Advancing an understanding of selves in transition: I-positions as an analytical tool

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Abstract

Self-identity work appears to be a challenge for many service members as they transition and reintegrate into civilian life. When other cultural influences seem to threaten an established self as it labors with transition, tension and conflict may arise and can potentially impact mental health. Insights from an ongoing longitudinal project on the subject matter indicate that an analysis of an individual, which utilizes the concept of I-positions may serve as a useful analytical tool during these processes. A longitudinal methodology combining a narrative approach with such an exploration of I-positions derived from a dialogical self framework may prove to be a promising avenue to advance the understanding of selves in transition beyond the dichotomy of the military and civilian spheres. The bridging capacity of I-positions lies partly in the capacity of significant others to link the self to both spheres and to help fill the perceived void between these two realms, which in reality may be overlapping and intertwined. The findings suggest, facilitated by two case study examples, that military transition to civilian life may benefit from a dialogical approach. This dialogical mind-set could even already be introduced and established during basic training. However, there is also a shared responsibility for individuals in civilian contexts to invite former service members into open dialogue just as the service members themselves shall strive to initiate earnest dialogue. Future research is encouraged to widen the methodology and knowledge of selves in transition.

Keywords

Military transition to civilian life, self, I-positions, methodology, narrative

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Introduction

Many research reports suggest that service members reintegration into civilian life has the potential to become a challenge for military personnel due to their deeply learned military self-identities (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Edström, Lunde, & Haaland Matlary, 2009; Grimell, 2016a; Moore, 2012; Verey & Smith, 2012; Woodward & Jenkings, 2011). Although the concept of military identities not is a new one, Brunger, Serrato, and Ogden (2013, p. 88) suggest that much of the focus thereof has been upon the investigation of military identities and the construction of gender "rather than how one's identity might shift in response to contextual alterations." Additionally it has been suggested that self-identity issues are of concern for a large number of service members during transition from a military context into civilian life (Buell, 2010; Drops, 1979; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011; Savion, 2009; Yanos, 2004).

In the late summer of 2013, a longitudinal research project began with the purpose of gaining deeper insights into the process of identity reconstruction among 19 Swedish military personnel during the transition into civilian life. The project adopted a narrative approach to capture the identity reconstruction work of these service members in transition. Annual interviews were conducted until the summer of 2016. During the preliminary analysis of the material (Grimell, 2016b, 2016c) the concept of I-positions, derived from dialogical self theory (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010), proved to be a promising analytical avenue. Narrative claims of military characters, and other civilian characters, were considered as representing specific points of view in the self, which equate as I-positions. Meanwhile the dialogical self theory assumes that there is multiplicity in a self, which is populated by a plethora of narrative I-positions; this multiplicity results in a complex, narratively structured self (Hermans, 2001a). As a transition is initiated preexisting and new narrative characters need to be reorganized, and this can result in tension, conflict, asymmetry, and dialogue between voices of narrative characters in the interview material. This article suggests that what is needed to advance self-identity work in military transition to civilian life is a theoretical framework and methodology that can take into account conflict, tension, contradiction, and poly-vocality in a storied self without reducing it to a single personal narrative of ego-identity development (Erikson, 1959). Instead what is opted for is a more nuanced understanding of the self as a dialogical narrator with multiple I-positions, which are displayed in a storied self (Hermans, 1996; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992). The combination of a narrative approach and a dialogical framework, although seldom used in military empirical research, may provide relevant ways to advance the understanding of self-identity processes in these situations. The contribution by such a longitudinal approach to self-identity work in military transition to civilian life is manifold. To start, it may offer a qualitative understanding of psychological processes, whereas thus far quantitative and correlational studies have been much more common. Longitudinal qualitative approaches in general are rarely present in military empirical research to self-identity work in transition to civilian life. Additionally a longitudinal approach may help highlight that

military and civilian cultures shape different narrative characters with corresponding but diverse I-positions, which the self needs to center and integrate (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). Finally such a research approach has social relevance since military transition to civilian life affects a large number of military personnel. The ways in which service members deal with identity issues in transition will have impacts on their social environments such as partners, families, friends, new potential employers, and colleagues, as well as upon global social systems via, for instance, public health questions.

This article aims to provide the reader with a conceptual and methodological discussion, which primarily addresses selves in military transition to civilian lives. Empirical findings based upon two longitudinal case studies will be presented from the project to root the discussion in real-life experiences. One particular research question will steer the investigation, "How may I-positions be of relevance in understanding military-to-civilian self-identity processes from a narrative outlook?"

