, you like...you know you've changed in a year and you're scared that he's going to be ashamed of the person you've become. Which is totally ridiculous, because my dad is a very loving person.

Other challenges included an increase in responsibility. Paige, especially, felt that she had more responsibility and had to grow up faster than non-military children. She said, "As the oldest of four children I had a lot more responsibilities at home, especially once I started driving. I was...my mom was working, and I was needed to, um, get my brothers to all their after-school activities and sports practices when my dad was away for months at a time."

One of the most significant challenges military children encounter is frequent moving. Most participants noted that they moved frequently. Carly moved every single year of high school. Alex, at 5 years old, has never lived in a single location more than 1.5 years. Most military families move every three years, and this was the case for many study participants. Moving can be difficult for children, as they have to adjust to new schools, lose friends make new ones, learn to live in a new area, and deal with the added stress their parents experience.

Jordan noted that because his family moved so frequently, he has different friendship experiences than other children his age: “I get a little sad when people talk about how they’ve had a childhood friend for forever. I’ve never had that.” He also named losing friends and community as a challenge associated with frequent moving: “A lot of times, I feel like when I’m leaving a place...I’m leaving a community...the big part about moving is missing people rather than the act of moving.”

Ryan felt grateful that he did not experience many of the challenges other military families faced. He stated, “I think again his whole situation was very fortunate compared to most military families in that he, from what I know and what I understand, he was not going deep into combat zones and things like that, and he was relatively safe for the most part.” He acknowledged the difficulties military service often brings to families. Sophia’s parents related to one another and the children in such a way that the parental roles were consistent. She said “...it was always my mom at home to take care of us and she was the one who called the shots.” She noted that stayed the same whether her father was deployed or not.

Art as Play

The people I interviewed used art as play. Huizinga noted (1938; 158) noted that music and play were completely intertwined; their aesthetic elements overlapping and mingling in such ways that the relationship between them must stem from “some deep-rooted psychological reason”. Likewise, dance holds the same characteristics:

The connections between playing and dancing are so close that they hardly need illustrating. It is not that dancing has something of play in it or about it, rather that it is an integral part of play: the relationship is one of direct participation, almost of essential identity. Dancing is a particular and particularly perfect form of playing (Huizinga, 1938; 164-165).

While the “play factor” is less apparent in visual arts than other art forms, visual art nevertheless falls within the sphere of play: intrinsically motivated and connected to creativity. Hauser (1982) asserted “the authentic experience of art assumes a certain immediacy, an essentially spontaneous, uninhibited, unreflecting, sensual reaction to the impression made by the work” (465).

Consistent with the findings of Vanderschuren (2010), Ridge (2021), and other scholarly literature concerning play, the sample population engaged in art voluntarily, for fun, driven by emotions. Artistic play, in particular, served as a form of emotional release and expression for the sample population.

Many of the people I interviewed described art as a source of joy. Phillip, currently in his mid-thirties, grew up in a military family. His father served 22 years in the Air Force and retired when Phillip was about eight years old. Phillip lived on multiple military bases as a child and moved once or twice. He described himself as shy and discovered music through video games and movies. He listened to soundtracks and tried to play this music

on the keyboard in his house. As a younger child, he did not formally participate in the arts, yet found that art allowed him to entertain himself and, as he grew older, he joined a band and found a community there. He has both a bachelor and master's degree in music and currently works at a community college as a composer, band director, and music teacher.

Phillip described how he became involved in music and visual art as a child:

The biggest thing that I did for most of my life actually, and one thing that got me into music was actually video games. Since I didn't have a lot of friends I kind of gravitated towards that and I would kind of study and dissect the music of that before I even knew what I was doing. And so I would get soundtracks for, you know, movies and Star Wars and everything else, and I'd try to figure out how to play them on this little dinky, maybe twenty key piano/keyboard thing that I had. Um, but no formal anything really. As I grew up, I started dabbling in drawing... eventually, you know, I joined band and all of that, but during the military time in my youth-youth, it was more just absorbing music (Interview 6).

Joel, age 16, also draws for fun. His father serves in the Coast Guard and rotated between serving in the Reserves and serving on active duty for much of his childhood. For some of that time, his father commuted to work several hours away, coming home on weekends. This schedule allows for Joel's family to live in one place rather than moving frequently. Joel has also found a source of fun in his artmaking. When asked about his involvement, Joel said, "I could draw sometimes, I've been drawing lately." I asked him what he drew, and he responded, "Usually it's just like, characters from a show or like, I kind of just look up random things, whatever pops into my head. I just look up a picture and I try to draw it just because it's fun" (Interview 8).

Alex, a five-year-old boy, made explicit connections between play and visual art. His mother has served active duty in the Army his whole life. He remembers having moved many times, with assignments in Africa and the United States. His mother was

deployed twice; additionally, his mother has served two separate deployments. As his mother told me, since Alex was born, he has only lived in one location for about a year and a half to two years.

Alex is very artistically involved. He enjoys coloring, dancing, crafts, and music. He likes his art and music classes at school. His parents want him to take dance classes later. He appreciates learning new languages; he takes French classes and described visiting a family friend in a European country and learning words in that country's language. He noted that when his family visits, his friend can teach him more about the language. He showed me one of his paintings during an interview with his mother.

Interviewer: Well, Alex, what do you like to do for fun? When you're not in school what do you like to do?

Alex: I like to relax. And play games on Friday...Friday is game day!

Interviewer: Friday is game day—tell me about that!

Alex: We play (lists several games inaudibly) and also we play...that you can go on a board game, too. And...also, sometimes I color.

Alex described how he liked to draw aliens. I asked him to describe any other artistic activities he does: "I like dancing at the end of movies...Ben [younger brother] dances too. He's a cute dancer." "That sounds really cute! Well, how does dancing make you feel? You seem to like it." Alex replied, "Yes. I do like it."

Two young brothers, Joey (age 9) and Michael (age 7), brought coloring books to their interviews. Each one colored while the other was talking with me. Joey, age nine, told me he did art for fun, his eyes lighting up while talking about his activities.

Interviewer: So, what do you like to do for fun?

Joey: Art.

Interviewer: What kind of art do you do?

Joey: A lot of art.

Interviewer: A lot of art? Tell me about it!

Joey: Um, I have a lot of coloring books, I have a paint by sticker book, I have a lot of coloring supplies, I have, uh, paper. And that's all. And I have cardboard.

Interviewer: Do you do cardboard club, too?

Joey: Yeah, we both do cardboard club but we've got big boxes, um, in the garage too.

Further in the interview, I asked him what classes he liked in school:

Joey: Um, I really like art, I really like PE, and I really like music.

Interviewer: What do you do in your art classes in school?

Joey: A lot of things. Last Friday at art we got to stitch.

Interviewer: You got to stitch? What did you think of that?

Joey: (nods)

Interviewer: Yeah, you liked it?

Joey: It's really satisfying, all we do is (gestures like sewing)

Joey grinned broadly when I asked him to tell me more about his music class. I asked what he does in music class, and he smiled, saying, "We get to use the recorder. I really like the woodwinds".

Joey and Michael live in a dual-military household. Their parents have both been active duty in the Army their entire lives. Joey remembers having moved once so far; the family will be moving again within two years. The boys' mom, Heather, let me know that since they were born, she has deployed four times. Their father has also been away for up to four months at a time at least twice, as well as numerous multi-week trips.

Both children are involved in the arts. They enjoy drawing, painting, stickers, making cardboard creations, playing with LEGOs, and music. They put on plays together and with their friends, take music classes at school, and go to summer camps with more art and music lessons.

The theme of art as enjoyment permeated the interviews. “It was just something I loved doing” (Interview 3); “I really enjoyed it,” and “Whenever I had free time and stuff I’d play the cello for hours you know, sometimes just for fun” (Interview 2); “It’s very much an enjoyment” (Interview 6). “We also really like art. We’re a really artsy family” (Interview 12). “I know I’m happier when I participate in the arts. (Interview 11). “It’s just enjoyable for me” (Interview 13).

While the interviewees described engaging in artistic play almost on instinct, Julia, a woman in her mid-thirties, also depicted her experience joining a choir as a conscious decision to participate in a recreational artistic endeavor. Consistent with Huizinga’s assertions that play is both voluntary and distinct from ordinary life, Julia recalled choir as a space to explore her interests without outside pressures or in the service of some other objective:

I did two or three different singing programs when I was young. It kind of lagged when we got to (city) and, um, when I got to high school. I was always the person in middle and high school who was trying to get ready for the next step, so I finally ended up having the opportunity to have an actual elective, and not an elective that would help me prepare for the next step. So, I joined a choir in high school and did that my last three years. Just completely loved it (Interview 10).

Julia has served active duty in the Army for over twelve years. She also grew up in a military family, with a father who served actively in the Army and reserves in the Army National Guard her entire childhood. She told me that her parents have moved 32 different times since their marriage (although not all of this moving was due to his military service). He was gone relatively infrequently, mostly on weekends, and sometimes up to a month at a time. He did travel internationally while serving.

Julia enjoyed coloring, crafting, and choir as a child. She was involved in several choirs, both in and out of school as a child. She currently enjoys painting and crafting, and wishes she has more opportunities to sing. Art serves as a creative space outside of her everyday life where she can explore and have fun.

Play, art, and friendships.

A significant benefit of play and arts is the forging of friendships. Children who play together create their own communities and feel connected. When play takes the form of art, it transforms into a means of continuity for military children. When their families move, children can take their art with them, even though they leave their friends behind. Military arts programs can serve as a ready-made community for children, helping to create continuity and increase stability. Artistic play helps military children form and maintain friendships. Military childhood is often characterized by fleeting friendships, leading to difficulty sustaining relationship bonds. Carly, Sophia, and Jordan all noted that their attachment and friendship styles had been affected by their parent's military service. Says Jordan: "I don't keep ties from other places very well—unfortunately, because I do have a lot of friends there that I do really miss."

Carly explained this, saying:

I was really good at making friends fast, which was good. And I think my sister was too. We were all good at it. But none of us—well, maybe my parents—but I know me and my sister aren't good at maintaining friendships. We're good at making friendships but as far as keeping them for a long time, we're not very good at that because we're kind of like "Oh, well, I probably won't see you in a year anyway (Interview 11).

Sophia experienced a similar phenomenon:

This is the longest place I've stayed, is here in (Southern US state). And I saw that people had friendships ever since kindergarten and they grew up with friends, and I was like, "Oh, that's strange." So, I think for me, and ... This may not be the best quality, but it's really easy for me to let relationships go. 'Cause I can see with nuance how that turns out, and that, um, I can make new friends. So, in some situations it's good, like if a friendship were to fall out, I'm ok with letting it go, and in some situations it's bad, like if I accidentally, or if I just don't pursue conversation with work relationships anymore.

Jordan detailed the same:

People will consider me a friend more than I consider them a friend, because I'm so used to getting new acquaintances... the bar for becoming a friend to me is higher than it is for other people, and I don't know that's me or if that's influenced by moving and stuff.

