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ENG 350-D02

30 October 2022

"The Place of Home"

The geographic and psychological definitions of "home" in a military context carry a variety of interpretations. Due to the nature of the occupation, multiple moves are often part and parcel, with "home" physically being anything from a brick-and-mortar house to a Kevlar tent. Each "home" is a place with a marked influence on our inner character, outer identity, self-esteem, core beliefs regarding politics, social constructs, education, and faith. As a result, many believe living in different locations throughout life is a prejudice. However, research confirms that the varying "place" of "home" as a military family builds resilience, increases emotional and academic intelligence, adds depth of character, and can provide a stable professional life. Different geographic "places" of "home" will be discussed, along with how the varying aspects of those "places" of "home" affect a person.

As a Southern California native, San Diego in particular, I find that the stereotypical Spanish-American language, food, casual dress, and moderate temperatures became part of one's identity during childhood. In addition, house dynamics significantly impacted one's social identity, e.g., being an only child of generationally older parents and a nuclear, loving, traditional family in an upper-middle-class neighborhood. As the mother of the home was a full-time homemaker, this significantly influenced a sense of "place-identity" and fostered an ideology about future family values. Additionally, living in the suburbs of a military city changed a

person's beliefs, values, core principles, and socio-political and academic identity, specifically in the 1970s-1990s. For example, living in a house with a World War II veteran, business owner, and local government member, politics and the military were at the forefront of influence.

Although San Diego was primarily considered conservative during this time, the unions and liberalism were heavily supported. These all contributed to a fixed "place-identity" in my formative years. Giesecking and others define varying subfactors that constitute the place of "home" not in a strictly physical sense but in a broad context of cognition known as "place-identity" (77). This construct is defined as a "strong emotional attachment to particular places or settings, ties to a house/community, relationship," a conscious or subconscious act, and "fundamentally, places or spaces that have satisfied a person's psychosocial, cultural, and biological needs" (Giesecking et al. 77). Adult relationships then form from these "home" and "place-identity" personality traits developed throughout childhood and adolescence. These early influences may not always translate, but most core characteristics persist statistically. For example, a person can experience community throughout childhood by watching major sports team events and participating in school sports, fostering a lifelong sense of "home" and community. These activities further develop one's personality, resilience, and strength of character, influencing future parenting and travel decisions well into adulthood. Seeking community through recreation and sports is part of the unique way we socially identify ourselves (Giesecking et al. 140).

Academics is another strong identity "place" of "home." Attending grade school in San Diego created a social dynamic with some students who did not speak English as their primary language. A language barrier can affect an individual socially and academically, often impacting their personality. Giesecking and colleagues state that finding the place of "home" in an academic

setting is produced as one matures and that these cognitive associations can correlate naturally with stability from earlier in life (78). For example, the Spanish language was a required part of the primary grade curriculum during the 1970s in the East County of San Diego (Lyons, 66). This program provided a unique learning curve for English and Spanish-speaking students, contributing to a core intrinsic value of "home" associated with learning a second language, openness, and compassion, among other traits. Living within this culture carried a love for second language learning into my higher education. It also became a natural part of socializing, creating an openness toward cross-cultural relationships.

As part of military life, a family will uproot after several years in one location due to military orders, bound to establish a place of "home," possibly in a foreign country. This type of "home" change can be unexpected and significantly affect military members and families. However, these "place-identity" changes can be an opportunity to build resilience. For example, Lester states that those who experienced a higher frequency of moves, military or otherwise, exhibited improved mood, behavior, and positive socialization (3). Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, a controversial duty station after 2001 due to the War on Terror, was home after San Diego. On its face, living in the Caribbean can seem flawless, with fresh fish every night, ocean breezes, and a relaxed operational tempo. However, a move alone allows for conscious and subconscious stressors, so facilitating a "home" in a foreign country does bring unique challenges. For example, isolation on a military installation with three small children with little support can be intimidating. These experiences can temporarily alter one's personality if one is unwilling to reach out to available resources.

Therefore, cross-cultural, long-term moves rely on one's grit and strength of character. Easterbrook and others state that resilience is not a personality trait, per se, but a result of relationships between people and the resources around them (99). For example, living on a seven-square-mile base within the communist country of Cuba with occupied guard towers outside the window, one relied on past relationship experience and coping skills associated with the "place" of "home" to understand the boundaries. The people indigenous to Cuba were employed daily on the American base. Positive relationships were formed through community connections, attempting to learn the indigenous language, and being open and respectful of the local culture. Park confirms: "If families have positive attitudes toward relocation, social support, previous relocation experience, and active coping styles, they do better when they move" (67). The "place-identity" of Guantanamo Bay was one of growth, natural beauty, and peace for my family. However, it was also monotonous, underdeveloped, and restricted. Its local politics and lack of infrastructure can give one an overall negative outlook. As Mark Twain related in his essay, "Two Ways of Seeing a River," about his life and work on the Mississippi, "I should have looked upon it without rapture" (McGraw-Hill 739).

A final move to North Carolina would find one with another domestic cultural shift. Having a young family to raise for many months without a father figure due to deployments, one must again draw upon past resiliency, core family values, community, and positive personality traits developed during formative years. Easterbrooks and others further state as follows: "Children whose parents are deployed may build their self-confidence by taking on new responsibilities in the family, [sic] and moving offers new opportunities for adventure and personal growth" (99). For example, returning to college to earn advanced degrees and starting a

business are new, challenging activities for personal growth that can expand "place-identity" attachment and a fulfilling life.

Moving from a large city to a small coastal town can ironically broaden one's horizons. The combined Southeastern coastal cultures are stereotypically known for fried food, Southern "charm," colloquialisms of Southern speech, a vast hunting community, boating, and fishing. Economically, agriculture is still heavily relied upon, and the rural areas common to the farm fields are a culture shock compared to the city infrastructure of the larger city. However, maintaining the "place" of "home" here equaled continuity of community through faith and traveling to activities, e.g., sports, amusement parks, and the like. These experiences assisted in building the "place of identity" in North Carolina, building positive memories, and maintaining stability. As a result, a change occurred within the family, explicitly a sense of community, deepened friendships, strengthened interpersonal relationships, and garnered a profound understanding of belonging. It is well established, Park states, that a "home" emphasis on military values, honor, sacrifice, service, teamwork, and a sense of purpose and community can "work as resilience factors to overcome the difficulties of military life" (67).

Finally, in all definitions of "place" of "home," regular attendance within the body of the church, a belief in the God of the Bible, and a pursued relationship with the person of Jesus Christ are foundational. In addition, one's identity, core memories, self-worth, personality, community, education, and politics are all facets of life that are measured through this part of "place identity." Research conducted by Hamlin-Glover confirms that individuals who regularly attend church, particularly among military families, exhibit higher levels of resilience, positive personality traits, and better coping and interpersonal skills (129).

A person's faith can wax and wane throughout their upbringing and early adulthood. As a result, trust in the God of the Bible is where personality is most likely to be affected when the Holy Spirit enters one's life (Hamlin-Glover 130). The "place-identity" of the church within one's "home" can serve as the bedrock of personal identity. The apostle Paul provides us with a word of reliance on the "place" of "home" in his Epistle to the Hebrews: "For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything" (*The Bible*, English Standard Version, Heb. 3:4). Our faith in Christ grounds us and helps answer life's questions about who we are not only as a child of God but also helps us identify our personalities, our roles as children, siblings, parents, and within our friendships and communities. As believers, "home" or "place-identity" does not change the inherent nature or personality of self unless and until God leads a person's lifelong journey to strive to improve. (Dollahite et al. 52).

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