The article will continue with a review of the subject matter, a theoretical conceptualization, and methodology, findings from the project, discussion, and conclusion.

Transition into and out of military culture

Several attempts have been made during the last century to describe features of military culture (Devries, Hughes, Watson, & Moore, 2012; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Shields, 2011; Wertsch, 1991; Wilson, 2008). It has been proposed that military culture is collectivistic in nature, and instills ethics that are corporative in spirit and anti-individualistic. Military personnel learn to suppress individual needs in support of collective requirements (Ben-Ari, 1998; Goldstein, 2001; Huntington, 1957; Verrips, 2006). Actions and attitudes focused on concepts like loyalty, discipline, duty, selfless service, and even self-sacrifice are commonly displayed by service members (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; French, 2005; Kümmel, 2011; Lunde, 2009). The cooperative and collective approach is centered on the group and battle buddies as camaraderie is constantly reinforced (Goldstein, 2001; Woodward & Jenkings, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that the authoritarian and hierarchal structure inherent within military culture is designed to shape a predisposition to conformity and obedience (Hall, 2012a, 2012b; Wertsch, 1991). The socialization of service members is a turbulent and ongoing process as they begin to learn, construct, and demonstrate new military identities (Goldstein, 2001; Thornborrow & Brown, 2009). Basic military training consists of several rites of passage with an intense focus on camaraderie and military competence (i.e., weaponry and equipment familiarization, physical training, survival techniques). There is a large body of rituals in the regimented military life, ranging from standards and inspections to other forms of regulated conduct. Much is standardized including the military uniform, personal grooming, and the removal of personal

accessory items (i.e., piercings, ear rings) as part of the deindividualization process. This is designed to suppress individual desires and to encourage conformity with the military ideal focused on camaraderie and disciplined coordinated action (Ben-Ari, 1998; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). Once service members have embarked into the military world, its web of relationships will to a varying degree change their lives and the stories of who they are, even down to their ties to the outside civilian world and their families. New military voices will form to narrate this new military story of self-identities (Bragin, 2010; Dolan & Ender, 2008; Rosenberg, 1993).

However, service members are not passive recipients, which simply absorb the institutional messages in their socialization processes. Service members are active agents who may have more or less unique ways of appropriating and interpreting military cultures to fit or resonate with their own selves and preexisting I-positions, and thus individuals position themselves differently within military institutions. As active agents military personnel uniquely interpret the institutional contexts and take on a variety or multiplicity of perspectives according to their personal aspirations. This implies that beyond the mainstream sociological perspective on military socialization presented above, the individual psychological processes of internalizing the institutional ideas may be much more complex and heterogeneous than is often initially assumed. The psychological impact of military socialization may therefore be more nuanced, and this suggests that the military voices of service members may be divergent and thus influence their selves to varying degrees. Therefore, the term and category "military I-positions" may rather serve as a broad umbrella, which envelopes both personal appropriations of the cultural and institutional ideas and more collective voices of the institutions, which articulate critical institutional messages such as, for example, obedience, discipline, loyalty, and duty–willingness.

As military personnel leave military service the story of who I am calls for a reformulation of self-identity, and this transition initiates some type of narrative identity reconstruction that impacts the self. Such a process would necessitate the construction of a new meaning in life as well (Bragin, 2010; Frankl, 2006; Yanos, 2004). Numerous scenarios may initiate the separation from military service, and separation is not always desired or self-initiated. If a person is forced to leave active service (e.g., due to physical injury, mental health issues, poor conduct) it may generate major challenges in their self-identity adaptation to civilian life (Beder & Jones, 2012; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011). This ongoing longitudinal research project was designed as one step toward filling the research gap in regard to deeper insights into the longitudinal processes of identity reconstruction among military personnel during the transition into civilian life. The objectives of the project were to investigate transitional experiences, identity reconstruction, and existential/religious elements in the process. Drawing from this particular Swedish longitudinal research project with voluntarily released service members' self-identity work in

transition, seven identity issues among the majority of the participants are presented here, as they have been elsewhere (Grimell, 2016d):

- Asymmetry between military-veteran identities and new civilian identities, where the military–veteran identity maintains a dominant position in the self, and where the perception is filtered through a military–veteran lens.
- A clear sense of a military "me."
- Adjustment problems related to new settings.
- A slow process of constructing a new meaningful story of who I am as a civilian.
- Difficulties in find meaning and/or motivation in a new civilian life, which implies difficulties of reconstructing the story of who I will become as a civilian.
- Loss of extraordinary community and camaraderie.
- Dichotomy between military and civilian worlds/relationships.