However, the arts provide ways to make new friends easily, with peers that share common interests and goals. According to Miles, band is "a good way to make friends because everyone has a common interest." He also noted,

Band is, especially in high school, it's always the first people you meet because there's summer band before you even start school. So, you meet all kinds of people. And a lot of the times, your section—you're supposed to get to know them better immediately. So, it's a way to start to immediately get to know a place.

Jordan, as well, makes friends in band class: "...the close friend I was talking about, she plays trumpet. And my second close friend isn't in band, but he's in choir, so still music related. Most of the people I get along with are in band." Jordan also noted that his band friendships help him feel connected in other classes and at school in general:

There's another girl I know who plays clarinet... we work together in 8th period. We work together a lot because I don't know anybody else in that class. It's like, "You're in band, I'm in band. I'm going to work with you." A lot of the feelings of band are you get these people who are like-minded and interested in the same things as you, and you stick them in the band room and say, "have fun!"... Being part of a

section is cool because you're close with them, but being close with an entire band is just amazing. It's really good for you.

Interviewer: Is that how you find your people? When you've moved, is band where you're going to go?

Jordan: Yeah, since we got here where we live now, last year...I had a friend that I met through math class, but I started talking to him because we had a shared...[interest in] music. If he wasn't in band, we still would have gotten along fine, but I think we were more likely to interact because of band.

This sense of camaraderie persists throughout the school setting. Speaking of a school he went to on base when he lived overseas, Jordan said, "if you saw someone from the band in the hallway you'd (gestures a wave). It felt less like a band and more like a club."

Military children use the arts to make and sustain friendships. Even during the upheaval of moves, children find friendships through art. Sophia's father was active duty from the time she was an infant. She moved a lot, but mentioned that she was able to make friends through band class:

I think with any kind of big transition where I was in a new place, the first thing that I try to do is find friends...luckily it was set up for me where I was in band. That's usually how it went. When I was in elementary school and had to learn how to find friends...I think it just comes a lot more natural to kids. I tried to find where I fit in.

Sophia noted that one of the challenges of growing up in a military family was that she found it easy to let go of relationships. She finds herself sometime not putting effort into getting to know people. But, she says, the friendships she has that last were friends she made in arts classes:

Sophia: I think that the biggest thing that's come from being in band, specifically, is the relationships that I've made. So any of the people that I do keep in contact with were usually in band.

Interviewer: So those friendships would last through moves for you?

Sophia: Yeah.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Sophia: I'm sure a lot of it has to do with you're spending a lot of time with them. Especially when you start getting into high school band and you're doing a lot of your afternoon...where you would be dedicating that to yourself is now being dedicated to a common goal with all these other people. You all share that experience. I think it really just helps that you're spending a lot more time with them.

Miles experienced the same phenomenon: "Almost all of my friends are in band, actually. Even the people that I keep in touch with from previous moves, all of them are in band."

The arts connect children with their siblings, as well. Sophia bonded with her siblings through art, which was especially important for creating connection while her father was working and away a lot:

I'm sure with me it [arts involvement] got me a lot closer to my siblings. My older brother was the one who really got us into art. He was always really good at drawing, so he would have sessions with us where we would go through Pokémon and draw something. And I think around the same time, I wouldn't see a lot of my dad. He wasn't deployed, just his work schedule, I didn't get to see him a lot. But it didn't feel like I was lacking anything when I was able to spend time with my siblings (Interview 11).

Carly, likewise, used the arts to bond with her sister. She told me, "I did a lot of artsy things. I told my sister stories; I would make up stories at night.

Balke (1997) noted that play creates a common culture for children. During the interview with Joey, the following conversation took place. Heather, the boys' mom, asked Joey (in order to jog his memory/get him to open up more), "Do you guys like making plays?"

Joey: Yeah, when we have the Jacksons, over. We don't have enough people to make any kind of plays other than puppet shows, and, um, but with...

Michael: We have puppets.

Joey: Yeah, I do make puppets out of cut out paper taped to pencils.

Interviewer: Ok, who are the Jacksons?

Joey: Oh, they're our friends that like to make plays too.

Interviewer: Ok, so you like to make plays with your friends?

Joey: They got to come over last night. One of them said he wanted to come over to our house, and so. We didn't do any plays...we did jump on a lot of pillows. We got buried.

Michael: I buried all three of them.

This exchange demonstrates how art both functions as and facilitates play. The brothers create paper puppets together, put on plays, and bond with one another and other friends. These friendships are crucial for young children; the boys clearly love spending time with their friends and are very sad to leave them when they move. Both Joey and Michael listed leaving friends as a downside to moving; Joey mentioned "we make new friends" as a benefit to having military parents and moving.

I mentioned that the family would be moving again soon and asked how he felt about it. Joey answered, "Partially good, partially bad." When asked what was good about his upcoming move, he responded, "I'm gonna be moving right about the same time the new LEGOLAND opens. And we get to go see one of our, one of our friends." Likewise, Joel noted that friendships were an important part of his musical experience, commenting, "I have a lot of friends that do it [play music]" (Interview 8).

The Arts Facilitate Community and Continuity

The arts, as play, provide continuity for military children. Children take their play with them when they move; play is there when parents aren't. This theme emerged repeatedly across all the data sets. The arts themselves helped kids create connections and

interact with one another, the arts are a community in and of themselves, and connections are made in the process of making art.

Strong communities and support networks are crucial for children's feelings of stability. The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military, a project of Americans for the Arts, released a guide for military and community arts programming. The guide outlines key functions of arts programs within military communities:

The arts enhance the quality of life of individuals, communities, and the greater society. The arts are universal and often dubbed the "great equalizer"—anyone can participate in some form of artmaking or arts experience at any age or location, despite socioeconomic circumstance or background. When people engage in art, they change and grow, and by extension, their communities become more vital and connected.

My findings support this claim; community-making and the role arts play in creating continuity emerged as major themes during the coding process. Many of the study participants engaged in the arts on a regular basis, creating a sense of routine. Ted maintained that the structure of musical involvement helped him improve his life:

Interviewer: How did your involvement, in this case, in music, affect...I'm going to break it down further...affect your feelings?

Ted: When I was doing music it was just something that I did. So, I guess it served more as a routine, rather than a respite. Which, I guess a routine is its own respite.

Interviewer: So, it just made you happy?

Ted: Yeah! I probably wouldn't say...I wouldn't phrase it like that. It prevented me from feeling sad. Maybe like that. It didn't make me happy; structure kept me from being sad.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Can I ask you what you were staving off with that? Do you know?

Ted: I was a kid. We went to school, Monday nights were cello lessons, Tuesday was youth orchestra rehearsal....it was my life. It was a routine. And I enjoyed doing it, so (Interview 3).

Miles noted that the arts have played a continuous role in his life, and in the life of his family: “There’s almost always music in my house, ’cause I play, my brother plays, my mom can play and sing sometimes...Music has always been something that’s central to my life.”

Miles’ brother, Jordan, talked about the regularity with which he engages in music, both at home and in school. He describes his arts engagement as something that can be a seamless part of life—it isn’t always structured, yet the engagement in art itself can help provide structure and routine. Arts engagement is merely a part of life, something that he can turn to during his day.

I’ve been listening to a lot of violin concertos...I do a lot outside of school. I spend a lot of time doing score study when I’m just bored at my house. I’ll get out a piece of music that I’m having trouble with and finger notes while I’m just sitting there. Or I’ll look at music that I haven’t looked at, I’ll search something up and look for a piano arrangement of it and just look through the notes, look at the fingerings. A good chunk of my time is...not necessarily devoted to music but influenced or affected by music.

The sense of routine and continuity that the arts lend to military children is invaluable in the maintenance of a sense of wellbeing. A child’s location, friend group, school, and family structure may change frequently, but arts engagement can remain the same no matter what else may be happening in the child’s life. Children can engage in the arts casually, at home (wherever home may be at the time), at school, alone or with siblings. A child’s play can relocate with them, creating a stable sense of self.

Julia recalled how much she enjoyed a music program and how she wished that the military itself would facilitate continuity between children’s programs. She said,

I was really big into music all growing up. My mom got me into this thing called (redacted) when we were in (state) and I just loved it, and it was one of the few things that she was able to kind of...it was really hard for us moving around a lot. I wish they had more...I don't know how they would do it but. I'm sure with military bases it would be easier, too, like continuity between programs because it was really hard for my mom to find programs that were similar or the same or I would easily transition into.

When I asked her if she would have benefited from specific military music programs, she stated "I think it would. I think it would really help." (Interview 10).

Carly had access to a wide variety of military arts programs. She spoke fondly of the military arts programs she participated in:

We had art classes on base. I would attend those. Like painting and drawing classes...the art class I attended was done by the MWR program. The theater program was also done by MWR. Do you know what that is? Morale, welfare, and recreation. So, the theater program was done through the military. It was actually really cool. The theater program in Europe had a competition kind of like the Tony awards, where these judges would go through and see "ok, so these are the Army plays in Germany, and here are the Army plays in Italy." I think it was all armed services. And they would actually give out awards. I actually won one at one point for stage management, so that was fun. So, most of it was government-provided I would say.

She noted that she was in theater "a ton" during all her father's deployments, and that she took choir and fine art classes on base. I asked what specifically she enjoyed about the program, and she mentioned:

Well, it was just a fun event. Like I said, judges would come around and judge your theater production and they would give out awards at the end of the season. And you'd get awards for like, best actress, best stage manager, best production, best director. It was televised--do you know what AFN is? Armed Forces Network. Basically, it was like English TV in Germany or Italy. It was put on by the Army or whatever military, DoD, I don't know. And they would have English speaking shows, and they would televise this event on AFN. So, when I won, my name was on TV.

It seems that such military arts programs served to create a sense of community between branches and provide English-language entertainment for people stationed outside of the United States. Budget cuts, unfortunately dissolved that program, according to Carly: “I was really sad when we had budget cuts and that one actually went away.”

Sophia had access to a variety of activities and programs at one of the military installations she lived on as a child. None of them were specifically arts-related, but she mentioned that she really enjoyed these programs, which included swimming, cooking, and ice skating classes.

The arts also provide a place for children to belong no matter where they live. According to Jordan, “It gives you that sense of community, you feel like you belong somewhere.” The military music program where I conducted observations upheld providing and creating community as program goals. The on-base rehearsals took place at the USO Center, a community gathering place with internet access, places to lounge, places to buy and eat food, and a variety of meeting rooms. One of the rehearsal leaders, a veteran named Brian, explicitly stated, “We’ll get closer, we’ll get stronger. For those of us in off-base housing, we’re trying to help them realize that we’re all in this group together.”

