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# Military Members: Body, Identity, and The Transformations of Military Service

Valerie Masutier

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MILITARY MEMBERS: BODY, IDENTITY, AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF  
MILITARY SERVICE

by

VALERIE MASUTIER

Under the Direction of Cassandra White PhD

ABSTRACT

Military service and reintegration into civilian populations often entails an abrupt disorienting shift in environment for members of the United States military. Navigating variable differences in military and civilian culture directly impacts the ways service members navigate and understand health and wellness. By examining the lived experience of military members, this research aims to recognize how military service is a transformative process of the mind and body and how identity is shaped and reshaped by the institutions they work for. Using ethnographic research, I argue that service members adopt the behaviors and values associated with the military environment which directly impacts their health and identity in and out of the military. This study suggests that the military institution's involvement in fostering certain behaviors has a

direct consequence on how military members navigate and conceptualize their own physical and mental health.

INDEX WORDS: Military, United States, Health, Identity, Body, Wellness.

MILITARY MEMBERS: BODY, IDENTITY, AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF  
MILITARY SERVICE

by

VALERIE MASUTIER

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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2019

MILITARY MEMBERS: BODY, IDENTITY, AND THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF  
MILITARY SERVICE

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May 2019

**DEDICATION**

*To the service members who spoke towards their most personal experiences and encouraged me to continue writing on this subject.*

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

**ASVAB**

Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery

**BUDS**

Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL

**EOD**

Explosive Ordnance Disposal [Technician]

**GAD**

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

**IED**

Improvised Explosive Device

**MST**

Military Sexual Trauma

**PTSD**

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

**VA**

United States Department of Veterans Affairs

## 1 INTRODUCTION

After a year and half of conducting ethnographic research surrounding military members, I will never get used to the emotional and yet visceral responses that are so evident in so many of the participants. The physiological and psychological changes seen in their bodies while reliving their present and past in active duty, nearly took away my desire to continue this project. On more than one occasion during interviews, I encountered yelling and rage over memories and frustrations involved in “reconciling with the demons”, as one participant would put it. Another, with her fists clenched and knuckles turning a marbled color of red and white, would begin to mentally “space out” and mid-sentence I would watch her talk, stop abruptly, and her eyes would fix above my head and stay there for a few seconds until she returned to the present. Fixated on these responses I find myself still not knowing how to react to them. Do I try and sympathize? Do I try and calm them? Do I just let the rage wash over them? These various scales of awkwardness and discomfort are what puts this research in perspective for me.

The reality is, I have no family and very few close friends who are or were in the United States military, but through a book on military technology I became interested in the more overlooked aspect of the institution and the people who work in it. Often, in places where normativity is challenged is where realities become convoluted in acceptable and unacceptable versions of selfhood, identity, embodiment, and health. Predicated on public perception of appropriate and reasonable reactions to the mundane aspects of life, the ritualistic aspects of military culture and the aftermath of military service put into question: what is normal? Like research, the lived experiences of the participants in the before, during, and aftermath of their military service follows an unpredictable trajectory, we really do not know and cannot control where it may go.

After the fieldwork process was over and while writing this, even now, I am still left unsure about what the purpose of war is. Many have argued that doing and going to war is justified by the promotion and preservation of democracy, used for humanitarian interventions, linked by moral and ethical laden explanations for war, and the preventions of war by going to war. Militarization, as proposed by Lutz (2002), has been a process that has organized society in such a way that we accommodate and maintain the presence and production of violence (723).

This process involves an intensification of the labor and resources allocated to military purposes, including the shaping of other institutions in synchrony with military goals. Militarization is simultaneously a discursive process, involving a shift in general societal beliefs and values in ways necessary to legitimate the use of force, the organization of large standing armies and their leaders, and the higher taxes or tribute used to pay for them. Militarization is intimately connected not only to the obvious increase in the size of armies and resurgence of militant nationalisms and militant fundamentalisms but also to the less visible deformation of human potentials into the hierarchies of race, class, gender, and sexuality, and to the shaping of national histories in ways that glorify and legitimate military action. (Lutz 2002:723)

In other words, militarization is intimately attached to the ordinary, the mundane, the ritual aspects of everyday life, and the maintenance of structural inequalities. For the U.S civilian population, it often goes unnoticed. Yet, for military members and the communities in conflict it is engrained into experience. On the global scale, as the military industrial complex increasingly grows across the nation and into more global system, the effects of war on health through a biocultural lens are countless. There are both the physiological and psychological changes, there is also the admixture of conditions that are harmful to human biology and health demonstrated by acts of war (Singer et al. 2010: 29). The predictable picture that the term war paints is one that is directly associated with death and dying. But, casualties of war are not just immediate but also long term. Correlations between economic and ecological destruction and higher predispositions of chronic disease compromises and quite literally locks in the experiences of war into our

bodies (Singer et al. 2010:42-3). The events of war engrain themselves into our cells and the embodiment of war elevates the risks for adverse health outcomes (Singer et al. 2010: 42-3).

What I question here is what happens when the facets of doing war become a part of the everyday physical and mental embodied experience? For the military members that engage with this institution, the effects of militarization are internalized in the ritualistic components of life. From hyper vigilance to resting upon the comradery, the transformations of military service on the body, identity, and health are deeply rooted in a service members everyday living that is involved in doing war.

It is important to note the differences in what I call “doing war” versus “going” to war? “Doing war” implies the less obvious actions most associated with “going” to war. Doing war is the training, the molding, the internalization of the jobs that they are called to do and how it intersects with military culture and civilian life. Going to war is then the actualities of deployment for combat and peacekeeping purposes. In either sense, the doing and going to war changes a person, and in very real ways some come back from their service on the Homefront or abroad with another war to face. In approaching the documentation of bodily effects of military service and its impacts on health and identity learning about the military culture, coping strategies, and navigation helps understand the mindset of a military member that as a society we neglect.

### **1.1 Purpose: Why Military?**

The purpose of this research is to examine the military institution, its methods of training, its culture in the broadest of terms, and how this directly effects the military service members who work for the military industrial complex. More specifically, I aim to emphasize how the institution effects the health, body, and identity, of military members. The approaches that

military members use to navigate these phenomena is particularly important as the entrance into military service and the return to civilian member can often symbolizes an abrupt shift in thinking met with an unforeseen push towards the hope for normalcy, independence, and or opportunity. Navigating identity is a component of this push to normalcy and has significant implications for military members health and wellness. Gaining knowledge on the intersection of identity, the body, and military service from a military members point of view is important to understand aspects of attention and care they most need or desire. By examining the lived experience of these military members, this research aims to recognize how military service is a transformative process of the mind and body and how identity is shaped and reshaped by the institutions they work for. Thus, in this project, I propose engagement in meaningful conversations regarding military service, the realities it encompasses for military members, and sub-culture interrelationships to better understand these processes.

I find it important to note the complexity of such a topic that works to deconstruct the military member and not the system of the military institution of the United States. In many ways it is difficult to separate the two, as they are essential to each other's existence. The national story, the history, and its affective properties, have occupied large spaces in the American cosmology and are symbolic of American ideology. From the notion of military might to "support our troops" slogans, the military and the militarization of objects, people, and things has been silently indoctrinated in our culture as an aspect of daily life (Enloe 2000:2). For this reason, I found that while military institutions are globalized systems, I choose to position this paper away from cross-cultural consideration or comparison in that the topic of military service in the United States is in of itself unique and complex. Additionally, this limitation of the scope of the paper allow me to cover the topic in what is arguably the more necessary literature to

concentrate on more detailed and nuanced approaches involved in military research. In collecting narratives of variation in experience with shared contexts and challenges, my end goal is to understand military health holistically to assist people in reintegration with civilian life. In this project, I am seeking experienced-based narratives to understand the variation of the individuals and human variations in body, identity, health, and experience.

## **1.2 Situating Ethnography: Narrative and Selfhood**

The importance that narrative serves in this work provides a fundamental theoretical and methodological framework to position the bodily, personal, and cultural experiences of military members. Narrative, for this research, illuminates aspects of practices and experiences that surround military life and culture that might not otherwise be recognized by what can only be described as a mediation between the personal and the cultural (Garro et al. 2000:1,5,20). Narrative constitutes the relationship between the two. While, narrative can be argued to be bound by passive portraits of memories and plots as recalled by the individual, anthropology has combatted this notion through its increased and broadly accepted use of narrative for ethnographic representation. The reality of the matter is that narrative is both useful and is a tool for the discovery of our data that is shaped by these stories. Because narrative is heavily crafted by cultural understanding about what are the appropriate actions a person takes both bodily and personally, it provides a way to approach how the individual mediates the relationship between individual and culture by filling a role in culture that creates meaning (Garro et al. 2000:24-25). The struggles that participants might find themselves in during interpretation and practicality of stories are not only a concern to the individual but also the moral and structural positions that they find themselves in (Garro et al. 2000:17).



These struggles enable anthropology to deal more directly and in a more dynamic manner to the structural and symbolic influences and detriments. This is where telling stories and taking action meet and here the individual not only emerges through their cultural and personal particularities but also links and makes sense of the past through perspectives on the present and future possibilities (Garro et al. 2000:70-71). What narrative brings to the table is the lived experience, embodiment, and reconsideration of the ritualistic aspects of the mundane.