After military service, former military personnel may developed post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), or other related psychiatric conditions, which may impair their adaptation to a new post-military, civilian life (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2012; Dickstein, Vogt, Handa, & Litz, 2010; Dolan & Ender, 2008; Kim, Britt, Klocko, Riviere, & Adler, 2011; Kopacz & Connery, 2015; Larner & Blow, 2011). The preponderance of military research focuses on service members and veterans with psychiatric diagnoses, such as PTSD, traumatic brain injuries (TBI), or related symptoms such as moral injury or moral concerns (Nakishima Brock & Lettini, 2012; Parkinson, French, & Masetti, 2012; Rambo, 2010; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1995, 2004; Yarvis & Beder, 2012). Less research has focused on the more mundane, planned mid-service transition or career retirement. Even fewer researchers approach the subject from a narrative and dialogical perspective.

A self with both military and civilian I-positions

A dialogical view of the self combines what Hermans and Hermans-Konopka (2010) conceptualize as traditional, modern, and postmodern understandings of the self (see Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 82–119, for a full review). Such a perspective understands a self as an extension of its military and civilian cultures and societies, and the self is viewed as a, "society of the mind," including a variety of voices with their specific tensions, conflicting ideas and potentials for dialogue (Hermans, 2002, p. 147). This idea of a dialogical self creates a self with many I-positions, which each have specific voices that can be understood as narrative positions of a multifaceted self (Hermans, 1996). However, the self does not passively internalize positions that military and civilian cultures and societies emulate unaltered, but rather participates and interacts in such an interchange, appropriating some while adapting and even rejecting others.

Regarding the voices of self, there are two types of I-positions: those linked to the "internal" and those to the "external" domain of the self (Hermans, 2001a,

p. 252). I-positions within the internal domain of the self are located inside of a person (e.g., "I as ambitious," "I as restless"). I-positions within the external domain of the self are located outside of the person (e.g., my battle buddies, my unit, my children, my wife), but are really part of the self. Given the basic assumption of the extended self, the other is not outside of the self, but rather an intrinsic part of it in a metaphorical topological sense (Day & Jesus, 2013; Hermans, 2001a, 2008). The composition of these I-positions creates the position repertoire of the self (Hermans, 2001b). I-positions may have different arenas of activity and weights in the self depending upon, among other things, the current circumstances and significant others such as battle buddies and families. One reason that military I-positions may become influential in service members' selves is the potential depth of camaraderie, community, and bonds with battle buddies (Franks, 2004; Goldstein, 2001). This may instigate tension or conflict between a military I-position and civilian positions such as a father and husband related to significant others such as children and a wife, which a composite self must then handle. The composite self seeks to promote integration between decentralizing and centralizing movements of positions in the self (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). This movement is understood as a dynamic process of positioning and counterpositioning between I-positions as these positions engage in interactions with significant others, their own desires and wishes, or new cultural influences, encounters, and relationships. As military personnel leave military service, the selves may require reorganization or innovation as new situations in lives are encountered. "In the case of a transition, the self is confronted with a new, unfamiliar or even threatening situation that requires an adaption or reorganization of the self" (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 239). A transition involves adaption of a settled number of I-positions, and most likely the construction of new I-positions. In order to succeed with a transition some degree of reorganization is called for in order to sustain the dialogical capacity of the self in the new life situation (Hermans, 2004). Transitions for service members imply that the personal narratives are likely to change as the authors of the selves become reoriented.

The self as a dialogical narrator may be presented with some inconsistency in regard to a self with many (sub)selves, but this inconsistency may be narratively solved through the distinction between the characters and the story. "The many are the main characters; the one is the story within which the characters are given form, function, and voice" (McAdams, 1997, p. 118). I-positions author a set of corresponding characters that become united, likely with tension and numerous plotlines, through a personal story of who I am. Furthermore, other psychological perspectives may challenge the self as a dialogical narrator, for example the Eriksonian idea of self-work attained through the integration of ego-identity around a stable core of the self (Erikson, 1959). As for the idea of an ego-identity that develops over time, this article suggests that what is needed to advance self-identity work in military transition to civilian life is a theoretical framework and methodology that

can take into account conflict, tension, contradiction, and poly-vocality in a storied self without reducing it to a single personal narrative of ego-identity development. Instead, what is opted for is a more nuanced understanding of the self as a dialogical narrator with several I-positions, which are displayed in a storied self (Hermans et al., 1992).