Military children emphasized the importance of community and connection in their childhoods. Paige found a network of support through her involvement in the arts as a child. Paige’s father served several decades in the Coast Guard. Her family was able to stay in one location, although they considered moving many times. In order to allow for

the family to stay in one place, Paige's father deployed frequently and was away for long stints at a time. Although he served in the Coast Guard, which typically operates in the US, Paige's father's specific job required frequent international travel, often with limited access to communication devices. Paige recalled,

I had kind of an unusual child of a military parent experience in that instead of us moving my dad would be away longer, um, and he would...he would fly to the location where he was needed there and back every week instead of us moving. So, so on one hand, we didn't have to move as much. But on the other hand, my dad was gone more since he had much longer transportation. (Interview 1).

As previous research has found, military life can sometimes consume parents' attention and time. The arts provide children in military families with connections, support, and community. In her interview, Paige said "[the arts] also provided me with positive influences in the form of teachers and friends, and I would not have the support network that I had growing up had I not met people through the music activities." Ryan, age 21, also noted that art helped him when his home life felt "weird", such as his parents being gone: "I'd play it for a couple hours when I had practice then I'd come home, usually to like, a one-parent home when my dad was gone" (Interview 2).

Ryan's father served both active duty and in the reserves. Even while a reserve servicemember, he was regularly called in, and spent significant time away from home training and working. He spent months at a time away from home, with an unpredictable schedule. Ryan recalled, "he got called back to active duty several times randomly throughout my whole life... he was, like, frequently traveling around so when he was called to active duty, like, he wasn't really around which kind of sucked." Despite his

parents' work schedules, Ryan used music to feel connected and to ground himself. He said,

I would frequently...I would practice a lot of the times when I was home alone, so when I'd come home from school and my parents were gone, or when I'd come home from practice and my mom was gone, a lot of the time I spent practicing was by myself and I would specifically do it when people were gone because it made me feel like I was like, doing something, like I wasn't alone. (Interview 2).

Although their schedules frequently leave them with less time to socialize, parents also create connections through their children's involvement in the arts. Parents talked to one another before and after rehearsals/lessons at the church, at the USO Center, and at the studio. They were involved and engaged in what happened during rehearsals and made connections with the directors and teachers. Kim, one of the choir directors, is a military spouse and has children of her own. She enjoys making a difference in the community by taking on a leadership role in the choir program. As Harits (2014) noted, children benefit from socially-connected parents in myriad ways, from having adult role models other than teachers and parents, to witnessing healthy adult friendships. Parents with strong neighborhood and community networks are better able to support and parent their children (Hartis, 2014). As Luhmann (2000) maintained, art fosters communication between people—art *is* communication. In the military community, the arts provide ready-made social networks for both children and adults in. From art classes to choirs, the arts build community, foster relationships, and strengthen social connectedness for military children.

The Arts as a Safe Space: Emotions and Individuality

Past research has found strong links between artistic involvement and emotions (emotional regulation, creation of positive emotions, stress release, etc.). Similarly, the subjects in my study identified the arts as a safe space or haven, where they could release negative emotions, cultivate positive ones, express their individuality, and process daily life. The use of art and play in therapy to create safe spaces is well-documented; my research adds to this by suggesting that the arts themselves function as a safe space. The interviewees identified both public and private arts involvement as a safe space, and that, furthermore, even young children are aware that art provides a space to be themselves. The people I spoke with utilized the arts to express their individuality; to explore; to construct and strengthen their sense of self.

Paige emphasized that the arts were “a great outlet for expression...I felt safe expressing myself” (Interview 1). Ryan claimed, “playing the cello allowed me to cope with my dad being gone a lot” and “playing the cello acted as a very good kind of release from coming home to kind of like a-a weird home dynamic.” He also stated,

Whenever I had free time and stuff I’d play the cello for hours, you know, sometimes just for fun, sometimes because I needed to practice. But I would argue that that probably had a very significant role on my mental health and that, you know, that it prevented me from fixating on certain things, that, there were clearly a lot of things going on around me that could have grabbed my attention and negatively impacted me like I’m sure happens to a lot of people, um, but I would say playing the cello really allowed me to avoid that. Because it was another release (Interview 2).

I asked Julia, “Was there anything specific that you enjoyed about music other than you just liked it? Was there anything you got out of it?” She noted that music classes allowed her to have fun, express her individuality, and served as a haven:

I also think that it was kind of nice to be...for it to be just for me. Um, my sister wasn't really into choir and so...it was just...I was the only one who was doing it. It was where I got to go, the instructor was just my instructor, so it was a place kind of like a haven just for me where I could go and have fun (Interview 10).

As an adult, Julia still uses the arts for stress regulation.

I got diagnosed with something last year, completely unexpectedly after I had my little boy and I have really had to turn to art as a means to regulate my stress. And so that's been really interesting to me. I haven't been able to do it with singing as much, which is unfortunate, but with Covid and things it's a little bit challenging to get together in a group and sing (laughs). But I have been getting more into painting and I've always loved to craft, and so (I'm in my crazy, messy craft room right now actually). But, so in terms of impact, it's really been something that I've been able to turn to use as a way of regulating stress and having some me time.

Miles also uses the arts to relax:

I'll hear a song and I'll go, "ooh, that's a cool song" and I'll learn it on bassoon or learn it on piano or whatever...It's something that I can sit down and relax and not have to worry about anything else.

Sophia notes the arts serve as a means of expression for her, both as a child and adult.

I know that for people arts are just a really good way of expressing a lot of emotions or thoughts...definitely in the art sense I was able to get into that...if I missed my dad while he was deployed in Afghanistan, there was a song that reminded me of him. I was able to listen to that.

As an adult she still finds an emotional outlet in art: "I noticed that if I just get all of my frustrations out, like if I'm playing piano and sing a song about it, and I just let myself sing that song, I feel better." She also noted that "All of my siblings draw or do some kind of outlet that revolves around art, music, comedy, script writing, directing." (Interview 11).

Miles detailed the benefits of music on his emotions, and as an emotional outlet: "Music has always made me feel better. If I'm upset, I can go play music or write music

or listen to it, even, and it just...it makes me happy. It takes my mind off anything that's frustrating me."

Jordan stated that the arts allowed him to create his own identity and express his individuality:

He [Jordan's father] will always outclass me in being able to put stuff together. I want the feeling of having an in-depth knowledge like that, but I don't want the same in-depth knowledge as he does. I want something else to be kind of my thing. If he wants to be like, "I did this at work, look at this." that's cool, and I'll listen. But I also want to be able to be like "I'm listening to this piece, it's super beautiful." ...Yeah, it's my thing.

Jordan plays several instruments, but even when he doesn't have the time or ability to play himself, listening to music provides emotional release: "It's very calming. It's something I enjoy without having to do much work. So, I can relax while still getting the benefit of the music. Listening to music has a very positive effect for me."

He also uses music specifically for emotional regulation:

Music can be calm; it can be energetic as well. If you're frustrated, you can listen to something that's quick and angry. But if you're just ready to calm down, you just want to let it all go, you can listen to maybe something like on the sadder side, but that's slow, peaceful. Music is really good to help if you're on the verge of tears. If you want to pick yourself up, there's plenty of music out there to do that, or if you just want to let it all out you can do that as well. Music can give you anything you need it to...really any music that lets you be able to experience a certain emotion or help you when you're experiencing it without the music involved, I think that's important.

The arts as a space for emotional release is especially meaningful within the context of military culture. Three interviewees explicitly characterized the military as having a "hypermasculine" culture. They cited this culture as both a source of difficulty for themselves and as a reason the arts may not play prominent roles in many military

children's lives. According to Paige, "I would say military bases and the military...they push STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] so hard and there's definitely a negative connotation against music and the arts. *Especially* for males, so I, so I worry about, um, that families, especially young boys, if they do take dance or music or arts classes, I worry about social repercussions" (Interview 1). Ryan echoed this sentiment: "I feel like a lot of it is like, very brute force, military, sports, working out, like stuff like that is what I attribute to a military base" (Interview 2). Similarly, Ted recalled,

When I felt bad—for whatever reason—the fact that my dad was in the military and that kind of hypermasculine "we don't talk about our feelings" kind of thing definitely didn't help. Not that he was like "I don't want to hear you," but maybe lack of empathy is what I felt. Yeah, I think that would be the best way to describe it (Interview 3).

Jordan noted that, while he values his father's work within the military, he enjoys art more. He contrasted the type of work that he believes characterizes the military with what he enjoys doing, and theorized that military children in particular are drawn to art:

The military is a hands-on job. I like things that are kind of...they require me to...I'm not very good at art, but I love it! Like, we've gone to art museums and I'll just look at paintings. A lot of times I don't read the text about what it's about. I want to know what *I* think it's about. That's what I'm interested in. That could just be me because my father is in maintenance, but if that is something that you've found [I had mentioned that other military kids were also heavily involved in the arts], that could be worth looking into is the fact that it's not tangible. It's something that requires you to process it purely mentally and emotionally. You can't "work out" music.

Phillip says he did not experience push-back from his parents or within military culture in general for his involvement in the arts. He notes that he was both artistically inclined and actively engaged in sports.

Interviewer: Every single person I've talked to so far as mentioned, quote, a "hypermasculine" culture within the military and arts were not encouraged all the time. It wasn't actively discouraged all the time, in some cases, but there was a culture that made people feel weird about being as artistic as they were. Did you experience that in your household?

Phillip: No. No, um once I started getting into music stuff my parents were very supportive.

Interviewer: That's wonderful. So, there was nothing like that?

Phillip: No, their big thing was they just wanted me to be happy. Which, again, I'm very fortunate for that. But no, I never got that sense and, I mean, growing up, since I wasn't formally doing anything musical and mostly doing sports I guess I kind of fell into that more masculine thing naturally, and I kept doing music and sports both once I started. But once I decided to pursue it as more than just a...hobby or whatever, they were very supportive.

Interviewer: And that extended through college and getting your degrees?

Phillip: Yep.

Alex, even at age five, identified art class as a place to be a little bit more individualistic. Like many young children, he enjoyed the freedom within art classes. Describing his art class at school, he said, "I like you can do whatever you want sometimes. You can switch what table you want, but...my teachers...there's a timer...we have to switch when the timer goes off. At the tables."

Alex mentioned turning to art when his mother is gone:

Interviewer: What kind of activities do you do when your mommy's gone?

Alex: I sometimes color. I sometimes play in my bed.

It appeared that Alex's parents also encouraged Alex to play and create art during deployments. Julia, Alex's mother, reminded Alex of this during our conversation about his mom's deployments: "Daddy lets you play with Play-Doh a lot more when I'm not around, huh?"

The teachers and directors at the field site also emphasized the emotional benefits of music. Brian said, “Music is so awesome, it can change your entire day” (Field Notes 2). The smiles and laughter that echoed throughout rehearsals and the studio support this theme.

The interviewees identified art as a safe space in reflection and when referring to their current selves. Artistic involvement served as a haven, allowing people to experience, process, and sometimes ignore, their emotions. While much of the emotional functions of art were identified retrospectively, several adults noted that, as children, they purposefully used art to cope with stress, deal with uncertainty, and create structure. For children in military families, where family, residential, and academic life is frequently erratic, the arts create much-needed structure and stability.