The abrupt change from military life to civilian life involves encountering the loss of one's "normal" roles such as Navy Seal or being a part of an EOD team. The loss of such roles is encountered with the struggles involved in reconstructing a sense of continuity of self and the role of responsibilities due in part to roles and their performance often defines one's personhood (Garro et al. 2000, 88). Because of the shift from military to civilian is a profound disruption to identity, narratives about the effects of the shift on health and embodiment hold the potential to articulate the experience and the reconfiguration of one's identity (Garro et al. 2000:89). Restructuring the social identity (cultural) and the self (personal) in response to this shift occurs as certain conflicts and strategies noted by participants. We can then see how these narratives result in the reorientation of the self that is shaped by the efforts it takes to make sense of the self and the world around them in the face of instability.

While this research is not about what comprises selfhood, noting that there is variability in the ways the "self" is understood through multiple contexts proves valuable in recognizing how selfhood is built and rebuilt. Much of what characterizes the western version of selfhood involves a unique individualized trajectory of understanding and "finding" the self; a life history that often involves the personal inner self forming on one's own terms in relation to social role and group or community affiliation (Kusserow 2004:19). Here I would argue that in the case for

military members, dominant discourse around the self is both approached by individualized self (inner) and a self-built in relation to community ideologies (outer). This is particularly important in examining how military service affects their lives when they no longer are actively involved in a context where socialized identity is a result of their service.

Recognizing the military culture embedded in these experiences is fundamental to understand how service members understand and navigate their health and identity. While militarization does not always take the guise of war understanding the process by which a person may shift in identity, self, or embodiment by the military depends on militaristic ideas that serve the purpose of the military's ability to strip the civilian self and remake it as a soldier (Enloe 2000:3). Anthropologists have discussed, through numerous works on the construction of the self, that selves are intimately intertwined with the institutions that individuals find themselves in (Hinojosa 2010:180). Military service and culture offer catalysts for the ways people respond, contribute, and conceptualize themselves in relation to their military service.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

In recent years an ontological shift in anthropological military research has begun to direct its focus on the more private perspectives and experiences of the military members who work in and for the institution. The greater part of these narratives collected has incorporated intersections of military soldiers' bodily practices, sentiments regarding their health, and how military culture has shaped and reshaped the soldier's identity. To understand the complexity of military members' lived experiences, it is worth exploring how anthropologists and other social scientists have worked to understand the range in experience with the body, health, and identity. The overview of the literature on such a topic will focus on three points: how military bodies have been formed and reassembled by the military, what anthropology has said about these

measures, and how anthropology has theorized and studied these narratives about soldiers' experiences with military service and its aftermath.

But what do I mean by the body, health, identity, and embodiment? These terms after all are loaded. Anthropology has, through time and time again, worked to deconstruct models of health, what it means, and what is involved. The consensus has been that terms, such as those above, and their meanings have been dictated largely by the individual but also the culture(s) they may find themselves in. But the dynamic between the individual and culture has both largely dictated meaning and the way the individual navigates and negotiates said meanings. Knowing this, approaching the topic of military health requires a suspension of my own usual beliefs and cultural rationales surrounding the mind/body, health/unhealthy, illness/wellness oppositions and the assumptions they carry that are both naturally and culturally produced (Scheper-Hughes 1987:6-7).

## **2.1 Approaching Health, Bodies, and Embodiment**

Focusing on health, body, and identity requires 2 perspectives founded on the individual level and the social level. The individual body involves the lived experience of the body-self dynamic (ex: you and your body). The social body is the socially produced models used in understanding the body. These 2 perspectives will be crucial to consider when accounting for how military culture and the institution has affected the participants and the methods and thought processes they go through when detailing their experiences and any changes to their health, body, and identity. Western models of health, identity, and body have occupied much of contemporary social and biological theory and are based on what is "natural" and using those terms as a way to justify particular social values and social arrangements (Scheper-Hughes 1987:19). Thinking of the body has both a physical and cultural artifact illustrates that it is not

always possible to ascertain where nature ends and culture begins (questioning “what is natural?”) (Scheper-Hughes 1987:19).

Additionally, the body is filled with information about cultural and personal practices related to health; bodies also act as a form of communication through which nature, society, and culture speak through (Scheper-Hughes 1987:31). Embodiment is the fundamental dimension of habitus, advancing our understanding of certain practices (Bourdieu 1990:72 and Csordas 1990:28). Bourdieu’s concept of habitus, the ingrained habits that organize practice and perception, demonstrates how embodied habits are managed through material conditions, relational experiences, structural practices, and the effects of biological properties and social readings (Bourdieu 1990; 53, 79). This interpretation offers an understanding of the embodied relations between individual and social bodies (Csordas 1990: 30). Much like the idea of the body politic proposed by Scheper-Hughes, the regulation of embodiment and the habits expands its reach towards regulation and surveillance of the individual, social, and now the political body (Scheper-Hughes 1987: 24). Often the boundaries between the individual and social body become blurred. For example, for military members mental or physical health (etc.) is a matter obscured by morals and values. Purity of the body and mind are often expressed through forms of power and knowledge by military intervention over the body (Scheper-Hughes 1987:26-28). This could be through restricting definitions of what is “normal” or through shaping proper emotional responses to health and the body by means of gender, occupation, or situation (Scheper-Hughes 1987:26-28).

The body is also a convenient means to justify social value and arraignments of what is natural and normalized and what is not. The disconnects between and the way health is, in the broadest of terms, navigated, are not just between any one person (the military member /civilian)

but also the cross between military culture and the reintegration back into the civilian culture. What I aim to illustrate here is that no single definition of health, embodiment, body, or identity can be used to isolate the phenomenological situation that occur as a result of (1) military culture (2) its effects on military members and (3) the affects military culture and reintegration into civilian population has on the military member. It is through the participants and their unique circumstances that only they can define what is happening to them and through which lenses do they define, mitigate, or reduce their experience to. As the body becomes the place where social truths and contradiction play out the body also becomes the place where personal resistance, creativity, and struggle accentuate cultural affects (Scheper-Hughes 1987:31).

## **2.2 Working to Understand the Military**

The embodied responses of enacting the role of the soldier has been discussed extensively by anthropologists. These studies contend that the body as a site of transformation made to be fit, ordered, and productive with the necessary skills and capabilities for active service (Newlands 2013:40, 42,45). Anthropologist Paula Holmes-Eber (2014), who collected her data as a Marine instructor and civilian anthropologist over a 6-year period, has explored the structures of meaning and bodily actions that have formed the habitus of Marine Corps members. She has proposed that a Marine's unique response to external pressures is related to the unique culture instilled by the Marines Corp (30). Outside of the Marine Corps, other branches of the military have been documented to establish their own cultures. Studies of these "second cultures", the military culture, have equally revealed cultural variations between and within individual military units suggesting separate subcultures due impart to differing histories and experiences (Holmes-Eber 2014:11). What might the variation in military cultures have to say and contribute to the discourse in the formation of military bodies, health, and identity?

Although they are complicated and complex, military cultures are rather difficult to study in individualized ways. Much like how culture is ever changing, the ethnographic literature on military culture has narrowed in on a subject within the culture, breaking down phenomena to highlight experience. Here, what is important in the research of military bodies are the collections of personalized narratives, ones that are meant to highlight the variation in individual experience while also highlighting the collective experience (phenomena) towards the effects on the body. For example, Finley (2011) approached studies of PTSD among veterans through studies of health and identity that formulated an understanding that (1) individual stories of experience in the military come with variation and (2) this variation in the case of documenting health conditions, bodily comportment, and identity are driven by both life history and physiological factors embedded in cultural signs, systems, and beliefs (Finley 2011:49-50).

What also must be considered is the literature that has looked at the ways the public views, interacts, and impacts military members. Anthropologists like Finley (2011), Wool (2013), and McSorley (2013) have all engaged in discussions surrounding the public conception of the soldier. The historical and political areas of military culture have shown that public, political, and medical sectors have contributed greatly to the ways military members seek, describe, cope, and make decisions based on their health, identity as a military member, and state of the body (Finley 2011:9). Holmes-Eber (2014) further suggests that most government and policy-making institutions presume that military members come from the same society as civilians and that both parties share the same ideals, views, and solve problems in a similar manner and speak and behave in mutually comprehensible ways (10). These sectors, being largely unfamiliar with military service or with limited exposure and knowledge about the military, struggle to understand what encompasses military service today (Carter et al. 2017:1). It is vital when

talking about the relationship between the public and the military to briefly discuss their interconnectedness. The U.S has not employed the draft since 1973, but what we do have is a standing, paid, and expansive military who have been professional and volunteered enlisted soldiers (Pew Research Report 2011). Mostly filled with recruits from low -income families, this factor provides one of the main reasons why people enlist in the military. According to both the U.S. Department of Defense (2009) more than 98% on enlisted forces have at least a high school diploma and 75% of recent veterans are reported to more likely join the military for education and economic benefits. The connections between the economic and structural inequalities that future enlisted forces may find themselves in look to the military as a means of escape and for a potential greater future.