Method

The article draws on two case studies collected from a qualitative and longitudinal research project, which started during the summer of 2013. The working name of the project, which reflects the overall research purpose, was *Existential and Religious Dimensions in Identity Reconstruction among Swedish Military Personnel during the Process of becoming Civilians*. Within the project, 19 participants were interviewed annually during 2013–2016 as they transitioned from full-time military service to civilian life. As the project evolved, some participants aborted the transition due to different reasons and returned to military service. The project was designed to investigate identity reconstruction in transition on a long-term basis, which in itself was a time-consuming engagement for both the participants and the researcher. The approach was narrative, a productive lens for the investigation of identity and self (Clandinin, 2013; McAdams, 2013; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006). The analysis was centered on how preexisting and new narrative characters develop and interact in the interview narratives (Slocum-Bradley, 2009).

Participants

The sample of 19 service members volunteered through a snowball sampling method, and each individual was informed about the study by a letter of information (Noy, 2008; Polkinghorne, 2005). The letter of information presented the background of the project (i.e., a need to gain knowledge about the process of transition among service members) and described the purpose of the project, the number of interviews, the research ethics, and the anonymity and formalities. This letter was distributed by e-mail, and the participants had to complete a response letter and return it. This also served as the informed consent agreement. In the response letter, the participants were required, among a number of things, to suggest a time and place to conduct the first interview. There was a wide variation among the participants in regard to age, missions, ranks, and regimental background. The largest part on the sample included service member aged between 23 to 35 years old. Four service members were around 60 years old and engaging retirement. Three service members were female. The ranks spanned from Private First Class to Major. The majority of the sample included Caucasian males and females. Twenty participants began with the project, but during the second year one dropped off; thus 19 remained till the conclusion of the sampling phase of the project.

Sergeant Helen and Lieutenant John (who are referred to using fictitious names throughout the study but with correct ranks) were selected as case study examples in this article since they represent two different types of the self-identity work in military transition to civilian life present within the sample (part-time service and a return to full-time service). Helen (part-time service) and John (return to full-time service) also highlight one male and one female experience, which is significant since both males and females serve and transition to civilian lives. Some of the presented details have been slightly altered or omitted to safeguard the anonymity of the participants (e.g., explicit information about regiments, missions, universities, studies, names of significant others, etc.).

Interview protocol

The interviews were based on a semi-structured design in order to cover stories of service, transition, relationships, identities, and existential concerns (Kvale, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; van den Brand, Hermans, Scherer-Rath, & Verschuren 2014). The same interview questions were used throughout the project. The questions were designed to open up topics and allow the informants to construct answers in ways that they found meaningful (Riessman, 1993; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The questions were formulated as open questions, and the interview started with the question: "If you think for a while, in what way would you describe your life or service as a soldier or an officer?" Through this approach, the informants were encouraged to tell their own stories in their own ways (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Crossley 2000). The topics covered were: Military Story, Transition, Relationships, Identity, and Existential Concerns. The semi-structured design allowed for follow-up questions in response to the stories told. Each interview has been transcribed verbatim into a complete transcript. Transcripts in Swedish and a summarization in English will be provided to other researchers per request.

In addition to the fact that I conducted the interviews as a researcher with a stated research purpose, the participants were explicitly informed of my earlier military service as an officer in the Swedish armed forces in the letter of information. I experienced that my military background facilitated the interviews in regard to military cultural knowledge (Mishler, 1986, 2004).

Analysis

A longitudinal design with repeated interviews (Time 1–3) created the possibility of a triangulation between the participant's narrative accounts, wherein preexisting and new characters of I-positions were compared over time (Patton, 1990; Polkinghorne, 2005). Explicit self-descriptions made by the participants revealed identity claims made by the characters of the self (McAdams, 1988, 1997; Mishler, 1986, 2004; Sarbin, 1986), and these were interpreted as I-positions (Hermans, 1996; Hermans et al., 1992). Even though a participant may not have explicitly

declared ''this is my I-position as a service member,'' the claims of the military character, and other civilian characters, were understood as representing specific points of view in the self, which equate as I-positions (Grimell, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c). If a character was not clearly presented in the interview narrative, then the participant was asked to explicitly identify such a voice, which represented a declaration of a specific I-position of the self. Within this design the potential rearrangement, movement, contradiction, tension, conflict, or dialogue between narrative characters of the self, expressed in the storied accounts, was perceived as the actual self-identity process (Hermans, 1999, 2003). To keep track of developments and interactions of I-positions, a qualitative software analysis program (i.e., Atlas.ti) was used in the analytical process to code narrative characters in the transcripts. Taking Sergeant Heleńs case into consideration, two influential and salient characters were present in the first interview narrative and coded as the military character and the political/feminist character (later entitled the activist position in this article). The position of the political/feminist character articulated tension, critique, and a conflicting point of view in regard to the military character and culture. However, in the second interview, as Helen was about to deploy for an international mission, the military character was then dominating the interview. In the third post deployment interview, the narrative accounts implicated a rearranged climate between the characters that was coded as cooperation.