Arts as a Service to Others

Particularly in the rehearsals at the military base, the theme of music as a service to others emerged. I focused on this theme because it reveals so much about what the arts mean to the military community. The first rehearsal at the base was permeated with references to music as a service to others. Brian and Kim (choir directors) referenced this theme throughout the rehearsal: “You’re here for your friends. When you think of your friends, maybe in military school—you’re here for all those people who couldn’t be here.” “When it’s Christmas time, you want to be home. And a lot of people, especially in our military community, can’t be there. We sing Christmas carols and bring that comfort to people.” (Observation 1).

During one of the rehearsals, another instructor was out sick. Kim asked the children to make a video of themselves singing to help their usual director to feel better. They spent time and effort recording several “takes” to send to the instructor, emphasizing that they were excited to help her feel better soon. Yet again, music was conceptualized as a service to other people.

The children themselves picked up on this theme. At the end of the rehearsal, Brian asked for a volunteer to close the evening with a statement. A boy volunteered immediately, stood before the group, and said, “Thank you all for coming. You could have been anywhere. Home, sleeping, anywhere. Thank you for being here.” (Observation 2). Joel noted that he wanted to continue playing music in his high school because “...I should finish up, I think, my high school career in band because I’m good enough to the point where I can be really useful” (Interview 8).

Jordan views music-making as a way to help other people. He told me, “When I play, I want to be able to have the effect that music has on me. I want to give that to other people. I think it’s super cool and I think it’s something worth sharing.”

This sense of sacrifice and service was present throughout my interactions with military-affiliated people. The sense of responsibility, sacrificial focus on others, and service-oriented environment is an effective way for kids to create stability. In thinking of improving the lives of others, they improve themselves.

Parental Engagement in Children's Lives

Interviewees described parental engagement in their artistic endeavors. I also observed parents of younger children demonstrating interest in and active engagement

with their children's art. Goodall (2013) distinguished parental engagement from parental involvement, defining it as "parents' engagement in their children's lives to influence the children's overall actions" (133). Parental engagement with children's activities, and lives, including artistic activities, positively affects children's development, physical and mental health, and socioemotional development (Baker et al., 2018).

Balke (1997:355-360) noted that the arts, as a form of play, "establish a point of contact between adults and children". Adding to Balke's (1997) research, my study found that the arts facilitated parental involvement in the lives of the people I spoke with. Parents engage with their children while they play with clay, dance, and practice instruments. They attend rehearsals and classes where they connect with other military families, strengthening their social networks. Many parents stayed for the entirety of the choir rehearsals at the USO Center. They chatted quietly with one another, sang along in the rehearsals, and helped out when needed. The arts program Bec runs provides opportunities specifically designed to bring military families together over art, with workshops for the whole family, as well as events and "open studios" for service members and veterans to connect with one another while engaging in their individual artistic pursuits.

Paige told me "I came from a musical family and so my mom was my first violin teacher" (Interview 1). Julia and her mother performed in a choir every year at Christmas, and as a mother now, Julia ensures that her son Alex has plenty of art supplies to play with, in addition to enrolling him in classes and encouraging him to be creative. Phillip recalled his parents being "very supportive" of his artistic endeavors. Joel said his parents

encourage him in academics and in art; that “they encourage me more than they’re demanding...they just want me to do my best” (Interview 8). Carly’s mother “would help bring in teachers if we needed them. She would help organize events like recitals and stuff, where we sang and stuff like that” (Interview 11). She also noted that military arts programs required parental involvement, and that parents frequently worked to make sure programs ran smoothly.

Ryan discussed being grateful for his mother’s involvement in his music lessons.

Looking back on it, it was all a very positive experience and I’m very glad that I did it. So, I wouldn’t say that I was negatively impacted by my mom forcing me to do it, um, and I’m actually glad that she did because now I have a cello again and I’m joining a music ensemble next semester, so, all in all, I think that’s good. (Interview 2).

While Ryan described being “forced” to practice music as he got older, he also played on his own for fun throughout his childhood. He says his music training still provides him with enjoyment and social connection. Sophia detailed a similar experience:

My mom had it so where all of us had to take band for a year. Our neighbor was actually the band director and really good friends with my mom and she was a bassoon player. My mom’s immediate thought was scholarships. And so she was like, “Sophia, I think you’d be really good on bassoon,” and she got her band director in cahoots and was like, “get her on bassoon.” So I just stuck with it. I didn’t like it because it’s really difficult, but at some point something clicked and I’ve just stuck with it since.

The people in this study all appeared to have engaged parents who encourage/d and support/ed them in their artistic and academic pursuits.

During my interviews with children, I observed how parents interacted with their child. The children all engaged with some form of art during the course of the interviews, and the parents encouraged this. Julia praised Alex when he showed me his artwork. Joey

and Michael each brought coloring to their interviews, and Michael brought LEGO figurines. Heather urged both boys to focus on coloring and to be quiet during the other's interview. After Joey and Michael's interviews, I spoke with Heather to get more background information, during which time the kids played with one another and colored some more. At one point, Michael made a panda figurine out of LEGOs. He held it up to show his brother: "Oh my gosh, Joey, look what I've got!" I admired the panda and said, "Cute! How did you get into LEGOs?" Joey answered with, "Duplo. We started building Duplo." (Note: I found this definition of Duplo online: *Duplo bricks are twice the length, height, and width of traditional Lego bricks, making them easier to handle and less likely to be swallowed by younger children. Despite their size, they are still compatible with traditional Lego bricks.*) Heather chimed in and asked "What's the other reason you really like LEGO? Who else really likes LEGO?" "Oh! Dad!" Heather explained to me that her sons bonded with their dad over LEGOs.

Parental engagement, as observed in rehearsals and discussed in interviews, can enhance children's feelings of stability. When children have parents who actively engage with them, they feel supported and connected—which is especially for children in military families.

Arts Improving Wellbeing—Retrospective

Most of the adults in this study looked back at their arts participation and drew connections between art, military family life, and mental health. In retrospect, they identified art as improving their mental health, or at least helping them manage mental health struggles. This echoes the findings of Shira and Lev-Wiesel (2016), who also

reported that adults reflect on their arts involvement in childhood as improving their mental health.

Several people, including Ryan and Paige, noted that art improved their mental health. Ryan explained how playing music affected his mental health:

I would argue that that probably had a very significant role on my mental health and that, you know, that it prevented me from fixating on certain things, that, there were clearly a lot of things going on around me that could have grabbed my attention and negatively impacted me like I'm sure happens to a lot of people, um, but I would say playing the cello really allowed me to avoid that

He mentioned that while he didn't believe that he had any mental health struggles directly related to his father's service, "indirectly, I imagine there's plenty of mental health impacts of like, your father being gone a lot of the time. I can tell you that playing the cello allowed me to cope with my dad being gone a lot." (Interview 2). Paige, on the other hand, directly attributed her self-identified "poor mental health" to her father's military service. When asked, "were any of your mental health problems caused or exacerbated by having a parent serve?" she answered with a definitive "absolutely". She did not wish to elaborate and we moved our conversation along, as it was clear she was uncomfortable discussing the topic. However, like Ryan, she found that art improved her mental health.

Ted also mentioned struggling with mental health growing up: "I don't want to use the words 'had problems' but I don't know if that's because they weren't there or...I didn't have the skills or words..." He attributed some of his mental health struggles to his father's service and specifically to military culture:

When I felt bad for whatever reason—the fact that my dad was in the military and that kind of hypermasculine ‘we don't talk about our feelings’ kind of thing definitely didn't help. Not that he was like ‘I don't want to hear you’, but. Maybe lack of empathy is what I felt. Yeah I think that would be the best way to describe it. Not that my dad needs empathy to be like, “Yo, you got an F” but...it was just like, that sort of...when he was talking to me about grades and school it was...I'll say that I definitely felt like he was pointing out the problem and not, like, helping. (Interview 3).

Ted appreciated the structure and routine that involvement in the arts brought to his life. He identified this structure as a “respite” and noted that, while his efforts were mostly subconscious, looking back he always prioritized maintaining good mental health.

Phillip described art as both contributing to and improving his mental health struggles. A self-identified perfectionist, he described playing music as “very much an enjoyment, but it's also very much a frustration. And that's kind of inherent in the perfectionism...there's always a pressure to do things perfectly, even when you don't need to.” Recently diagnosed with obsessive compulsive disorder (which he described as “a fancy way of saying perfectionism), Phillip claimed that one of the reasons he excels in music was due to his perfectionism. “You kind of have to have it [perfectionism]”, he said about his master's degree in music. I asked him “Does music help with that? Or does it make it worse?” Phillip replied, laughing, “I think the best answer to that is yes.”

Sample Population and Achievement

The theme “high achieving” emerged in the open coding frequently enough to warrant at least a short discussion. Most of the interviewees appeared to be very high achieving. Academically, artistically, professionally, and otherwise, the people I spoke with had many accomplishments. My research suggests that kids with arts backgrounds

succeed at similar or greater levels than their peers, which contradicts expectations given the challenges of military upbringing. Childhood arts participation, combined with unique elements of military childhood, seem to produce professionally and personally successful adults, as well as engaged, inquisitive children.

Sophia spoke about this directly, saying “according to my mom I’m a bit of an over-achiever.” And “I was in talented and gifted” [in school]. Carly valued arts involvement, in part, for its ability to strengthen intelligence: “I think it made me smarter, for one thing. I think I can see patterns and things quickly. Like, patterns in media or patterns in art or patterns in other people.” She also described enjoying the arts as means to create something valuable, noting that her family prioritized this:

Carly: I feel like it makes you feel productive, which is always a good feeling. Yeah, it makes you feel productive, and it makes you feel like you made something of value. So, like, you might be doing work on an Excel spreadsheet, but even you and I know the computer could probably make an Excel spreadsheet faster and more accurately. But like, if you make something creatively you feel maybe like you were the only person who could have made that.

Interviewer: So making something of value. Is that something that your family emphasized?

Carly: Yeah, I’d say so.

Jordan, at 15 years old, observed a phenomenon within the military kids he knows and arts participation. He told me:

I feel like the military people that I know that are in a fine art...it’s one of their...if there’s a kid that’s super good at a fine art and it’s their favorite thing, especially if they’re like “my favorite class is this fine art class” at least 50 percent of the time I’ve found that they’re military kids. I don’t know if it has any relevance or it’s connected or coincidental, but it’s more common to meet those military kids than non-military kids. We just find each other. I don’t know if it’s that or if it actually is that military kids just enjoy fine arts more.

I asked him if he had any hypothesis as to why this occurred. He replied:

If I had to bet, I'm going to say that the military seems to be...it's probably different for other military families but my dad is a maintenance officer, so military feels like a very hands-on job. Part of me not wanting to do the military is I've already experienced that through him.

Miles and Jordan attended a school on base when they lived overseas. They noted that it was a small school, but that the music program was particularly advanced.