Not just through employment but through medical and other life experiences does the translation from military experience to civilian life become more difficult because of the lack of exchange between institutions. Lack of studies and methods of dissemination through literature and policies are problematic and have fortified the gap between how the public views and contributes to damaging rhetoric towards military members. Considering that 84% of post-9/11 veterans say that the public has little or no understanding of the problems that those in the military face, the gaps existence is not lost on military members (Pew Research Report 2011). The work of academics has both filled and widened this gap. In attempts to correct the gap, military ethnography has gone beyond the limiting clinical perspectives and has added a biocultural and public discussion about the military members, their bodily, and military experience. For example, the change from civilian to soldier entails a process of forming, molding, and controlling the body. Militarized bodies, from the point of training to the anticipation or participation of going to war, maintain the embodied experience of military

practice. The structure in training the physical body requires pushing the body to its limits and conditions both the mentality and physicality of a soldier to endure fatigue, pain, stress, and injury (Woodward et al. 2013:154). In doing so, optimal functions of the body are maintained. Trained bodies are then equipped with classified knowledge and high functioning specialized tasks and are outfitted with small arms all as extensions of the body and to exercise violence (Woodward et al. 2013:154-155).

Newlands (2013) and others have proposed that through forms of transformation of the civilian body, the military institution establishes control over recruits' bodies (35-36). The exterior of the body is regulated through mandates on military body comportment such as standard issued haircuts and uniforms. Meanwhile, the interior of the body is made equally efficient. Through military training, "skills" meant to distinguish between threat and safety are taught and embodied by soldiers; lessons become part of the habitus, deeply ingrained in the muscle and nerves, etched into the brain, that training like hyper-vigilance and scanning one's surroundings become automatic patterns in and out of military environments (Finley 2011:54). Drawing from Bourdieu's work on practice and habitus, military habitus, or the habits observed and practiced in the military are the product of history produced on individual and collective practices (Bourdieu 1990: 54. Examining the military institutions' methods of shaping civilian bodies into molds of the model soldier has designated the soldiers' bodies as tools or instruments, a term used by the service members in this study. The concept of the "tool" or the "cog in the machine" as a model and the discourse surrounding it has had long-term repercussions both historically and contemporarily.

Wool (2015) notes that the soldier's body has long been bounded by the iconically male form that is gendered and nationally called, entrenched in both the before and after effects of



military service (1). The distinct bodily and affective life of a soldier is involved in a complex relationship with bodily discipline and exposure to discomfort and harm; their lives are considered as material collateral damage by the institution (Wool 2015:1; MacLeish 2013:18; MacLeish 2012:50). The strategies that produce embodied military habits are ones that enable military bodies to cope with the constant unforeseen changes of military life (Bourdieu 1990: 61). The interconnections of military habits, body, and the identity of a soldier is then put into context with what Wool (2015) defines as a life that is specified by forms of corporeal figures who are characterized by the values and virtues of hypermasculine, dramatized, and symbolic national figures (2-3). This public image upholds the commitment a soldier has to the form of a person who is confined by the epitome of national ideals (Wool 2015:9,11). Such perspective has indicated that through these nationally called forms that the soldier is held up to by the public and institution they work for, that they then navigate their bodies, identity, and the health through a complex structure of contradictions between vulnerability and resilience, the tool and the person.

### **2.3 Exploring Narratives on the Body, Practice, and Identity:**

The ways in which the soldier's body has been addressed in anthropological work both theoretically and conceptually emerge through narratives organized by the military members. These narratives collected by anthropologists and other social scientists have emphasized individualized experiences. While military comradery exists, the homogenous interpretations that are captured in public and military discourse about the cohesiveness of military culture ignore that within comradery is an individual trying to navigate the identity of "military member" and "self". According to Jaffe (1984), who has contributed to research on social identity in the military, an emphasis on the frameworks by which an individual conceptualized their social

identity in the military relies on the degree to which a person is committed to their social roles and affiliations (32). In proposing this idea, Jaffe (1984) also considers institutional goals and moral structures of military organization that contribute to the negotiation of a military member's social identity (44).

Exploring the military members' civilian/military self-dichotomy has proved valuable in looking at the identity of military members. In concept and practice, these narratives show military members actively manage this dichotomy. For example, as we shall see, this study and others illustrate diversity that exists in the military, steering away from discourse that demonstrates military members as just soldiers with rank or from a specific branch (Holmes-Eber 2014:14). Other identities exist on the level of gender, race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, and sexual identity that all have been seen to affect acceptance in military communities, motivations for hazing, opinions towards military service, among other affects (Holmes-Eber 2014:14). Military members managing variances in identity have heavy implications for how the body and health are conceptualized before, during, and after service. Susie Kilshaw (2006) further explains that medical anthropologies' concerns with social groups and the types of treatments chosen or not chosen contextualizes what is happening in their lives to make such decisions (699). Looking beyond illness itself and considering wider contexts introduces approaches that focus on the individual, their body, and the relevant aspects of a person's life (like health beliefs and anxieties) (Kilshaw 2006:699). Through Kilshaw's work with Gulf War Syndrome, intimate connections between health, identity, and the self are documented and promote more holistic foci on health that also look at illness and movements that arise around them as intimately attached with identity (Kilshaw 2006:701).

Additionally, attachments to the body both physically and mentally have implications for how service members approach health, wellness, and identity. MacLeish (2012) argues that the soldier's body is subjected to intensified destructive forces so much so that we can treat the acts of doing war as materially and culturally represented through embodied human practices and experiences (55). Physically speaking, focusing on the soldier's bodily engagement with military technology (weaponry, armor, etc.) further represents the transformation of military bodies into "tools" (MacLeish 2012:55). The body as an instrument, as MacLeish proposes, is filled with the knowledge of the capacities, limitations, and feelings that measure the vulnerability of the human body and the forces it is exposed to (MacLeish 2012:63-64). Likewise, narratives from military members about genitourinary injuries, the militarization of uniforms, and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has helped explain the measures, perspectives, and capabilities to which military members produce health models bringing them into the public conversation.

Through speaking with military chaplains (MC) during deployment periods, Besterman-Dahan et al. (2014) documented the stigma associated with military personnel coming forward about the impacts deployment and training had on their health, encouraging the denial to seek the necessary care and support that otherwise could reduce suicide rates of military soldiers and substance abuse (113-114). Zoe Wool's (et al. 2012, 2013, 2015) work has looked at cases of severe limb injuries, traumatic brain injuries, and genitourinary injuries during her time at Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Her collection of narratives critically examines the distinctions between violence and care, life and death, and a theoretical shift from rebuilding the body to the life it once had to instead remake the body's capacity to live an ordinary life (Wool 2015:191). Like Wool, MacLeish (2013) has also used this narrative to call to attention the worth the life of military soldier holds.

Analysis of narratives that engage in discourse surrounding military culture are working to understanding how military members navigate their environment. Recognizing what approaches service members and the military institution are taking and their affective properties proves to be valuable in promoting improved reintegration strategies, creating access to knowledge for incoming and outgoing military members about their psychosocial health, and to better equip military medical providers with the necessary tools to adequately serve their military patients. Most importantly, bridging the gap between civilians and service members is a significant contribution and goal of this literature. The misalignment between the two puts service members at risk for alienation and heightens the risk of mental health issues. Bridging this gap would ensure that the disconnect between what we think is happening and what is actually happening is confronted with intent to understand realities and present strategies. Countless stories about military members' experiences with the before, during, and after of going to/doing war has called into question how we as a society have perpetuated the affective qualities of political, social, and historical interventions (Wool 2015:191). What the work of anthropologists and other social scientist surrounding military culture tells us is that as a society we have reduced the act of doing and training for war as a simple action with stereotypical complications (such as PTSD). Giving both voice and choice as to how to approach life after war will help to transcend violence, a violence we have worked to rectify through the misjudged value of life that we reduced to a "debt" that society must pay (MacLeish 2013:220-21).

#### **2.4 Contributions to the Discussion:**

Drawing on the literature compiled, the intersections of body, identity, and health are integral to understanding military members experience. Personal narratives show that these intersections are impacted by both military and civilian culture. Yet, inside both cultural spheres,

each military member navigates the environment in conflicting ways. What my project will contribute to the existing literature is the documentation of the method's military members practice in these cultural spheres both during active and nonactive duty. I focus on the specifics of the experience and attitudes towards the embodiment of an engagement in military culture and service that impacts the health of military members. Through my ethnographic work, I hope to explore dimensions of the bodily experience that range from the during and after of military training and what the implications this has on health. Anthropological studies like the ones discussed here have provided the necessary foundations to understand how the body has been molded to the model soldier, what impacts this may have on health, and how the military identity impacts health decisions. Now more than ever, as the military engages more transnationally, does this type of work seem relevant. As more and more bodies, here and across the globe, are molded for war and peacekeeping, we continue to face the collateral damage. What do military members have to say about this? What do they want from a system that they put their life on the line for?

### **3 METHODS**

In approaching this project, employing qualitative research methods for this study offered specific advantages. Methods such as in-depth interviews, a mix of semi and unstructured interview questions, and coding to analyze field notes provided the opportunity for my study to consider a wide range of narratives. In this chapter I will discuss my data collection methods, recruitment, locations, and other methodological approaches to this project. Finally, a discussion of the issues encountered during the project and the ethical parameters of this study will also be addressed.