Results

Sergeant Helen

Sergeant Helen is approaching her late 20s, and is a combat veteran in the Army. When we met for the first interview in November 2013, she was about 30 months post exit and a university student. Her service included two years and culminated with a combat intense deployment in Afghanistan. Heleńs initial motive to enlist in the armed forces was to learn a language as an interpreter; likewise she viewed her deployment as a type of language travel. Helen's motive to leave service was largely influenced by the difficulties of being a female in a warrior culture populated and defined by ''servicemen,'' and she stated:

> Prior to deployment to Afghanistan I considered continuing to work in the armed forces. But then I grew quite decided about not being at all interested in continuing because it was so difficult. Most of all because it was so split, even though I really fought hard to fit in there were so many inbuilt obstacles, and if I mentioned those obstacles it would become impossible to fit in. It was either to try to crawl under those obstacles and accept them and in that way try to erode at them, but once again it is very difficult. I really admire the female officers because it damn sure is not easy, and there is a lot of ignorance about this among the male officers. I have experienced many of those things, particularly the rumor spreading, which is something that can only

be discussed with female service members, and in the civilian life, they can't even understand where such things come from, it is a very strange phenomena.

Helen was studying social science at a university in Sweden at the time of the first interview as she has a specific interest in politics, gender issues and feminism, and she stated:

> I read social science to have a platform to stand upon, and maybe it is just a way of postponing what I really want to do, but I am thinking that I will be able to work with human rights when I am done...to work with women's rights.

In the first interview, there was much tension and conflict between critical parts of her self. The greatest areas of conflict related to her experiences as a service member (e.g., sexism, prejudices against women, combat, and the transformation into a warrior). Despite beginning her transition, her military character still searched for adventure and meaning in dangerous contexts, and entertained the possibility of a new deployment. However, it seemed like parts of her self could not accept the military context in which she had been shaped as a warrior, and Helen stated:

> It seems like I want different things, the military thing, I have been very influenced by that, that you are supposed to be cool, which I had no need to be before. That is probably what is absolutely most new to my personality after the armed service, I have more of, I believe it is a need to be calm, secure and not become stressed by unnecessary stuff. I am thinking of a thing, when we had returned from deployment and were already in Sweden preparing to go home, we had psychological sessions, you had the possibility to get extra support, if you said you needed it. But I was drawn into some kind of competition to be mentally healthy; I mean from my civilian I: "free psychology support, that is what people pay a lot of money for, that is really good!" But my military I took over completely, and I just wanted to be declared mentally healthy. That I was cool and well and good, and then I will walk out of here and get notified that I don't need to see anyone. And I have reflected a lot over that, it was totally sick, but it was something which really influenced me, and I was declared healthy, but I fixed that later.

By the addition that "I fixed that later" Helen was referring to a reaction that she had about 20 months post deployment when she was supposed to talk about her deployment and combat experiences on a seminar. In the middle of the seminar, suddenly a number of repressed combat and post-combat memories fled over her, and she started to cry. Later, she called the Veterans Health and was scheduled for psychological support to process the repressed memories.

In the second interview (T2, 2014), Helen was actually preparing for a new deployment, and had taken a year off from University. This came as a surprise to the researcher. Helen's military character totally dominated the interview, which

was filled with military expressions and experiences from pre-deployment training, and she stated:

> Even if it is a fucking dangerous deployment, because you don't know what will happen, it feels damn nice. That was appealing, and to get more competence too, and something which influenced it [the decision to deploy] a lot was how jealous all military personnel in the armed forces became as I am going to the place-to-be where everyone else wishes to deploy to. I think it has a lot to do with that too, not really that I thought it was the coolest thing in the world, but that the others thought so.