According to Jordan:

The kids played more difficult music than they had to. I think we played more difficult music than we had to, given that we were first- and second-year students. The second-year music, I suppose, was easier than most second years, but at the time we were 5th graders, not your standard 6th or 7th grade for being in the second year of music.

Of course, this example is only from one school. I do not know if this phenomenon would be found in other schools; however, it is interesting that the advanced level of this on-base school's music program was noteworthy enough for Jordan to mention.

The adults I spoke with all had college educations. Phillip, Julia, Paige, and Bec had master's degrees. Sophia is currently studying music in college. Cabrera, Peralta, and Kurban (2018) echoed these findings. They found that despite the challenges that accompany military family life, military children obtain college-readiness milestones at rates similar to civilian children. They hypothesize that the military provides structural support and access to education that enable children to achieve educational goals. Goodall (2013) noted that parental engagement in children's lives lead to greater achievement in school and otherwise.

The sample population of adults appeared to succeed professionally, in addition to their educational attainments. The interview subjects held positions that spanned an array of professions. Julia is an Army officer; Carly is an Air Force officer. Ted is a professional musician and teacher. Bec has worked as an arts professor, owns an art studio, and is the director of a military arts program. Paige has worked as both a music teacher and as a science researcher. Ryan became a financial advisor. These people all obtained success in their careers.

The teenaged participants were accomplished, academically driven, and thoughtful about their futures. Miles told me:

I want to succeed in school...I always wanted to do well in school because I want to...it's always been, if I do well in school, I know that I'm going to get into a good college, which means I'll get a good job, et cetera.

Joel, about to begin his senior year of high school, discussed a detailed college and career plan: "I want to study natural resources and conservation at [state school], but I want to go to [community college], the community college in my town first, to do like, a two and two program." In addition to music, Joel has been involved in a Spanish club, played several sports, and is about to become an Eagle Scout.

Jordan, a freshman in high school, noted that he is good at school: "I generally do well in class." Interestingly, he also explained that doing well in school provided him with an identity and a sense of community:

I want to think that being smart, it gives you a community. Like, all my friends are pretty good at school as well. And I think it's easier to associate with people who are the same level as you are, because you have the same classes, so you see them more often. It gives me a way to find people who are more likely to have the same interests as me.

Many people identified school as an enjoyment of theirs. I asked Miles what he liked to do for fun—after listing various artistic endeavors, he also said, “I’ve always just been good at school.” I find it interesting that he mentioned not just school, but *being good at school*, specifically, as something fun. It seems that for some military children, school, and achieving success at school, provides fulfillment on several levels.

Past research has correlated high achievement, perfectionism, anxiety, and depression. Perfectionism, while it can lead to success and accomplishments, can also be maladaptive (Gnilka, Ashby, and Noble, 2011). Brown and Beck (2002) noted a link between children with perfectionism and vulnerability to depression. They also distinguished between adaptive and maladaptive perfectionism. Two interviewees clearly labeled their artistic involvement as coping strategies. Ted mentioned that he was “that kid” who was involved in everything, but that the routine served as a respite. It seems that poor mental health and high-functioning attributes frequently co-exist in military-affiliated children. Military culture, with its emphasis on personal responsibility, creation of independence in children through higher instances of “one parent homes” (however temporary), and high levels of parental involvement in school and extracurricular activities, creates an atmosphere where some children seem to cope with their mental health struggles through over-performing and attempting to meet expectations.

Despite the disruption that is inherent in military life, the people I talked to are as successful and motivated as their civilian peers. Art seemed to be correlated with success in my sample population, suggesting that art was beneficial for kids as they moved

forward toward college and adulthood. The sample population's successes and achievements throughout their lives appear to highlight the importance of art for military kids.

All the adults I spoke with were still involved in the arts, to varying degrees. Six of the adults were involved professionally, as teachers, performing musicians, composers, music directors, and visual artists. While the sampling methods used did increase the likelihood of finding and interviewing artistic adults, these adults found ways to participate in their art, sometimes professionally, despite challenges posed by military family life and culture.

Parental Engagement

Many of the people I spoke with described their parents as actively involved in their artistic lives growing up. As outlined in the findings, the arts appear to encourage parental engagement in children's lives. Such parental involvement aligns with a parenting style called "concerted cultivation." Identified by sociologist Annette Lareau, concerted cultivation involves the ways in which parents actively encourage and nourish their children's talents and activities. Parents structure children's free time and take care to provide opportunities for play.

Concerted cultivation is a hallmark of middle-class parenting (Lareau, 2003). The people I interviewed were all raised by people who took interest in their children's academic and recreational lives. Both the parents in the observations and the parents I met during the interviews with children encouraged involvement in the arts, taking them to lessons and classes, providing them with art supplies, and encouraging them to talk to

me about their activities. The arts provide a way for parents to become more involved in their children's lives, and, in the context of the military, where such activities also provide parents with community and connection, enhances the positive effects of parental involvement even further. The ease of access to artistic activities for children in the military may increase parental involvement and encourage parents to allow their children to participate in artistic endeavors even more.

Carly explicitly declared that parents were crucial to the success of military-affiliated arts programs: "a lot of times parents had to get involved to get the programs to work properly. I would say that. It just always took a lot of parent involvement usually, to get stuff going" (Interview 11).

Some of the interviewees reported bonding with their parents through art. People described going to classes and rehearsals with their parents, continuing family musical traditions, and having their parents attend recitals and concerts. The parents I met and heard about during interviews with their children brought up memories they had with their children surrounding art. Some parents engaged in artistic play with their kids during their spouse's deployments, specifically as a special occasion activity. The arts enhance the bond between parent and child, and increase parental engagement in children's lives.

In addition to parental involvement in children's artistic activities, many of the participants' parents invested in their children's academic life. Bec described her parents' involvement:

Interviewer: Do you know why your parents had you go into private schools?

Bec: I think it was one of those things where a lot of the parents on the bases that we were stationed...there were so many parents who were doing that with their kids, that was who my parents knew. A lot of the officers—my dad was a major—would always talk about the better private schools versus the public schools. And on the bases that we were stationed at, they were actually more prevalent to have private schools around us than public schools. So, I think part of it was keeping with the norm of what everyone else was doing, but also the convenience of it being closer to where we were living.

It was common for military families to work to make arrangements to stay in one location during high school. Not all, but many participants, both children and adults noted that they were able to attend one high school. Sophia, Miles, Jordan, Phillip, Paige, Ryan, and Joel reported that, particularly once they reached high school, their families stayed in one location while the servicemember parent travelled more frequently. This reveals parents' investment in their children's academic lives, in addition to striving for more of continuity and stability.

DISCUSSION

Friendship

Military children highlight the importance of friendships, noting that moving is both difficult because of the loss of friends, and exciting due to the potential of making new ones. Children prioritize making friends after relocating. The arts serve a crucial role in this endeavor. Military use the arts to find peers with whom friendships may form. The arts allow children to bond with one another, help them play together, and strengthen their social ties. Friendships made through artistic engagement last even after a child moves, helping them to feel connected and increase a sense of continuity. Children's play comprises a common culture, which creates familiarity for children in new situations and locations. Structured, formal arts activities provide children with a set of peers.

Community and Continuity

Military arts programs strive to increase and fortify children's social ties through the creation of a community. This community benefits both military children and their parents. Military arts programs' focus on community service speaks to the importance of arts in the creation of community. In addition, military arts programs explicitly state creating and sustaining community as a purpose and goal. Children gain a support network through participation in the arts. Through teachers, other parents, and various

other adults, children increase their social ties and supportive connections. Likewise, parents form connections with other parents through their children's activities. The parents I observed at the military children's choir rehearsals interacted with one another and seemed to know most of the other parents in attendance. Additionally, since military arts programs frequently require parental involvement, parents interact with one another as they work together toward a common goal.

Emotional Outlet and Wellbeing

The arts provide children and adults with lifelong ways to process and express emotions, explore and assert their individuality, and enhance their sense of wellbeing. Military children use the arts as distraction from problems, as ways to feel less alone and or/lonely, and as a means of stress mitigation. Arts participation allows for military children to regulate their emotions in several ways: playing and creating through arts activities is in itself a means of emotional release; additionally, children both create structure through arts participation and benefit from the structure provided through formal arts activities (i.e. regular classes, rehearsals, practice sessions).

Artistic play functioning as a means of emotional release and expression of individuality is notable within what several study participants labeled "hypermasculine" military culture. In a setting where bearing, hierarchy, discipline, and masculinity are highly valued, avenues for emotional release and exploration of the self are even more important. As interviewees noted, military children are not always encouraged to talk

about their feelings, and parental military service can sometime be associated with feelings of parental alienation and lack of empathy. This, combined with a STEM-focused culture, means that military children derive particular benefit from playing and exploring through art and accessible art programs. The arts provide a safe space for children to express their emotions.

Nearly every study participant noted that arts participation improved their sense of wellbeing and mood. This aligns with the numerous and well-documented positive effects of arts on emotions, stress levels, mental health, and wellness. Military children's artistic play and arts participation allows them to be happier and improve their perceived wellbeing and mental health. This continues into adulthood. With mental health challenges presenting so frequently in military-affiliated children, the arts serve a particularly valuable role for this population.

Structure

Arts activities frequently provide much-needed structure in children's lives. Many adults, looking back, recalled that having standard schedules of arts classes and rehearsals helped them feel grounded. A few recalled purposefully using arts involvement to create structure. Daily life as a military-affiliated child can be unpredictable and tumultuous. An increased sense of structure and stability improves military children's wellbeing, and arts participation provides a means for children feel more grounded during the week.

Arts as a Service to Others

The military places heavy emphasis on sacrifice and serving others. This value was reflected in the children's choir rehearsals I observed. The music instructors

encouraged the kids to work hard so that their music could help others. In addition, the kids were urged to sacrifice for others. This attitude was reflected by the children during and after rehearsal, as they eagerly volunteered to close the rehearsal with a spoken remark, thanked one another, recognized each other's efforts, and helped put the room back in order after rehearsal without being asked. Interview participants noted that the arts helped them feel useful. Across the board, sacrifice and service is woven into military-affiliated children's arts involvement.

Parental Engagement in Children's Lives

Parents are heavily involved in their children's arts experiences. A feature of middle-class parenting, such "concerted cultivation" features perhaps even more prominently in military arts communities. As study participants stated, military arts programs require active participation from parents to run smoothly. Parents spend time organizing rehearsals, recitals, and classes, as well as accompanying their kids to classes. They are involved with practice sessions and collaborate with teachers and other parents to ensure their children are actively engaging with the arts. Parents arrange and supervise playdates, providing arts and crafts materials to their children and children's friends. I watched parents encourage their children to dance, sing, and draw/paint. Some parents asked their children to show me their arts. Such engagement bolsters children's sense of security and stability.

Military Children and Achievement

Contrary to what might be expected due to the challenges parental military service presents, military children appear to excel professionally and academically in both

childhood and adulthood This study's use of snowball sampling did lead to a sample population comprised mainly of officer's children, which I extrapolate to mean more middle-class families. A parenting style often utilized in middle class families (concerted cultivation) seems likely to present in an arts-focused study. However, I do not believe that concerted cultivation and socioeconomic class fully explain the level of achievement the sample population demonstrated.