### **3.1 Data Collection Methods:**

#### ***3.1.1 Interviews and Interview Questions:***

Approaching this study ethnographically, this project was designed to explore and represent a group appropriately and respectfully. To do so required gathering data in both a semi-structured and unstructured interview process. The semi-structured interview utilized an interview guide that would include questions needed to be covered in a particular order (Bernard 2011:157-158). Incorporating an unstructured interview process as well allowed for the participants to: (1) freely talk about the topics they felt needed to be covered, considered, and explicitly noted in our project without being confined by set interview questions; and (2) allow the participants to express themselves in their own terms thus minimizing the control, I as the interviewer, could have over their responses (Bernard 2011:157). I found that incorporating both semi and unstructured interviews allowed for ample rapport building, allowing the interview questions to serve as a guide to lead conversation in the case a person was disinclined to talk. Likewise, the interview guide also served to direct conversation but that participants could speak towards a topic in their own ways. Especially for sensitive topics, interviews a more than a collection of narratives but also a space for people to create and refashion their understandings of their experience and identity.

Those who agreed to the interview process, were asked to consent to both audio-recording and note taking. In cases where they did not consent to audio-recording, then recording was not involved in the interview process. The same actions were taken for note taking. Interview questions included a range of demographic questions such as age, active duty or non-active duty status, branch of the military served in, and gender or sex as defined by the person. In order to understand the participant's life history and experience I included questions regarding

their life before military service, why they chose to enter into the military, their basic duties, their experience with being in the military and life outside of the military after service (when applicable). Subsequent queries aimed to discuss events and social climates during military service followed by questions on the overall health as defined by the participant. The nature of these questions not only allowed for the military member being interviewed to account their military service chronologically but also paint a picture of their experience, both in and outside of the military culture, in an individualized way.

All participants were assured that their interviews would be confidential using pseudonyms. I assured participants that at any time during the interview and the writing process that they could exempt their interview from the thesis work. Interviews took place over the course of 1 to 2 hours on a given day at a time and place agreed by both parties. While physical locations cannot be revealed for ethical purposes and potentially reveal identifying workplaces, some interviews did take place over Skype and phone calls.

### ***3.1.2 Recruitment Process:***

To find participants for my study flyers were posted at Georgia State University Campus in Atlanta Georgia as well as other university campuses. Flyers posted communicated to participants about the study, how many people would be involved in the study, contact numbers, and requirements to partake in the study. The criteria to participate in the study included a minimum age of 18 years and must be an active duty or veteran military member. Drawing from a group of participants from backgrounds of both active duty and veteran status allowed for a broader range of participants that also represented a large population. This was vital in approaching both the military culture in and outside of military service and aided in my understanding of this culture from my etic perspective. Using volunteer and respondent-driven

sampling, I was able to get help from former participants from a previous pilot study to get a wide range of participants from various military backgrounds, age groups, genders, geographical locations, and duty status.

While the study asked for a maximum of 100 participants, this number was anticipated to be significantly smaller given (1) the constraints of the study as a master's project and (2) that 100 was enough to anticipate an influx in volunteers while also providing enough data to detect significant observations in data trends. A total of 7 interviews have been conducted for this ethnography. Since U.S. Military members are from, adapt, and come to live within multiple geographical locations, my project draws from different military branches, military bases, homes, and communities that span around the U.S. from Georgia to California. I chose not to focus on one branch of the military, type of soldier, or specific demographic considerations because despite each branch being different, all branches and specializations come with positive and negative experiences associated with the process of training, instruction, and service.

### ***3.1.3 Analysis: Coding***

Interviews that were audio-recorded have been transcribed. Likewise, notes taken during interviews that did not utilize audio-recording have been transferred into a typed version for an easier coding process. As a methodological approach to this project, coding for themes in the transcribed interviews gives the opportunity to interpret and examine trends and themes in the data that are ethnographically significant. Coding has uncovered visible themes and trends in the data over the course of the analysis of interviews and notes have shown that there are valuable and potentially shared trends. Some of the trends noted have been topics on mental and physical health problems, stigmatization of health problems, comradery or brotherhood as a major



contributor in extending their service time, reintegration and the strategies used in the transition from military to civilian populations.

## **3.2 Issues Encountered:**

### **3.2.1 Interviews**

Ethnography often comes with a range of difficulties that accompany the ethnographic process. During the course of this project encountering obstacles along the way was both expected, surprising, and life-changing. In working with the population and environments that the participants were coming from I had expected to face some resistance towards questions and the idea of participating in the interview process. As anticipated, some interviews that were scheduled or those who showed interest in the interview process become silent and otherwise never appeared for our interview. In understanding the parameters of my project, military members often are accompanied with feelings and emotions generated by difficult pasts, stories, and experiences that the military culture instills in them to suppress and or are difficult to relive or express in terms relatable to me, a civilian. As the one probing into these difficult stories, I understood that I could never force participants to share their difficult experiences that would otherwise put them at risk and harm. Additionally, I can speculate that this may have been one of the reasons some of the participants never came to our interview.

The motivation to take part in interviews or not is common during ethnographic work, for that reason when working with difficult to reach populations key informants become highly important. Without these key informants, I would have not been afforded the opportunity to interact and experience these personal and intimate worlds. Due in part to the comradery aspects of the military, key informants encourage or even make requests for other participants to take part in the interview process. As one of the participants would tell me, *“If I tell them do it, they’ll*

*do it because we trust each other.”* Another participant who was referred to the study through a key informant explained that “...*the comradery is so deep, they told me to go do the interview even though we haven’t talked in a few years. But we know each other. We trained together, [the key informant] can just reach out to me after all these years and I would do whatever they asked because that just how it works.*”

While many of the participants are unaware of the degree they are all connected personally, I had to be extremely cautious about what identifying materials I was going to include in their descriptions. Frankly, a great number of them had referred each other or through their stories I had realized that they knew each other at some point during their time in the military. Therefore, descriptions given later in the analysis of the data about the participants of this study I chose to leave out certain demographics such as a specific age (instead I employ an age range), amount of time served, and where they have served. Instead I chose to use their own descriptions of their life and experiences from our interviews. While some participants were asked to participate, others who did not come from this method came to be a part of the study out of pure fortitude, noting that their reasons to participate in the project was to give voice for issues the public was not aware about, for those who could not come forward for stigma purposes, and for those who have passed away.

Lastly, throughout this process, going into interviews with expectations is common in ethnographic work. Entering the field with a more open mind and attitude is the best way to combat the expectation for certain answers. In fact, there is much to be said about what is not being said. Looking in between these lines allows for (1) the ethnographer to listen intently and (2) to ask questions that question why your preconceptions existed in the first place. Aside from what is not being explicitly said, what is being said required some deciphering. In the course of

establishing the type of questions to ask, terms such as identity or health take on different meanings to each person. As the interviewer I had to question what exactly did I mean by identity? Should I have defined this? My approach to the interpretive aspects of these terms was to allow participants to define these words on their own regards. This can present both challenges and opportunities in exploring interpretation of these questions and terms. Without the restriction of definitions, what I may think of as a problem, like a “bum knee”, might not be considered a problem compared to other health and wellness facets participants might be dealing with. Therefore, the freedom to interpret these terms reveals more insight into the lived experience of a service member than if they were to take on a more rigid definition.

### ***3.2.2 Institutional Review Board (IRB)***

Putting up much resistance, ethnographers and other qualitative researchers have struggled with the process of hurdles and the long last approval of a study from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). No different from these studies, my project has also battled like many others with the IRB process. While this project has changed its field of interest over the course of the last year due in part to IRB approval, much of what makes formulating a study of ethnographic methods difficult is this very process. Although we could debate the positive and negatives of the purpose of IRB, IRB has operated under the assumption that all studies follow under positivist, quantifiable, and experimental type of research like medical, biological, or “hard science” type methods (Chin 2013:202; Fluehr-Lobban 2013:76). The privileging of this narrow range of research above others is especially problematic for ethnographers to have access to the types of studies they peruse (Chin 2013:203). In an IRB institution where the range of acceptable research is more about what research is dominating and less about reassuring the practice and the ethics, spelling out the possibilities of a study is an impossible task for an ethnographer (Chin

2013:203,208). Being in the field will always present itself with the unforeseen ethical dilemmas. In fact, the routine requirements to have participants sign consent forms harms the informal nature that is ethnographic research and perpetuates the problematic power structure between anthropologist and participant, but more on this later (Fluehr-Lobban 2013:76).

At no point in the process of preparing to submit the IRB and in the aftermath of receiving approval did I feel the preparation or training that would help me encounter some of the ethical circumstances in the field. While effective training in deescalating situations, sympathetic responses, and understanding the field you are going in is a part of the ethnographers' responsibilities, the function of IRB is to promote safety and wellbeing for "human subjects". Yet the process by which approval is obtained contains no type of information about keeping subjects safe aside from small paragraphs concerning risk of the study, informed consent, and people and numbers to call if a "subject" become distressed.