Helen deployed for about six months to an international war zone and returned without any outer wounds and resumed the academic studies where she had left to eventually graduate and apply for jobs. When we conducted the third interview (T3, 2015) Helen said that she had "accepted" her military self, and as I asked explicitly what she meant she replied:

> I guess it means that I speak about it with others, I am not so quick to excuse the fact that I have served for some time. Before [the second deployment] it felt like I served to learn some skills, I went to Afghanistan to learn those skills well...It was easy to explain why I did it. But now, with me being politically oriented to the left, engaged in the armed forces and so on, I as a feminist may have actually been there to improve things. Now this has become more of my explanatory model when I talk with new people about why I serve, why I have served in the armed forces.

As I encouraged Helen during the third interview to describe and name her critical voice of the armed forces and service she responded by calling it, "the political, ideological, empathetic voice." New to this interview narrative was the tone of acceptance, to acknowledge that she had served in two deployments while no longer questioning her voluntary military engagement and military character of the self. Instead she had reframed the meaning of it, and the narrative account above demonstrated a cooperative climate between two influential characters and I-positions of Helen's self.

Lieutenant John

The second case involves Lieutenant John who is approaching his 30s and had served for about seven years in the Swedish Marines at the time of the first interview. John himself found the military service stimulating, and when, during the later phase of the conscription, his platoon commander posed the idea, John opted to become an instructor. After some time serving as an instructor, he was encouraged by his commanding officers to apply to the Military Academy, which he did. He was approved and eventually graduated and served as a platoon commander. His motive for leaving service was partially dependent on a curiosity to pursue

a civilian life, and partially due to his frustration regarding budget cuts in the armed forces that sharply limited the possibilities to train troops, develop skills, and obtain sufficient material.

By the time of the first interview, he had served seven years in the Marines. As we conducted the first interview (T1, 2014), John was four months post exit, and was also studying social science at a university in Sweden. John had severe difficulties adapting to the university setting, and was in conflict with many of the antimilitaristic ideals and values presented in that context, particularly of his institution. John stated that:

> Yes, I became crazy. During one seminar the other day we discussed something, and one of the students said ''nowadays soldiers don't really fight against each other.'' And I started to think, 'but you haven't actually been out there serving and I have colleagues of mine that have lost their legs...' So this has rather strengthened my military identity... It has been very frustrating, and I experience a lack of attachment to reality at the institution I belong to, there are really great researchers in many areas but they are scholars and only deliver criticisms. With my military experience, the values that I have are not sufficient and it becomes a pretty big identity crisis, it prevents me from shaping a new identity... It consumes so much energy because sometime I focus more on how detached the others are than I should, instead of focusing on my studies. It is related to the institution and everything that you are supposed to do. It is like criticizing everything that you are, that I believe in. Somehow I believe in these things, otherwise I wouldn't have ended up serving in the armed forces. But now I am supposed to sit and constantly criticize the system I am a part of, that consumes much energy, definitely.

John could not settle the conflict between the institution and who he experienced himself to be, his values, and what he believed in. He completed his year at the university and then reenrolled in the armed forces.

A year later, we met for the second (T2, 2015) interview, and John had continued advancing as an officer, but a new element in the interview narrative was that John had begun a relationship with Sara; they now lived together, and John stated:

> I think in general what has happened this last year is that I have deliberately started to open myself up, and previously I didn't dare to let people in, it is likely also related to that I realized that my career and my ambition at work, I can't control that, you never know what happens, but sincere relationships are something that you control 100 percent by yourself... before I met Sara, that's the name of my co-habiting girlfriend, I have never been so close, I believe, in any relationship before, so I have really dared to open up.

When we met for the final and third interview (T3, 2016), John had continued advancing successfully as an officer in the Swedish armed forces. However, in the

third interview narrative, there was a change of tone in regard to his military identity, and as John was invited to talk about his future he stated:

> I want to have a family. That is something Sara and I have concretely talked about, to have kids. And I am quite traditional, so I want to get married before we have children, and then I have to downsize the strong will to pursue a military career. I would not say that to marry and have kids are parallel developmental steps which can share the same plane as my career without impacting it, but rather that when I add those things then I must downsize the others.