For one, the military itself provides access to a range of programs and services meant to help children and their families succeed. From mandatory meetings with guidance counselors to military-provided arts classes, military children have a range of services available to them.

Additionally, children in military families are exposed to a culture that stressed the importance of personal responsibility and excellence. Children are surrounded by this culture themselves and through being parented by adults who live their lives in accordance with such values. Independence and is sometimes cultivated in military children through parental reliance on children to take care of themselves and/or their siblings while parents are working and out of the house. Military-affiliated parents frequently have high expectations for their children, which may result in the rates of academic and artistic achievement, inquisitiveness, and professional success seen in this study's sample population.

Lastly, military children have higher rates of mental health challenges than non-military children. Military culture does not always encourage people to address mental health struggles in a healthy manner. Children may therefore use the arts to cope with a

maladaptive, perfectionist approach. Parental engagement and high expectations may result in high-achieving individuals but may also contribute to the higher rates of mental health struggles found military children.

Military Utilization of Art Programs and Research

Various arts programs for servicemembers and their families exist. The Department of Defense has partnered with the National Endowment for the Arts to further understanding of the relationship between arts engagement and the wellbeing of military-affiliated persons. The alliance, in addition to various other programs and organizations, coordinates and implements arts programming for servicemembers, military families, and veterans. Several of these programs have published or compiled research, pamphlets, white papers, and infographics about the need for and benefits of arts participation for military-affiliated persons. Yet few national programs for military children exist, with much of the focus of existing programs going toward veteran and current servicemembers using the arts to improve mental health (helping with PTSD, anxiety, and depression, providing an outlet for emotions). Further, very little research has examined military children's experiences with either these programs or other arts activities. This paper indicates that military children, like servicemembers themselves, experience an array of benefits from arts participation, including improved wellbeing. Although this is recognized by many of the programs I analyzed, the specific benefits of arts participation for military children seem to receive less attention than for veterans and current servicemembers. My research expands the current body of knowledge by providing specific insight into how military children engage with the arts, as opposed to

current policy guidelines, which extrapolate from current data regarding adult to infer benefits for military children.

LIMITATIONS

Sample Population

As is the case in much qualitative research, the sample size was on the small side. The themes that emerged were nearly universal across the sample population; moreover, the types of information the study revealed were consistent. Before claiming this study has reached data saturation, I would like to conduct several more interviews, ideally with more random sampling to ensure that there is no sampling bias. Additionally, a wider age range would contribute to the study's generalizability.

The demographics of the sample population were less representative. I interviewed 9 boys/men, and 5 women. None of the children I interviewed were girls. Ideally, future studies would have had a more equal male/female ratio. Additionally, nearly all the participants identified as white. According to a demographic profile by Military OneSource, a program affiliated with the U.S. Department of Defense, 31% of active duty service members are a racial minority. The demographics profile defined "racial minority" as "Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, and Other/Unknown." Of course, service members' race does not translate exactly to the racial makeup of their children, but there is likely significant overlap. Therefore, this study would need to include races and ethnicities other than white in order to be more robust. Due to the

stratification found in society at large, the use of convenience and snowball sampling may have contributed to the lack of racial diversity in the sample population.

As I completed interviews, I noticed that most of the people who came forward to participate in the study were raised by commissioned officers. Although I did not have any specifications regarding rank, the people who brought their children to be interviewed were also commissioned officers. Commissioned officers hold a college degree and positions of leadership within the military. My sampling method, snowball sampling, may have contributed to this disparity in sample population rank. The military is characterized by strict adherence to hierarchy; officers and enlisted servicemembers are forbidden to fraternize with one another. This can result in stratified social circles, not only for servicemembers, but for their spouses and children. Therefore, my study's reliance on snowball sampling was susceptible to focusing on the children of either enlisted servicemembers or officers.

The observations of choir rehearsals may well have included a more balanced distribution of parental ranks. Parental rank was never discussed during the rehearsals. Recruitment strategies for further research ought to be designed to include a more diverse sample population regarding parental rank.

Age Ranges

This study made use of interviews with both children and adults. These populations help to increase the study's validity by increasing the range of interviews and opinions that are recorded. I would have liked to have interviewed several more children

as this study did not include the interviews of any children of middle school age. The age range of the adults were more representative, spanning from 20 to around 40.

Memory Recall

The reflective interviews of adults potentially have issues with memory recall. None of the adult interviewees seemed to have much trouble recalling their experiences or emotions, but of course, recollection of small details fades with time. Especially since this study had particular focus on emotion, accurate recollection serves an important role and the use of long-term memories for data collection constitutes a potential limitation of this study.

Covid (Video Calling vs. Face-To-Face)

Lastly, several of the interviews I conducted took place in a virtual format due either to distance or the Covid-19 pandemic. When it was not possible to meet face-to-face, we used video calling. I believe that video calling allowed me to gain more insight than just voice calling alone; body language sometimes communicates more than words alone. Particularly for younger children, I found that observing their facial expressions and body language allowed me to learn more—at the same time, I felt that I was able to connect better with children when they could see my face and we could communicate with movements. Children can be shy, but a smiling, friendly face and welcoming, encouraging gestures can help put them at ease and feel more comfortable during the interview process. I did not want the interview experience to be negative for children (or adults) in any way, so their comfort was very important to me; additionally, when the children were more at ease, they shared more with me and I was able to learn more from

them. Several of the kids accompanied their narratives with gestures, facial expressions, and movements. Alex, a 9 year old I spoke with over video chat, brought me his artwork to show me over the camera. While some nuance may be lost over video calling, in the end, I was able to speak with people in many different locations throughout the United States. Scheduling interviews also became easier when they were over video call.

CONCLUSION

Military childhood poses distinct and frequent challenges for children. Schedule disruptions, feelings of instability, and mental health challenges abound. However, engagement in the arts provide military children with a host of benefits, many of which are unique to military childhood. The arts: improve stability, provide continuity through transitions, serve as a safe space for emotional release and expressing individuality, create and enhance friendships, provide opportunities for parents to engage with children and one another, and allow children to serve others.

Arts participation leads to an increased feeling of stability for children. The structure inherent in certain types of arts participation is grounding for children and adults alike, allowing them space to process emotions and escape hardships and difficulties.

Over a lifetime, participation in arts makes life richer. Throughout a person's life, arts participation allows people to develop and maintain a sense of self throughout transitions and hardships—particularly within military childhood. The arts, as play, allow children to create and maintain senses of stability through continuity. Play remains a constant in their lives, despite relocations, changes in family structure, schedule disruptions, and other uncertainties.

The ways in which art functions as a service to others in the military also strengthen people's connections to their communities. Arts-centered acts of service provide children with a sense of meaning and belonging, crucial to everyone—particularly those experiencing instability and unpredictability in their lives. Focusing on serving others can also provide people with a means of distraction for difficulties they may be facing.

Outside of the self, arts provide and enhance connection with others: children play with one another, make friends in artistic spaces and activities, and bond with their parents and siblings. Children use the arts to create and sustain friendships. Formal arts engagement encourages children to quickly make friends through military moves. These friendships can last throughout transitions, providing a community. As adults, arts participation provides similar community through a person's work, recreation, and social life. Arts are, in fact, one of the most common ways adults engage in play, either alone, with one or more other adults, and with their children. The lifelong nature of arts participation enhances the effects of identity creation and aids in a strong, continuous sense of self for adults.

The military recognizes the advantages of offering people, including children, opportunities for artistic expression and in the arts. Since the arts provide community, connection, and resiliency (in adults, as outlined in current military research), arts programs for the military community can be found on, and in close proximity to, bases. These programs, frequently governmental and nonprofit projects in collaboration with the military, are available for active duty service members, spouses, children, and veterans.

The benefits children gain from such programs serve to boost morale and enhance connection, as the military has already found. However, children's engagement in the arts, whether through military-affiliated programs or not, benefits them in more ways than the government currently recognizes. This research project presents the numerous ways military children benefit from arts engagement, *in their own voices*.

APPENDIX A: DEFINITIONS

Arts: dance, music, theater, other performing arts, fine and visual arts, creative writing, and poetry.

Military children/children in military families: A child with a parent who currently or previously served in the military; an adult who grew up with a servicemember parent. Study participants must have been able to recall their childhood at the time their parent was serving.

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHICS/BIOS OF INTERVIEW SUBJECTS

Interview 1.

Paige is a 25 year old woman with three siblings. Her father served several decades in the Coast Guard. Her family was able to stay in one location, although they considered moving many times. In order to allow for the family to stay in one place, Paige's father deployed frequently and was away for long stints at a time. Although he served in the Coast Guard, which typically operates in the US, Paige's father's specific job required frequent international travel, often with limited access to communication devices.

Paige grew up in a musical family, taking private music lessons and playing in various groups in school and out. Her father and mother both play instruments and encouraged her artistic engagement. She obtained a bachelor of arts degree in music and has worked as both a public school music teacher and private lesson teacher.

Interview 2.

Ryan is a 21 year old man with three siblings (including Paige, above, and Joel, below). His father served both active duty and reserves. Even while a reserve servicemember, he was regularly called in, and spent significant time away from home training and working. He spent months at a time away from home, with an unpredictable schedule. He was called in "randomly" throughout Ryan's entire childhood.

Ryan was involved in music throughout his childhood and in college. He still plays music for fun.

Interview 3.

Ted is a man in his mid 20s. His father served active duty in the Air Force up until Ted was in middle school. His family moved frequently. His family moved four different times, both in the U.S. and internationally, by the time he was in second grade. They were then able to stay in one location, although his father still traveled frequently. After his military retirement, Ted's father moved into a civilian job similar to his military job, so he kept traveling at a similar rate even after leaving the military.

Ted was heavily involved in music as a child. He took private music lessons, participated in band, choir, and marching band, and taught himself other instruments. He attended a conservatory for college, receiving a bachelor of music degree in instrumental performance. He works as a performer, private music teacher, and music arranger.

Interviews 4 & 5

Joey and Michael are brothers: Joey is nine, and Michael is seven. Both their mother and father have been active duty in the Army their entire lives. Joey remembers having moved once so far; the family will be moving again within two years. The boys' mom let me know that since they were born, she has deployed four times. Their father has also been away for up to four months at a time at least twice, as well as numerous multi-week trips.

Both children are involved in the arts. They enjoy drawing, painting, stickers, making cardboard creations, and music. They put on plays together and with their friends, have music classes at school, and go to summer camps with more art and music lessons.

Interview 6.

Phillip is a man in his mid-thirties. He has one sibling. His father served over 20 years in the Air Force and retired when Phillip was about eight years old. Phillip lived on multiple military bases as a child, and moved once or twice. His father's job required a lot of moving, but he negotiated to instead, be based out of Washington, D.C. and to receive longer temporary assignments away from home so that the family could stay in one location.