### ***3.2.3 Foci of the Study***

As stated before military culture and the institution itself is a complex system. Within the military alone several phenomena can be addressed. Factors that contribute to life experiences become enmeshed in these phenomena and are a catalyst for the ways people respond, contribute, and conceptualize themselves in relation to their military service. Because of this, one of the constraints of this study is my lack of addressing and discussing at length gender and power hierarchies implicated in military culture. Now more than ever are women in the military facing sexism and misogyny that is ingrained and continually fostered within the institution. For many of these women, proving one's self in a heteronormative and androcentric environment proves to be an aspect of the job that has been historically constructed on a type of masculinity that relied on policies of rape, recruitment, sexual harassment, and morale (Enloe 2000:51). For

the women for whom I interviewed and those who served or are currently serving , I see you, I see your struggles, I see your strength, and I see your accomplishments in an institution that does not see you.

The policies, from reporting sexual harassment and assault, the handling of these cases, to the ways women's bodies are regulated sexually during deployment, indicates that the military institution perpetuates a hierarchy supporting hypermasculine behavior. This is ever visible by the number of studies, including that of my own, that disproportionately show men have more positive experiences in the military than women. Equally so, for the trans bodies and nonconforming bodies of those who function outside of the heteronormative discourse, the LGBTQIA+ community, I also see and hear you. While the conversation of gender and sexuality is a confounding factor in these people's lives as it intersects with military culture, for this paper I cannot address such a topic. Gender and sexuality in the military deserves its own form of research separated from the topics covered collectively with the following research.

### **3.3 Ethical Considerations, Positionality, and Power Structure:**

Encountering ethical dilemmas in this study was expected and anticipated through a pilot study done prior to this project. I learned that working with military members to tell their stories was paired with the struggle to maintain a methodological process that both prepared me to listen to these stories and that also empowered participants to come forward without having to fear judgment. What I was most conscious of during the research process was my positionality as a researcher and an outsider, and how I was going to empower participants. This was not necessarily the goal of the study, but arguably a long-term goal for future work and interventions. Perhaps, the best thing I could have done for the participants of this study was to formulate my questions in such a way that allowed them to lead the conversations and speak

towards topics they found the most important about their personal narratives. Considering that participants expressed that this project was an important step in allowing military members to speak for themselves, the best I could do was tell their truths in the ways they found fit.

In collecting their narratives, my positionality has come into question. At the end of the day, I am the researcher, I am the public, and I am not the military member. To combat the power hierarchy that exists here, I found it important to both make sure that participants knew I was here to be educated by them. While IRB consent forms made this difficult to navigate I found that by being transparent about the goals of the research also worked to break down the hierarchy of researcher and the researched. This promoted more intimate rapport building and personal relationships, where after this research I remain in contact with these participants. As for my status as an outsider to the military culture, again being the person who needed to be educated, participants gladly shared information about terms, actions, and proceeding of military life that as an outsider I would never have understood unless I asked.

Additionally, the preconceptions I may have had toward the participants and my own ethical and moral leanings may have influenced my expectations of this project and the interview process. Like many anthropologists, we find ourselves imagining what people may say, their motives, and intentions. I find it important to note that in large, I do not agree with the military institution as a practice. Incredibly complicated as it may be, the military institution is one that exercises violence and historically has forged a relationship between the military and the public. The relationships between the military and the national culture revealed the effects of militarization on gender relations (perspectives and values), popular media's relationship with the military through war propaganda and justification of military action, and military imagery and its connection to the war and defense economy (Friesen 2014:76-77). Given militarisms

prominent role in U.S culture, its influence has reached through generation from cold war sentiments to the decades long “war on terror”, shaping the consciousness of the public and reducing war to values and symbols of American “peacekeeping” (Friesen 2014:77). As those attributes may sound like attractive qualities, they disguise the reality of violence, ethical problems, and means of engaging, instilled by war both at home and abroad., My apprehensions towards the military is not directly with its service members, but the institution itself. Its structure, actions, how behaviors go unchecked, and how overall the institution carries and manages itself are what I find complicated and troublesome. Continuously and at accelerated paces do the reasons and legitimacy of violence and empire become ongoing developments and not “sharp openings in history, an aspect of the military that should be challenged (Lutz 2002:723).

Despite this, I found that the population who instilled in me a sense of curiosity supported or were employed under such a structure for numerous reasons such as a tradition of being a military family or an economic choice. Whatever these choices are, at the end of the day, the institution exists and those who work under it do so for reasons that they found important for themselves, their families, and/or for the country at large. Personal bias for the system has allowed me to learn from several other political and ethical leanings. In understanding these perspectives, my feeling towards the institution exist, however, these narratives are about the military members, their stories, bodies, and lives. In empowering them by vocalizing my morals towards the military institution, a right that they have fought for me to have, I also empower those who have found themselves at the crossroads with this institution, civilian and service member alike, at home and abroad.

While the purpose of this thesis was never to discuss the political, economic, and greater historical implications of the Persian Gulf War, the invasions in Iraq, and the current U.S war in Afghanistan, the Middle East and Afghanistan are where most of the participants have served in, during, and after, with few still currently serving. Even so, I am not here to weigh the importance of a life over another. What can be said is the devastation, the mourning, and the death that is seen when war ravishes the bodies it falls on, impacts a person deeply and viscerally.

Considering this, public views of the military and its service members have contributed greatly to discourse that is detrimental towards military members and the jobs that they are perceived to do. Damaging rhetoric has been both contributed and combatted by academics. I must consider that their stories reveal fragile and identifying information. Considering that most Americans believe that service members are more likely to suffer from mental health problems than civilians, these assumptions that are not based on the foundation of familiarity do little to bridge the civil-military divide (Carter et al. 2017:8). Cautiously aware of the divide, I understand that today, military members are unlikely to come home with mental health issues among other things that civilians often interpret as inherent occupational hazards, compared to previous decades. Even so, a certain delicacy must be put into telling these stories. What must be considered is who will read this and what will they do with this information. My biggest concern is that their stories come across in the way they intended and that through ethnography I can accurately represent their stories.

A part of representing these stories and collecting narratives about experiences in the military involves information that shapes fellow military members and other readers. One thing that must be considered through the course of this research, from interview to analysis, are the power structures at play. The way power operates in the military may have major effects on what



and how something is said if said at all. Questioning what is not being said, or rather, what cannot be said because of legal restrictions, is indicative of larger power structures and the communication of power through the military institution. Ethically speaking, as interviewees participate the content of their interviews will likely shape others. For this reason, people may be reluctant to speak out because of retaliation or placing the military in a bad light. In many cases did service members want further clarification on the anonymity of their words and mention that they “*didn’t want to get into any trouble*”, as one participant emphasized. Keeping this in mind, military service involves tight communities, for those who came to speak with me the military power and their formal carefully crafted yet candid answers made it clear that the power structure at play here limited both their answers and degree of honesty.

Anthropological research is always a difficult path to go down, where the ethics are never simple and never straightforward (Fluehr-Lobban 2013:118). Even now, as the completion of this project has occurred over the course of a year, more ethical considerations and impact to this study will take place that I may have yet to realize. More so, I am aware that after this project is finished, the final paper will have implications, good and bad for whoever encounters it. The purpose of this ethnography from the start was to bring voice and analyze stories in the greater context of a large and powerful institution and ensure that the public has close encounters with the reality that is military service. The methodological structure of this project kept this in mind. Through ensuring that proper consent is taken, fluidity in conversation takes place, and freedom to take stories in the direction they need to be taken in, is ensuring participants are protected and represented as a top priority. Concurrently, my positionality as the researcher must also be considered, and the inevitable hierarchy in anthropological research must be dismantled to the best of the researcher’s ability. The task of this research and the methods used were not

implemented for the singular purpose of reflecting a reality (Saukko 2003:26). Rather, the tools of ethnography here seek to bring forth different realities consciously and ethically.

#### **4 POSITIONING THE MILITARY MEMBER: INSIDE THE CULTURE**

Generally speaking the U.S. Armed Forces are made up of the five armed service branches: Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy. There are three general categories of military people: active duty (full-time soldiers and sailors) reserve & guard forces (usually work a civilian job, but can be called to full-time military duty), veterans and retirees (past members of the military). Two main branches make up the Army: the operational branch and the institutional branch. The operational branch conducts the more visible aspects of the Army's job, which involves combat and peacekeeping. The institutional branch of the Army is responsible for training and maintaining soldiers and equipment, so the operational branch can do its job effectively. Enlisted Soldiers perform specific job functions and have the knowledge that ensures the success of their unit's current mission within the Army (U.S. Department of Defense 2019).

Through the course of a pilot study done a year ago and the current research of this project now, have I realized that military members are fighting another war altogether. I have talked intimately with a range of military members about their Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), surviving Military Sexual Trauma (MST), and military members with hidden physical and mental challenges resulting from time served or currently serving. These stories prove to be so much more than a range of problems that can be met with medication or the medicalization of military bodies. They are accounts of resilience, of defeat, and of tradition. The focus of this paper is about the people, the system, and their crossings.

As I had touched on in my methods, while the Persian Gulf War and the U.S. presence in the Middle East are not the foci of this ethnography, they have had substantial impacts on

military policy and consequently military service members. Exploring policy puts into perspective the behaviors, bodily attachments, actions, and adaptations to surroundings or persons, dictating and enforcing how one should behave. Military policy specifically is fundamental in prompting the embodiment or acceptance of behaviors and actions, that in the case of this thesis, greatly impacts the embodiment and understanding of health and wellness. (outside of policy there are also unspoken rules, but more on this later).