Discussion

Based on the literature review in the beginning of the article, it was already suggested that military cultures seem somewhat different from that of civilian western cultures (Beder, 2012; French, 2005; Hall, 2012a, 2012b; Huntington, 1957). However, military cultures may also be experienced quite differently depending on gender. Helen's experiences of the obstacles of being a service woman in a male-dominated context dissolved her ambition of a military career after the deployment in Afghanistan. Her experiences of being a female service member in a military context which is dominated by men, such as being judged by gender in a number of situations, while she simply aspires to be accepted by the other male service members, yet is the object of pejorative rumors of different kinds and depreciative comments, resonates with other reports (Andreassen & Ingalls, 2009; Badaró, 2015; Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Estrada & Berggren, 2009; Goldstein, 2001; Wertsch, 1991). Moreover, the presence and influence of a warrior culture which led Helen to see psychological support upon completion of a mission as a potential risk stands in stark contrast to Helen's "civilian Me" which was rooted and constructed in a civilian culture. Viewed from the eyes of her "civilian Me" psychological counseling was perceived as a valuable asset that would benefit her mental health. This process in her self at that time precisely after returning to Sweden was something which Helen had reflected upon frequently, and 30 months post exit she called it "totally sick." This suggests that the process of transition that includes the adaption of I-positions takes time but also significant others who can assist in the reorganization of I-positions within the self (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Warrior cultures are a challenge to deal with for military and civilian health services as well as military personnel. Bryan and Morrow (2011) suggest that warrior cultures value strength, resilience, courage, and personal sacrifice. Mental toughness is saluted and reinforced as a cultural norm, with an emphasis on inner strength and self-reliance. Warrior cultures explicitly train their members to "suck it up," and "a warrior who admits to mental health problems and seeks out mental health care might view these actions as signs of weakness" (Bryan & Morrow, 2011, p. 17). Additionally Kim et al. (2011) suggested that one factor that explains why so few soldiers seek out mental health support has

involved stigma. Stigma can be conceived of as a type of mark that separates a service member from the others and connects him or her to undesirable characteristics. Helen first made contact with the Veterans Health to seek psychological support when her repressed deployment and combat memories were unexpectedly released 20 months post exit. This reevaluation of psychological support may also be related to the transition and reorganization of I-positions as Helen reflected upon the outcome of a warrior culture from another civilian cultural position which perceived psychological support as rational, far from a sign of weakness. If she on the other hand would have made a career within the armed forces, research reports, and her own recounting suggest that it would have been less likely for her to seek support for mental health issues (Hall, 2012a). As Bryan and Morrow (2011) suggest, alternative mental health support programs need to be developed for the armed forces to better navigate the challenges of warrior cultures wherein mental health care is connoted with weakness and stigma.

John, on the other hand, as a male and a Lieutenant had quite different motives for leaving active service. As he transitioned from a military culture, John experienced a salient conflict in his self as his military character and mind-set were expected to adapt to a new cultural context. This conflict involved self-described identity crises. The clash between cultures could not be avoided as John's student peers were as critical to his cultural position as he was to theirs. This dichotomy was sustained throughout his year in university. The civilian student peers, as well as John, were locked into their cultural characters and positions. John's experiences are not new amid this specific type of transition and resonate with previous research of military transition into university settings; universities characteristically encourage and nurture individuality, a critical point of view, free thinking, and openness (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011; Rumann, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Wheeler, 2012). Additionally, service members pursuing higher education are often much older than their peers, and potentially possess drastically different life experiences related to deployment or combat (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2013; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

However, an emphasis on the dichotomy between military and civilian cultures and the people within may not be the most productive avenue to advance the understanding of military transition to civilian life. This is a major reason why the adoption of a dialogical perspective on the military transition to civilian life offers so much potential. Within a dialogical perspective lies the capacity to bridge the very dichotomy between "military" and "civilian"; a hang up on this polarization is common and can be a major handicap. The particularization and simplification of service members which, for example, perceives them as a strange and anachronist group, coupled with the same semiotic relationship reciprocated by service members toward civilians will hinder dialogical routes that could otherwise facilitate military transition to civilian life (Badaró, 2009). Both positions are required for dialogue, and only when people with contrasting cultural positions begin to talk and listen and learn from each other can the foundations to a bridge be built. Unfortunately, this was not the case when John entered the academic

institution where neither he nor his student peers could actually open up, listen, and learn from each other to better understand their points of view. Instead, the seminars generated clear movements toward the familiar and the protection of the local for John as well as for his student peers, who became the actual "other" (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). As dialogue failed, so failed the transition for John who returned to full-time service after the first year; the absence of academic openness among the students on both sides of this chasm, who all could have enriched their outlooks and perceptions of the world, resulted in the closing of new horizons.