Phillip discovered music as a child through video games and movies. He listened to soundtracks and tried to play this music on the keyboard in his house. As a younger child, he did not formally participate in the arts; as he grew older he started drawing and joined a band. He has both a bachelor and master degree in music and currently works at a community college as a composer, band director, and music teacher. He is a hobby photographer.

Interview 7.

Bec is a woman in her mid-thirties. Her father served in the Marine Corps until she was around eight years old. She moved frequently within the United States throughout her early childhood. She lived in every major region (North, South, East, and West) as a child.

She was involved in music and art as a child. She has a bachelor and master's degree in the fine arts. She has worked as an art teacher, adjunct art professor, and is currently the director arts education at an large arts initiative.

Interview 8.

Joel is sixteen years old with three siblings (including Paige and Ryan, listed previously). His father served in the Coast Guard reserves and went on active duty later in Joel's childhood. His father traveled frequently, and currently

commutes to work in Washington, D.C. several hours away. He stays in DC a lot the week, and comes home on weekends/when he is able during the week. Like several of the other interview participants, Joel's family chose to live in a steady location while the servicemember travels more frequently.

Joel enjoys drawing and is in his school's band. He started playing saxophone in elementary school and continued on. He enjoys it and plans on playing casually after college.

Interview 9

Alex is five years old with one sibling. His mother has served active duty in the army his whole life. He remembers having moved many times. He recalls moving several times within Africa and the United States. Alex has moved at least five times; additionally, his mother has served two separate deployments. As his mother told me, since Alex was born he has only lived in one location for about a year and a half to two years.

Alex is very artistically involved. He enjoys coloring, dancing, crafts, and music. He likes his art and music classes at school. His parents want him to take dance classes later. He appreciates learning new languages; he takes French classes and described visiting a family friend in a European country and learning words in that country's language. He noted that when his family visits, his friend can teach him more about the language. He showed me one of his paintings during an interview with his mother.

Interview 10.

Julia is a woman in her thirties. She has one sibling. She is Alex's (see previous) mother and has served active duty in the Army for over twelve years. She also grew up in a military family, with a father who served actively in the Army and reserves in the Army National Guard her entire childhood. She told me that her parents have moved 32 different times since their marriage (although not all of this moving was due to his military service). He was gone relatively infrequently, mostly on weekends, and sometimes up to a month at a time. He did travel internationally while serving.

Julia enjoyed coloring, crafting, and choir as a child. She was involved in several choirs, both in and out of school as a child. She currently enjoys painting and crafting, and wishes she has more opportunities to sing.

Interview 11.

Carly is a woman in her 20s. She has one sibling, and her father has served in the Army since she was 8. Carly's family moved frequently, both within and

outside of the United States. She moved every single year during high school, spanning CONUS (contiguous United States) OCONUS (outside the contiguous United States), and international assignments. Her father deployed to combat zones twice, receiving a Purple Heart and two Bronze Stars. Carly enjoyed theater, creative writing, and telling stories as a child. She is still musically involved and has taken music lessons as an adult. She is now serving active duty in the US Armed Forces herself.

Interview 12.

Sophia is a woman in her early 20s. Her father has served in the Army her entire life. She moved frequently as a child and didn't stay settled in one place until she was 13 and moved to a southern American state. She describes herself as being really close with her four siblings and currently lives with three of her siblings now that she is in college. Her parents still move frequently and are currently located in a very distant state for her father's job.

Sophia enjoyed painting, drawing, listening to music, and participating in band as a child. She continues her arts involvement in college, where she is studying music. She notes that her siblings and father are also involved in the arts through art, music, comedy, script writing, and directing.

Interview 13.

Miles is 16 a year old boy. His father has served in the Army his entire life. He lives with his father, mother, and brother, Jordan (below). He has moved frequently both within and outside the United States. He has attended both public schools and a school on base when he lived overseas. He gets along well with his brother, and both brothers and his mother are musically involved.

Miles enjoys filmmaking and editing videos. He plays piano, saxophone, bassoon, and accordion. He is in band at school. Miles wants to attend college and hopefully become a filmmaker.

Interview 14.

Jordan is a 15 year old boy. He is a freshman in high school. Like his brother, Miles, Jordan has lived in numerous states and countries throughout his life. His family moves approximately every three years. Jordan's family will, however, now be able to stay in one place while the boys finish high school.

Jordan is heavily involved in music. He plays the oboe, the saxophone, and piano. He enjoys band and has been involved in school bands since elementary school. He plans to study music in college.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

For children

Background:

How old are you?

What grade are you in school?

Do you have any siblings? Who else do you live with?

Which (or both) of your parents are in the military?

Do you live on a base?

What school do you go to? Is that on base? Have you ever gone to a school off base?

Have you ever moved? Do you know many times?

Mental health:

How do you feel about having your mom/dad in the military? What is it like for you?

How do you feel about moving? Is there anything fun about it?

How do you deal with that?

(If the child expresses negative emotions about moving): How do you deal with that?

How would you feel if you knew you could continue with your lessons/classes/clubs?

Have you ever talked to anyone other than your parents about your feelings or about (your mom/dad) being in the military?

Military specific programs

Arts:

What do you like to do for fun?

How do you make friends? What do you like to do with your friends?

Do you like playing music/singing/dancing/acting/drawing, etc.?

Have you ever had lessons or participated in _____?

How does _____ make you feel? Have you made any friends in your lessons/class/club?

What are your friendships like after moving?

How does your arts participation affect your day to day life and schedule?

-How does moving affect that?

What do you like about music?

Music wellbeing

For adults

Background: age, marital status, race, education, career, parental status, etc.

How old were you when your parent was active duty?

Which parent was/is in the military?

Do you have any siblings? Who else did you live with?

In what ways do you think having a parent in the military affected your family's life?

How frequently did you move as a military child? Did you see moving as exciting or was it difficult to move?

Sometimes a parent's deployment leads to a reshuffling of parental roles. How did your parent's deployment affect your family's life?

What was it like having your parent deploy?

What was it like when they came back from deployment?

Did your parent receive mental health treatment coming back from deployment?

Arts:

As a child, were you involved in programs in the arts? Describe. Where were these programs? What led to your participation in the arts?

Did you have access to any arts programs specifically due to the military, such as classes on base?

If so, please tell me more.

Mental health:

Would you please tell me your definition of “mental health” if you have one?

What was your mental health like growing up?

Have you ever received a medical diagnosis related to mental health?

As a child did you receive counseling for depression, behavioral difficulties, etc.?

As an adult, looking back at your childhood, how would you describe the experience of growing up in a military family?

Do you still struggle with issues related to your experiences in a military family? If "yes," then would you mind sharing these with me?

How did your involvement in the arts impact your daily life? Did it have an effect on your mental health or wellbeing?

What else would you like me to know?

APPENDIX D: RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Recruitment Email

Hello,

My name is Ginny Coffman. I am a graduate student in George Mason University's department of Sociology and Anthropology. I am reaching out to you at the suggestion of _____. I am conducting research on the impact of arts participation on children in military families. As a former military-affiliated child/parent of a military-affiliated child, I am wondering if you would be willing to meet with me or schedule a phone call for a brief interview regarding your experiences as a military-affiliated child/you would allow your child to answer questions about their experiences as a military-affiliated child. Participation is entirely voluntary and this interview will be kept anonymous. *If reaching out to a parent*, "I will conduct the interview with your child in full-sight of you and other people in a public space.

Please feel free to email me with any questions you have!

Thanks for your time,

Ginny Coffman

George Mason University

IRBnet project number: 1516702-1, principal investigator: Patricia Masters

Email to XXX at the _____ (military music program):

Hello,

My name is Ginny Coffman. I am a graduate student in George Mason University's department of Sociology and Anthropology. I discovered your organization through my research project and think the work you are doing is excellent! I am conducting research on the impact of arts participation on children in military families. I have been interviewing military-affiliated people (children and those who grew up in military families) about their experiences with the arts.

Are you able to put me in touch with current or former affiliates of XXX and XXX for a brief interview regarding their experiences with the arts as children of servicemembers? The interviews will comply with all standards set forth by the George Mason University Institutional Review Board and can take place in-person or over the phone. I have attached a recruitment email to this email; please feel free to distribute it to those you think might be interested.

Please feel free to email or call me with any questions you have!

Thanks for your time,

Ginny Coffman
(540) 908-7624
George Mason University
IRBnet project number: 1516702-1, principal investigator: Patricia Masters

Email to XXX at the _____ (military arts and health program):

Hello,

My name is Ginny Coffman. I am a graduate student in George Mason University's department of Sociology and Anthropology. I discovered your organization through my research project and think the work you are doing is excellent! I am conducting research on the impact of arts participation on children in military families. I have been interviewing military-affiliated people (children and those who grew up in military families) about their experiences with the arts.

Are you able to put me in touch with current or former affiliates of the XXX for a brief interview regarding their experiences with the arts as children of servicemembers? The interviews will comply with all standards set forth by the George Mason University Institutional Review Board and can take place in-person or over the phone. I have attached a recruitment email to this email; please feel free to distribute it to those you think might be interested.

Please feel free to email or call me with any questions you have!

Thanks for your time,
Ginny Coffman
(540) 908-7624
George Mason University
IRBnet project number: 1516702-1, principal investigator: Patricia Masters

Script when approaching adults:

Hello,

My name is Ginny Coffman. I am a graduate student in George Mason University's department of Sociology and Anthropology. I discovered your organization through my research project and think the work you are doing is excellent! I am conducting research on the impact of arts participation on children in military families. I have been interviewing military-affiliated people (children and those who grew up in military families) about their experiences with the arts.

Are you able to put me in touch with current or former affiliates of the XXX for a brief interview regarding their experiences with the arts as children of servicemembers? The interviews will comply with all standards set forth by the George Mason University Institutional Review Board and can take place in-person or over the phone. I have attached a recruitment email to this email; please feel free to distribute it to those you think might be interested.

Please feel free to email or call me with any questions you have!

Thanks for your time,

Ginny Coffman

(540) 908-7624

George Mason University

IRBnet project number: 1516702-1, principal investigator: Patricia Masters

Script when approaching adults:

Hi, my name is Ginny Coffman. I am conducting research on the impact of arts participation on children in military families. Participation in this study is completely voluntary, but I am wondering if you would be interested in participating in a brief, confidential interview? I will keep your answers confidential. *If “no”, I will thank the person and end the conversation. If yes:* I am approaching you since I know that you/your child grew up in a family with a military parent. Are you interested in hearing more details about this study? *If “yes”, I will discuss more about the project and set up an interview time. I will stress that answers are confidential and that I will provide them with a consent form with privacy and confidentiality information before the interview. I will let them know that the interview may contain questions they are uncomfortable answering and that they are free to refuse to answer or end the interview at any point.*

*IRBnet project number: 1333288, principal investigator: Patricia
Masters _____*

Script when approaching children under 12:

Hi, my name is Ginny Coffman. I am trying to learn more about military families like yours. Your parent said it was ok if I talk to you. Would you be ok talking to me? *If “no”, I will thank the child and end the conversation. If yes:* I want to talk to you because your parent is in the military. Are you interested in hearing more about what I am trying to learn? *If “yes”, I will discuss the study in age-appropriate language and provide them with an assent form.*

*IRBnet project number: 1516702-1, principal investigator: Patricia
Masters _____*

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to learn more about the impact of arts education on military-affiliated children. If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 30-45 minute interview over the phone or in-person.