A range of policies and strategies such as the Human Terrain System, Don't Ask Don't Tell (now overturned), and the onset of new military technology have otherwise demonstrated, that in the during and aftermath of war and where it is fought, shift in mindset and strategies begin to modify how the military institution operates. Where the inspiration for this project begun was with this very idea, the modification of military operations and who it affects. Military policy has largely impacted the culture itself by enacting and normalizing certain sentiments.

Changes in these policies have often been developed through the thought that by creating these strategies protection and enhancement of a soldiers' survivability chances are raised. This sentiment is particularly problematic in several cases. For example, in relation to "Don't Ask, Don't Tell", the law asserted the exclusion of LGBTs (Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals, and Transgendered Individuals) from military service, justifying the law by stating a military member with the "intent to engage in homosexual acts would create an unacceptable risk to the armed forces' high standards of morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion that are the essence of military capability (Lynch 2008:392)." The unapologetic and discriminatory nature of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" institutionalized stereotypes that represented the LGBT community as predators. This is also true historically in the military. Its main argument centered around the

cohesion of a group, defined here as existing when, “ the primary day-to-day goals of the individual soldier, of the small group with which he identifies, and of unit leaders are congruent—with each giving his primary loyalty to the group so that it trains and fights as a unit with all members willing to risk death to achieve a common objective (Lynch 2008:397).”

Overtaken by the Obama Administration in 2011, in the 17 years that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” was in place many members were discharged or forced to hide their sexuality while serving. What the law at large stood for was the systematic discrimination of LGBT service members. Combat Exclusion Policies for Women have also shown how policy and institutional influence the iconic form of the masculine “soldier”, a narrative that also does not include the female service member. These principals situate women in the military in ambiguous positions. Recognizing their status as women and soldier proves to be met with resistance in some cases (like in cases of Military Sexual Trauma [MST]) and acceptance in others (the ranking they hold). With hegemonic masculinity as the dominate discourse, the “war hero” or “soldier” is antithesis to femininity that stereotypically is associated with peace, not war (Pawelczyk 2014:87-88). Through these means, the military is not only a gendered organization but also a gendering, gender-granting or gender defining, actively involved in both the production and reproduction of the established gendered binary order (Pawelczyk 2014:90).

Documentation through this study and others has shown that discriminatory language in military communities are rampant and seen as “ball busting” and a way to build cohesion. Policies like these further shape military culture and enforce the heteronormative and hypermasculine environment that the culture has engrained (or tried to) into its service members. While policy secures this, embodied responses to masculinist climates are also prevalent. One example I aim to bring to attention has shown how the life of a soldier is vested in the body’s

ability to perform efficiently. As the geographical location of wars shift, military technology modifies to accommodate the terrain and dangers encountered at the warfront.

Enemy reliance of IEDs have accounted for roughly 75% of all U.S military casualties and 80% of all combat related injuries in U.S military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and are considered the leading cause of deaths and injuries on military battlefields (Committee on Gulf War and Health 2014:15,85). Explosive blasts have proven to cause the more complex forms of damage to the body, both psychologically and physically. With these wars being fought mostly through covering walking ground, IED's proved (and still are) to be major problems for military members when severe mutilation from these blasts directly transpires. As a result, amputations of limbs and, the primary intention of this discussion, genitourinary injuries became a major concern. Considering this, military researchers developed a piece of removeable Kevlar armor called a "skirt". The Kevlar skirt is roughly an additional 80 to 100 pounds added to the armor and gear soldiers are already wearing. The sole purpose of the skirt? The protection of the genitals and lower limbs. Ironically, the weight or lack of agility the skirt lends is not the primary or most reported reason soldiers do not wear the skirt. The skirt is reported to be emasculating, and in some cases if they were to lose their genitals some military members believed they were better off dead without them (since the skirt, new technologies have been developed to protect the lower limbs and genitals) (Wool 2014:##).

What I aim to do here with the two examples just discussed is to broadly situate military culture and the attitudes it has internalized. Locating the discourse from the past decades has resulted in current perspectives and practices in maintaining one's health and identity. While policy and body armor are just two of the many ways that practice is shaped, the attitudes of the military institution, historically and currently, have dramatically shaped what military members

know, what they are encouraged to talk about, and the actualities of what they can verbalize in the crosshairs of civilian and military culture. Again, through history, time, and space has the military institution been shaping and transforming what we as civilians know, see, and hear about the military culture itself. For example, the relationship between the military to the national culture reveals that areas of the U.S that are dominated by those who have served in the military (military bases, areas in closer proximity to recruitment centers) support both the military-industrial-congressional complex and military values in governance (Friesen 2014:76).

This is particularly important in that recognizing that these attitudes transform life histories and the affects that military and public perception of life during and after war influences. The point I wish to make here with these examples is that rather than grasping at obvious of why genitals matter to a soldier or why military policy has greater implications for the ways soldiers have engaged in discriminatory name calling for play, is because these perspectives reveal what military members believe their lives are vested in. The body, health, and identity are then navigated in ways that both conflict and contradict with military and civilian culture. On one hand military culture produces an environment that depends on the conformity of a body and its ability to withstand pressures. In the face of difficulties, one must remain silent. On the other hand, U.S civilian culture does not generate a society built on comradery and rather the perceived individuality of this society estranges the soldier. Rather difficult to navigate, the transformation of military service is internalized, and the attitudes inherited affect their health and their identity.

## 4.1 Unclear Transitions: Reintegration

### 4.1.1 *Deconstruction of the Civilian: Embodiment and Training*

Mike is a Navy Seal veteran but also currently serves in the Army Reserves, a voluntary subset of the army national guard that work as military personnel for emergency purposes. After finishing high school Mike did, what he calls, “*intermittent work*” in his families moving company, “*a lot of partying*”, and “*manual labor*” for about 3 years until he decided to move on. He had tried school but back then he did not have the “*discipline*” or the support financially nor the structural support to understand the process or inner workings of the college system on his own. After, what Mike describes as a “*failure*”, he looked at the military as the possible way to have economic improvement and to gain some independence from his family. He is charismatic and is adamantly willing to be a part of the interview process. I was first introduced to him through a pilot study I did on veteran health. From the beginning of our first interview I was captured by his ability to be candid about the military institution in general but also by his ability to remove himself from conversation and instead speak towards more larger issues affecting all veterans. He uses caution, not revealing too much about himself but revealing enough about his thoughts towards the military institution as whole. While Mike does not speak much towards his time during deployment, he does paint a picture of the emotional pain of seeing fellow service friends, “*brothers*” really, be affected by their military service and the sheer difficulty of transitioning back into civilian life.

*Mike: A lot of people they get out, and again, you’ve been told what to do, where to go, when to do, and now all of a sudden, it’s all on you to figure this out, give yourself meaning for how you’re going to carry the rest of YOUR life. It’s a very hard transition. I’ve known a lot of people that haven’t been successful, you know, in the transition, I’m not gonna lie to you, I’ve had a lot of coworkers that have died in this transition because they weren’t able to redefine how they were going to live the rest of their lives and a lot of things like alcoholism and everything else plays into that so...unfortunately...*

The training exercises both physically and mentally, and a knowledge base that focuses on protection and defeating the enemy are engrained into the mind and body through the course of military service. The stark difference that Mike explains from the moment of military enculturation to the rapid change of no longer having a sort of guidance that was once there through military service is both unexpected and filled with uncertain expectations about life after war. Redefining the self is a defining moment. Increasingly soldiers feel that they are unequipped with the necessary tools to rebuild life after their service, to otherwise find purpose. But what exactly establishes the set of prescriptive rules the soldier embodies making reintegration out of reach? The methodological approaches to training soldiers such as hypervigilance, special training (depends on what sector of the military you are in), and also the internal environment that has been perpetuated historically makes integration back into civilian culture difficult. Mike explains the ways that training can change the body and the mind of service member to reach the mentality of the military culture:

*Mike: ...the bootcamp experience, they have a way of almost desensitizing you. So where they mix pain with this physical and verbal sort of methods that they use to honestly be able to desensitized somebody. And I'm not saying it's in a good or bad way, Again, understanding what the role is, you have to be able to have people who can withstand a lot of pressure. It's not normal to put people through these environments and unless you've put people through this training, multiple phases of that training. I mean I can tell you again boot camp is one aspect, but even. You know I went through BUDS [Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL], and that's [navy] SEAL training and even that takes it to the extreme edge. You're not only desensitized to it but you almost have this mindset that you want to do that. I think it depends on the duration and the magnitude of what they've gone through. From my sense it was being in this heightened state all the time through training and mobilization and deployment and everything that one you get off of that you live in this weird world because you in this heightened state.*

This “heightened state” that Mike spoke towards is the type of training that stresses situational hyper-awareness, attention to detail, identifying threats, amongst other methods that control and mold the body to perform highly trained skills (Messigner 2013:193). With the intention of



molding a military body that embodies practices, lifestyles, feelings and lived experiences associated with “doing” and training for war, the bodily aftermath is then bounded to the military form during and after service (McSorley 2013:1-2). This control and dependency towards military life fixes the identity and body into a mold ensuring optimal bodily functions that occur simultaneously to save lives. These standards are thus engrained into the body physically, emotional, and mentally. The potential and perhaps even unintended consequences of the transition to military culture is a dissociation with civilian life. Following rules and structure for the better part of 6-10 years, like many of those interviewed, has ingrained a strong sense of attachment to the military environment.