From a dialogical perspective, humans evolve in complex ways in relation to cultures, relationships with significant others and new encounters, and this complexity is evident in the cases of Helen and John. Helen had two salient I-positions: one political, ideological, empathetic, and feminist position that is called the activist position (by the researcher), and a military position. Based upon Helen's narrative accounts the military I-position, under the influence of battle buddies, had the capacity to overrule her "civilian Me" as she rejected psychological support promptly after her return to Sweden. Battle buddies drew her into some kind of competition, which silenced the voice of her "civilian Me." However, at the time of the first interview 30 months post exit her activist position seemed salient, including the ambition of working with women's rights, while tension was present in regard to a military I-position which still nurtured an interest for adventure in dangerous contexts. During the second interview, Helen was preparing to deploy as a result of a complex decision rooted in several factors but wherein the perceptions of significant others regarding deployment (thinking it was really cool) actually carried more weight than her own perception and thus had major impacts upon the decision, thus demonstrating the power of others (Badaró, 2015). As she was interviewed a third time after returning to Sweden to complete her studies a salient change had occurred between her military and activist positions as she no longer from the activist position rewrote her military service as a type of language learning and travel experience; she instead presented herself as a combat experienced female warrior who had performed two serious international deployments in war zones. Suggestively, she had bridged the gap between military and civilian contexts by reframing the meaning of the military experience and reconsidering her I-positions (Badaró, 2015; Crossley, 2000; Frankl, 2006; Hermans, 2003; Hermans & Hermans-Jansen, 1995). Helen acknowledged that the activist position actually could improve things in the military context, which demonstrated that a cooperative dialogical climate had risen in her self (Hermans, 1996, 2001a, 2001b).

John was also evolving while he advanced his military career of full-time service in relation to new encounters and relationships with significant others. In the second interview John had recently entered into a relationship, and new in the interview narrative was the I-position as a cohabiting boyfriend, which included characteristics of becoming more open and sharing inner emotions and thoughts. This position had grown more salient in the third interview narrative as John wanted to get married and have children, which introduced two nascent I-positions

as a husband and a father. His traditional and responsible approach to marriage and children is not a parallel path which can be properly traveled while also fully focusing on a military career, but rather the route that he acknowledges will impact and limit the military career. In stating that marriage and kids equated downsized military career aspirations, John demonstrated that his family oriented I-positions were very influential in his self. Significant others and potential others had provided John with meaningful and salient I-positions as he had evolved in new ways and more elaborately embedded his self into civilian culture and life.

Conclusion

Military cultures foster military characters with corresponding I-positions in the self. These voices represent ideals and values which may stand in stark contrast to some of the elements in civilian cultural contexts. The transition from military service to a civilian life requires adaption of the self and involves interplay between I-positions; it is likely filled with some tension, contradiction or even conflict. Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans, 2001a, 2001b) may be of particular relevance in order to advance knowledge of military transition to civilian life beyond the mainstream dichotomy and projected otherness which can manifest in a service member's perception of civilians, or vice versa, or all too often both. The bridging capacity of a dialogical approach may be further developed by preexisting and new I-positions which link the self into military and civilian contexts via significant others who have a crucial influence for the temporal dimension in such processes, including a potential narrative reformulation of who I am, as well as for the spatial dimension in the self and the potential reorganization of I-positions in transition to civilian life or a return to full-time service (Hermans & Gieser, 2012; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Additionally, at least three other implications of this article should be considered. Armed forces must address the cultural obstacles for female service members in a male-dominated world, otherwise a likely consequence is that these female service members depart and thus the cultural reproduction of the obstacles continues. Not everyone may have salient I-positions such as Helen which evolve to dialogically cooperate in the service of creating change within a military context. Moreover, the personnel and peers within university contexts need to consider the identities, values, ideas, and experiences of service members who transition to universities in order to offer them fertile conditions for dialogue (Rumann, 2010; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Wheeler, 2012). The larger burden for an invitation to dialogue must rest upon the cultural context wherein the newcomers enter as the newcomers are naturally in the minority and upon entry prime targets of the "other" label, which also implicates that the armed forces need to explicitly invite female service members into dialogue. Finally, when a warrior culture manifests then the need for dialogue with civilian values and ideas may be even more accentuated as this warrior culture may otherwise hinder effective mental health support (Byran & Morrow, 2011). A possible step in such a direction may be to introduce a dialogical approach to

military and civilian positions of the self already in basic training and then to continue to sustain such an approach throughout military service. This may likely facilitate a military transition to civilian life, too, since dialogical military and civilian positions are already established in the self. As this is just a tentative but promising way of describing the complexities of self-identity processes, the readers will hopefully take this as an invitation to improve the qualitative limitations of the presented methodology, and to cooperate in gathering more knowledge to help transcend the dichotomy of military and civilian spheres and thereby support transition from active service to civilian life, or a later return to full-time service.

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