RISKS

The foreseeable risks or discomforts include emotional discomfort when discussing matters such as mental health, abuse, neglect, the impact of military service on servicemembers and/or their families, and child/parent relationships.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you as a participant other than to further research in the field of sociology.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not be used in any of the collected data. The researchers will code any of your identifiable information in such a manner that you will not be identified without the use of an identification key. This key will link your interview responses to your identity and will only be accessible to Virginia Coffman and Patricia Masters.

Those who participate via Skype or Zoom may review the platforms' privacy statements here: (<https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/privacystatement/>) and/or (<https://explore.zoom.us/en/privacy/>). While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission.

***There is one exception to confidentiality. It is our legal responsibility to report situations of suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities. Although we are not seeking this type of information in this study nor will you be asked questions about these issues, we will disclose them as required under the law if discovered.

Identifiers may be removed from the data and the de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation is voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. If you decide not to participate, or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty. There are no costs to you or any other party. You may choose whether or not to answer any interview question and may request that the researcher omit any part of your answers to the interview questions in the written study.

RECORDING

This interview may be audio recorded stored on a secure computer. The recordings will be deleted after transcripts are made. Only Patricia Masters and Virginia Coffman will have access to these recordings and transcripts. The transcripts will be stored at George Mason University for five years after the completion of the study.

- I agree to be audio recorded
- I decline to be audio recorded

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Virginia Coffman at George Mason University. She may be reached at 540-908-7624 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this research is Patricia Masters. She may be reached at pmasters@gmu.edu or 703-993-1432. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date of Signature

APPENDIX F: PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This research is being conducted to learn more about the impact of arts education on military-affiliated children. If you agree to allow your child to participate, they will be asked to participate in a 30-45 minute interview over the phone or in-person.

RISKS

The foreseeable risks or discomforts include emotional discomfort when discussing matters such as mental health, the impact of military service on service members and/or their families, and child/parent relationships.

BENEFITS

There are no benefits to you or your child as a participant other than to further research in the field of sociology.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The data in this study will be confidential. Neither your name nor your child's name will be used in any of the collected data. The researchers will code any of your child's identifiable information in such a manner that they will not be identified without the use of an identification key. This key will link your child's interview responses to their identity and will only be accessible to Virginia Coffman and Patricia Masters.

Those who participate via Skype may review Microsoft's website for information about their privacy statement. <https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/privacystatement/>. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission

***There is one exception to confidentiality. It is our legal responsibility to report situations of suspected child abuse or neglect to appropriate authorities. Although we are not seeking this type of information in this study nor will your child be asked questions about these issues, we will disclose them as required under the law if discovered.

Identifiers may be removed from the data and the de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants.

PARTICIPATION

Your child’s participation is voluntary. You may withdraw them from the study at any time for any reason. If you decide not to allow your child to participate, or if you withdraw your child from the study, there is no penalty. There are no costs to you, your child, or any other party. Your child may choose whether or not to answer any interview question and may request that the researcher omit any part of their answers to the interview questions in the written study.

RECORDING

This interview may be audio recorded and stored on a secure computer. The recordings will be deleted after transcripts are made. Only Patricia Masters and Virginia Coffman will have access to these recordings and transcripts. The transcripts will be stored at George Mason University for five years after the completion of the study.

- I agree to let my child be audio recorded
- I decline to let my child be audio recorded

CONTACT

This research is being conducted by Virginia Coffman at George Mason University. She may be reached at 540-908-7624 for questions or to report a research-related problem. The faculty advisor for this research is Patricia Masters. She may be reached at pmasters@gmu.edu or 703-993-1432. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board office at 703-993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your child’s rights as a participant in the research.

This research has been reviewed according to George Mason University procedures governing your child’s participation in this research.

CONSENT

I have read this form, all of my questions have been answered by the research staff, and I agree to participate in this study.

Signature

Date of Signature

APPENDIX G: ASSENT FORMS

ASSENT FORM (Children Aged 7-11)

My name is Ginny and I am from George Mason University.

I want to talk to you about a research study I am doing. Research studies help us to learn new things. In our study, we want to learn more about children in military families like yours and their involvement in things like music, dance, art, drama, and other classes. Your parents have already agreed that you may take part in the study, so feel free to talk with them about it before you decide whether you want to join the study.

What will happen to me in the study?

I'd like you to participate because your mom/dad is currently serving in the military and I want to learn more about your experiences with that. If it is ok with you and you would like to join the study, you will be asked to answer some questions about your music/dance/art/drama/etc. classes, what it's like to have your parent in the military, and your feelings.

Will anything bad happen?

I will ask you questions regarding your feelings and potentially ask you to recall sad memories or experiences.

Will anything good happen?

You will help me and others learn more about military families like yours.

Will anyone know that I am in the study? (Confidentiality)

I will not attach your name to any of the information you tell me. I might write down your age in the study and other people could read that. I will also write about the answers you give to my questions.

Will I receive anything for being in the study?

There is no compensation for this study.

What if I do not want to do this?

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say “no” now, or you can change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. You will not be in trouble for saying “no” or changing your mind.

Who can I talk to about this study?

If you have questions about the study or have any problems, you can talk to your parents or call Patricia Masters 703-993-1432, the Principal Investigator for this study. If you have questions about the study but want to talk to someone else who is not a part of the study, you can call the Institutional Review Board office at George Mason University at 703-993-4121.

This study has been explained to me and I am willing to be in it.

Child’s Name (printed) and Signature

Date

Check which applies below *[to be completed by the person administering the assent]*.

_____The child is capable of reading and understanding the assent form and has signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

_____The child is not capable of reading the assent form, but the information was verbally explained to him/her. The child signed above as documentation of assent to take part in this study.

ASSENT FORM (Children Aged 12-17)

My name is Ginny and I am from George Mason University's Sociology and Anthropology Department.

I want to talk to you about a research study I am doing. In our study, we want to learn more about how people in military families think about their involvement in the arts. Your parents have already agreed that you may take part in the study, so feel free to talk with them about it before you decide whether you want to join the study.

What will happen to me in the study?

We would like you to participate because you have a parent who is currently serving in the military. If you would like to participate in the study, you will be asked to participate in a brief interview, maybe 30-45 minutes.

What are the risks?

Some of the interview questions are related to mental health and I may ask you to recall sad memories or feelings, which could make you feel uncomfortable.

What are the benefits?

The only benefit is to further sociological research.

Will anyone know that I am in the study? (Confidentiality)

No, the only people who will know you are in the study are your parents and me.

What if I do not want to participate or decide later to withdraw?

Being in this study is voluntary. You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to and you can stop being in the study at any time.

Will I receive anything for being in the study?

There is no compensation for participating in the study.

Who can I talk to about this study?

If you have questions about the study or have any problems, you can talk to your parents, or call Patricia Masters, 703-993-1432, the Principal Investigator for this study. If you have questions about the study but want to talk to someone else who is not a part of the study, you can call the Institutional Review Board office at George Mason University at 703-993-4121.

Your signature below means that you have read the above information about the study, have had a chance to ask questions to help you understand what you will do in this study, and you are willing to be in the study. Your signature also means that you have been told that you can change your mind later if you want to.

Child's Name (printed) and Signature

Date

APPENDIX H: ASSENT SCRIPT

ASSENT SCRIPT (Children Under Age 7)

My name is Ginny and I am from George Mason University.

I want to talk to you about a research project I am doing. I am trying to learn more about how you feel about music/dance/art/drama classes and having your mom/dad serve in the military. I would like for you to participate. Your parents have already agreed to allow you to talk to me, but you can talk with them about it at any time.

If you would like to help me with my project, I will ask you some questions about your life, your thoughts, and your feelings.

Will anything bad happen?

I will be asking you to talk about your feelings, good and bad. That could make you feel uncomfortable. You should talk to me or your parents if you feel bad, sick, or in pain during the questions.

Will anything good happen?

You will help me and others learn more about military families like yours.

What if I do not want to do this?

You do not have to be in this study. It is up to you. You can say “no” now, or you can change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me. You will not be in trouble for saying “no” or changing your mind.

Who can I talk to about this study?

If you have questions about the study or have any problems, please let me or your parents know, and they can get in touch with me.

Would you like to participate?

If you would like to participate in my project, please say “yes”.
If you would not like to participate, please say “no” at this time.

APPENDIX I: POLICY BRIEFS AND GOVERNMENT UTILIZED RESEARCH

Americans for the Arts

Americans for the Arts: The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military. 2017.

Arts Deployed: An Action Guide for Community Arts and Military Programming.
New York, NY.

https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/ArtsDeployed_v3.pdf

Americans for the Arts: The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military. 2013.

*Arts, Health, and Well-Being Across the Military Continuum: White Paper 2.0
2020 and Beyond.*

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/niahm/ArtsHealthWellBeingMilitaryContinuumWhitePaper2.pdf>

National Endowment for the Arts. 2020. *Creative Forces Clinical Research Inventory.*

https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Creative-Forces-Clinical-Research-Inventory-November-2020_0.pdf

Americans for the Arts: The National Initiative for Arts & Health in the Military. 2016.

*The Arts: Promising Solutions for Meeting the Challenges Facing Today's
Military – Then and Now.* Washington, D.C.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/2016%20National%20Roundtable%20Brief%20112016.pdf>

Americans for the Arts. 2014. *State Arts & Military Initiatives Strategy Sampler*.

<https://www.americansforthearts.org/sites/default/files/StateArtsandMilitaryInitiativesStrategySampler.pdf>

Other

Creative Forces: NEA Military Healing Arts Network. 2019. *Creative Forces Clinical Research: A Strategic Framework and Five-Year Agenda (2018-2022)*.

<https://militaryartsconnection.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Creative-Forces-Research-Inventory-Version-1.28.2019.pdf>

The Future of Children, Princeton-Brookings. 2013. *Keeping the Promise: Maintaining the Health of Military and Veteran Families and Children*.

https://futureofchildren.princeton.edu/sites/futureofchildren/files/media/military_children_and_families_23_02_policybrief.pdf

National Endowment for the Arts and Department of Defense. 2016. *The National Endowment for the Arts Guide to Community-Engaged Research in the Arts and Health*. Washington, D.C. <https://www.arts.gov/sites/default/files/Guide-to-Community-Engaged-Research-in-the-Arts-and-Health-March2017.pdf>

University of Minnesota: The REACH Center. 2018. Military family research portal.

<https://reachfamiliesd7.umn.edu/research>

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