Note that reintegration back into the civilian population is usually associated with veteran/discharge situations, but active duty members come back home on leave/breaks and also report difficulties adjusting to home life during these reintegration periods (trouble sleeping, food outside of the base is harsh on stomachs, etc.). This decompression time from combat (or training) to the home front can take place in a matter of hours, and in many cases minutes after operating military weapon systems and technologies (Lee 2016:57). This aspect of the military culture compels us to wonder what the effects of asking service members to operate at the capacity of light switch impacts (Lee 2016:57).

While the body is filled with capacities, limitations, and feelings that measure vulnerability, the perpetuation of heteronormative behavior that constructs vulnerability as disadvantageous serves to indoctrinate the institutional goals and subsume the goals of the service member. Masculine discourse involving rationality, competitiveness, power, emotional control, independence, and self-confidence serve to create the embodiment of masculine power (Pawelczyk 2014:89). What becomes evident is that the self is rebuilt and becomes an assertion

that suppresses rhetoric antithetical to military culture and contradicts and delineates the “vulnerable” inner self from the “militarized” outer self (Kondo 1990:10). The fundamentalism of military masculinity additionally serves to uphold a public image characterized by the symbolic national figure soldiers are representative of and preserve in American military depiction:

*Mike: Uniforms as well. So obviously it has a hierarchy to it that they force on you and you get inculcated into that world based of off symbols and again which are implemented for that hierarchy again in the case that violence needs to be exercised when needed. You come in under a contract, so that instantly forces you into a different state of mind then if you would normally have the freedom to come in and out of that social group. Now, once you're in it and you do go through the--some people call in inculcation some people call it brainwashing—you do get to the point where there is some enjoyment out of it and a sense, they try to attach a sense of nationalism to you. So I would say, and I'm not saying that people don't go into for those reasons, it's so dependent on time and other reasons and discourses. You couldn't go through it without it shaping you somewhat. The discipline for one and being able to force yourself to do something you don't want to do for one. And get a sense of worth from it, like you do things that normal people wouldn't sign up to do, and you know you're doing things that are a greater national cause and whether you agree with or not, it is...*

Mikes point reveals several important factors of the military industrial complex that promotes and solidifies the identity and body of the soldier to the institution. Symbols of the branches, emblems, and specialty roles situates the soldier to an occupation that has both meaning ritualistically and nationally. The process of inculcation incorporates the senses of worth created by these symbols that positions the soldier to attach themselves, in a way, to the enjoyment of being a part of the institution. Social identities and notions of self are intimately intertwined to the purpose and meanings within societies (Hinojosa 2010:180). As the symbolic and material resources for constructing the personal identity of the soldier becomes meaningful through military values and ideologies, the curated image of the military body is redefined (Hinojosa 2010,180). Physical images like standard issued haircuts and uniforms or overwhelming depictions of white men in uniform set the norm for who a soldier is and who they might be. In

creating these images of who and what body constitutes a proper soldier, the military both implicitly and explicitly deconstructs the civilian body.

Centering on deconstructing the civilian self, physical forms of change such as uniforms, haircuts, heavily controlled sleeping and eating patterns take place. Shaping the outward appearance of the civilian by molding them to a standard and a corporeal coherence establishes a set of normative prescriptive behaviors and acceptable presentation of the self that conforms with military regulation. Emotional modification also emerges through forms of mental breakdowns that are rebuilt into more desensitized emotional operations. Re-crafting civilian identities into military identities becomes a process of negotiating the civilian self and its obligations to the more disciplined production of the self (Kondo 1990:24, 26,113-4). Again, in order to understand how service members, navigate their health and identity, recognizing the military culture embedded in these experiences of training and embodiment is fundamental. Selves are intimately intertwined with the institutions that individuals find themselves in, and therefore deconstructing the civilian self into the militarized self becomes an embodied response. This embodiment occurs because of the necessity to both survive war and violence and to conserve lives of military service members.

Internal dynamics like terminology, racism, homophobic slurs, and rape culture are also internalize. Most interviewees acknowledge that they know it's wrong but inside the military not only is it common to "ball bust" but it also helps to actually form the comradery and closeness in groups (more on this later). Terms like "tap sack Tuesday" or sexually touching one another as a joke are not only common but celebrated and are a form of bonding (Ward 2015:164-65). Many participants recognize that "past" military members have seen nothing wrong with this behavior and as it has been passed down through chain after chain it has been adopted as way of life.

Internalizing this behavior is embodied in some case through hypervigilance and other mental health problems or acts of saving civilians.

Oscar was the only participant of mine to reach out through flyers I had posted around universities in Atlanta. He had enrolled in one of these universities and failed the first semester because he never went to class. 6 years later, after a series of life circumstances stemming from a friend's death, he observed the static nature of people's lives who he had not seen in some time at the funeral. He tells me "*everybody was in the same place they were at all those years ago*". He decided to go to a recruiter's office that he would pass by daily through his UPS route, took the ASVAB, and 9 months later he entered the military as an airborne linguist. Due to his history with drugs that he lied about during recruitment (which we declined to go on further about), he was caught and was recycled to a different job because airborne linguists require top secret clearance. Oscar served in the U.S. Air Force for 6 years; now a veteran, he still serves the military as a part of the Army Reserves, similar to Mike. At some point in his trajectory he was reclassified to finance, and he hated it, but after a year the work became rewarding. Oscar worked for the travel section, his job was to make sure that service members who were deployed overseas were getting payed while they were gone and when they came back he made sure they were settled financially so they could go back to their families. "*I did briefings, I would talk to them telling them they're going to Afghanistan this is what's going to happen to your money, you're going overseas to this base this is what's going to happen to your money, your leaving New Mexico this is what's happening to your money...welcome to New Mexico this is what's happening with your money*".

Oscar's work in the military proves an interesting point. While most of us think of combat and peacekeeping military missions as one of the most probable causes of military

traumas, Oscar demonstrates that even those members who have never seen war up close and personal, that military service does have its effects.

*Oscar: I do think a lot about school shootings. I try and be vigilant, like I think about where I sit in class and not because I want to be safe but because I know if anyone try's to stop it, I know I will. I think am I in a position to reach the door, can a grab the weapon. When I walk to my car at night I'm like [gestures paranoia] even if its light or dark I still do it. I'm always thinking what could happen, and if it ever happens...*

Oscars's hypervigilance in a classroom setting is both a part of what he called "survivability" for other people who are civilians, but also hypervigilance. When military service members begin to engage in civilian environments, responses to ordinary aspects of the culture seem "normal" and are situated in a morally clear world divided into comrades, enemies, and collateral damage (Messinger 2013:202). Once a service member begins to interact with or around civilians' military culture becomes deeply rooted, embedding itself into an embodied experience. The way they view their bodies and view the risk of death are met with a struggle with the interpretations of social interactions. Essentially, internalization of the job through bodily comportments, purpose, and the culture that is not only antiquated socially (racism, homophobia, perpetuation of rape culture, toxic-masculinity, heteronormativity) but also functions for a purpose as military operational success.

While it can be argued how exactly beneficial and necessary military methods of training soldiers are, they have upheld the test of time. These methods persist and despite their effects on the minds and bodies of service members reintegration strategies and transition assistance not only exist but are also heavily flawed. Reintegration problems and difficulties are extremely common and are surrounded and triggered (or trigger) a number of issues like mental health issues, physical health problems, and social integration problems/disconnections.

#### 4.1.2 The Reality of Reintegration: Embodiment Problems and Difficulties

Juliette is a Navy veteran in her late 20s early 30s whose job was in the “*intelligence community*” working as a linguist translating Chinese to English. She comes from a town in Alabama where every high schooler is prepared to go into the military. At her high school everyone is “*forced*” to take the ASVAB or the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. The test measures your knowledge of ten subjects: general science, arithmetic reasoning, word knowledge, paragraph comprehension, numerical operations, coding speed, auto and shop information, mathematics knowledge, mechanical comprehension and electronics information (U.S. Army 2019). The test evaluates the jobs a person would perform best at in the military and is an exam everyone is required to take to join the Armed Forces. Military recruiters at her high school are not only common but welcomed, a common phenomenon found in economically disadvantaged rural area of the United States. Growing up “*incredibly impoverished*”, Juliette tells me that her family could only get food from food banks or places where the food was free. Living like this pushed her to join the military “*to get a better life and to actually be able to go to college*”, it is partly an economic decision for her to join the military. I ask Juliette then, “*why Navy?*”:

***Juliette:*** *That’s funny, since my high school forced us to take the ASVAB, you know we’re in Alabama so not a lot of people go to college and after that test I got a lot of phone calls from recruiters. The Army recruiter was stuttering a lot on the phone, but the Navy recruiter sounded really professional. So, I don’t know why, but I called him back.*

Despite the military complex being a consistent present force in her life, Juliette makes it clear that her time in the military was not her best experience. It was an one filled with hazing, malicious intent, and harassment from those ranked above her. While she tells me stories during her service she connects her current problems with her health and navigation of civilian life to her numerous years in the Navy.

**Juliette:** *“If I don't like the job I can actually quit, I forget about that...I can just quit or I can actually say I don't like doing this or this makes me uncomfortable I kind of forget that- I have a voice and that's something that I'm still trying to learn after I've been out for almost 10 years. Pretty much in the military your told what to do and you do it without question.”*

The change from military to civilian employment has been one of the most root causes of transition challenges facing service members (Carter et al. 2017:1). While the skills of military members are substantial from financial planning and accounting, specialized training in linguistics, to strong skills in leading, the translation of both hard (training) and soft skills (negotiation of salary/job searching) often proves to be a challenge to their long-term economic performance as well as their social transitions into jobs and co-workers or management (Carter et al. 2017:14). In either sense, these skills are lost in the civilian market. In Juliette's case, the “rigid” structure of the military, as she described, is one that asks its service members to subsume their own goals for that of the military goals. In doing so, tasks are done without questions and without explanation. With a change in environment military members are left in ambiguous positions often unsure as to how to communicate or express themselves in ways that are constructed as socially acceptable to civilian job environment. Oscar expressed that once he was done with his service the structure of civilian life involved coming to terms with the new structure that was unfamiliar.

**Oscar :** *A lot of stuff hit my afterwards, having a civilian job was different, I had people below me and when you're in uniform you see peoples ranks and you know how to talk to them there's a level of respect. But in the civilian works your just you. And when you get out they tell you, especially higher ranking people, “look you're not a Sargent anymore you're not a colonel anymore you can't just yell at people”. It was an interesting transition.*

The factors that affect the transition from the military environment to the civilian world are numerous. Noted by all but one participant was the disconnect between what they had been taught to do in the military and the stark contrast of how the civilian population functioned and operated. This could mean not being able to fit into a new job or feeling disconnected with the

way people themselves operated. While reintegration “courses” are required before discharge, the course is reported to be roughly a week long and include learning how to market military skills into civilian job markets and does not offer any type of support outreach or how to navigate the VA, for example. Comparatively, a week-long course compared to 6-10 years of military service does little to reconnect, reestablish, and re-assimilate the service member.

I had known India for several years. She served in the Army as an EOD technician (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) and the amount of time she has served and when is unnoted to protect her identity. She is happily divorced from another soldier, a characteristic that she says is common among EOD, “*were all divorced and heavy drinkers*”. She paints a vivid picture of what EOD is and what they do telling me that they are meant to be “*outside thinkers*” and “*think outside the box*”. Dismantling explosives like IEDs, for example, require creativity to pull apart a combination of seemingly unrelated parts and a detonating mechanism (they also work with biological, nuclear, and chemical weapons). India is proud of her job as an EOD tech and tells me she worked with the brightest people, but also some of the most violent people she knew.

Her description of her job, while mostly classified, summarizes the extent to what she dealt with on the job and the affects it has had on her afterwards. “*Think of the worst person you can think of and that’s what they tell you about humanity. They’re training us to think and act like a terrorist but to also think about things that are terroristic. But I can’t really tell you*”. Her time in the military has taken a toll on her health physically and mentally, she is a survivor of MST (Military Sexual Trauma/ more on this topic later) which has made her extremely cautious of talking with and being around men. She is resilient and is both consciously and actively looking to make herself “better”, as she puts it.



The description of her training puts into perspective just how internalized military training can be. While the degree to which the training is internalized (how is the training being done, what are they being trained on, how long) can differ, the internalization and embodiment of the job affects both the health of the service member but also their identity and connection to self. Mike, India, and Charlie put into perspective how and why the transition is so difficult.

*Mike: I think it's stressful, it's stressful for everybody to be quite honest, because you are kind of indoctrinated in this system and a way of life that is unlike being in, just a normal sort of life.*

*VM: Especially since you've been in it for nine years*

*Mike: Right. Absolutely you know, your controlled, it's this weird dependency thing. They pay you they feed you and all that, and you do this highly skilled job for them. Obviously when you get outside of that then it's like, okay, it's not that same dependency - a link that you have- now you gotta do all this on your own, it's not the fact that you can't do it, it's the fact that you've never sort of done it. If you get in early like me then you have to go through the stress of switching a whole paradigm- a life change basically. So it can be stressful.*

*India: Now, I'm more relaxed and chilled but compared to what I was. So, I would wake up in the morning as if I still had PT [Personal Training] ... so say class starts at 9, you're supposed to be 15 minutes or earlier to the classroom. I was very structured I would sit up straight like this [demonstrates]. If I wasn't taking notes then I would stare straight at the professor and I would be angered at people who sneezed or sniffled, and now I'm like wait THEY'RE not in the military.*

While I never saw Charlie in person our conversation over the phone was both stimulating personally and candid. A high school dropout and working as a carpenter for some time, in his 20s he decided to join the military. Charlie is in his late 40s Early 50s, and recently, after 9 years in the Navy and another 12 in the Army national guard, he finally retired from the military. He is currently perusing a degree in the social sciences (unstated for identity protection), a world that he characterized as “*incomprehensible*”, so much so that he had dropped out his first semester but returned to it later. During his time in the Navy, Charlie's job was to be the direct support for seal teams and in 2001 after 9/11 he was deployed to Kuwait to do special operations. In 2002 he left the Navy to join the infantry and deployed to Iraq multiple times for

combat purposes “*to find and trap the enemy*”. Charlie certainly holds deep regard for the military, in part because it was such an important part of his life for so long. Having spent half his life dedicated to the military means that the transition out of it was particularly challenging.

*Charlie: I didn't want to get out, had no idea what I was going to do. I mean the jobs I had held where jobs for war, all I know is to prepare for war. I had a therapist and all that shit to find my new purpose and switch gears. The world I was in to [social science] was a totally different planet. Incompressible to me, I dropped out the first semester and it was incomprehensible. Learning about Marxist theory and that's something I had fought against for the longest time...*

What Mike, India, and Charlie's narratives about life after doing war demonstrates is not only the ways that military training and embodiment has been embedded in their lives and bodies, but also their approaches to return to the most ordinary and mundane aspects of life. While these approaches are acts of making sense of the surroundings, navigating unfamiliar territory with an unfamiliar sense of how the world has continued without them. This life switching paradigm is less met with resistance and met with the military knowledge they have learned to grasp on to as life saving measures and optimization. Embodiment of the military culture is a necessary evil as it forms a collective model by which “*forces you into success*”, as Mike said. Success in completing anything as a group, doing a job together, completing a mission together, going through training together, there is no individual in military culture I would argue. This aspect is what makes reintegration so difficult. Due in part to the way the self is constructed and deconstructed, made up and re made again the militarized self and the civilian self is put into questions.

*Mike: “ I can relate to it, The Hurt Locker. It's a good movie on the EOD kind of culture. In one part he's in deployment after deployment after deployment and then he goes home and he's like sitting in the grocery store looking around, and you understand what he's going through. It's like this is a weird world for me, I don't belong here, I belong over there in that higher-pressure worlds and I almost don't know how to deal in this world that isn't high-pressure. Because everything you do in those communities [the military community], you're always doing something pressure-filled. It's hard to retain relationships in the [civilian] world, there's a disconnect. At first you find it hard to associate with certain people. In the United States it's this*

*world where it's a consumer society where you value things like this, and like over there your world is so far from that."*

The emergence of the sense of strangeness that Mike described above, may contribute the experience of service (particularly during wartime), and the familiarity gap of the civil-military divide, feelings of unfamiliarity works against the military member making reintegration difficult (Carter et al. 2017:14). This has in part to do with the magnitude of service members jobs. As military members begin to fit the mold of the soldier, they are able to have quick responses, gain immediate knowledge and decision-making skills when presented with a situation that the average U.S civilian could never fathom. Upon coming home that mold is hard to break when its purpose was survival. You quite literally on a permanent social fight or flight response. What accompanies that is the constant new stimulus coming in that is far different from violence and war.

Like Mike, others in the study also acknowledged the "pressure" of the job, but also the pressure of the civilian world.

**Mike:** *"Again, you have the maintain standards that you have to maintain in the civilian community you have the pressure physically, mentally, long term lower levels of stress affect people, it's like that you're in a pressure cooker. With limited opportunities to express or decompress."*

Despite the military training that is embodied in military members, tensions between the civilian and military self must also be revisited during the militarization process. While this is an issue that has to do with the idea of individuality- and by that, I do not mean someone's uniqueness but rather functioning as a solitary unit, this is combatted through embracing the military group dynamic ensuring that the group dynamic is actively fulfilling obligations of the military. This process of group identity cohesion links the self to both the work and labor of the military, but also the sociocentric doctrines that make one thrive in the military environment (Kondo

1990:114-15). The self and the power of militarization blur the lines between civilian self and military group member, the sense of self then emerges engaged in its relationality to the military organization.

*Mike: "Having to achieve outside of system that is more individual as opposed to in the military, you know, they, you have a whole group there that's forcing you almost into, into success, then its more individual once you get outside".*

## **5 BROTHERHOOD, COMRADERY, INDENTITY**

Despite the difficulties that service members encounter during their time in the military, the personal connection with comradery has been reported to be the main reason why service members return to service, would return if they could, or go into the reserves. The comradery, or the brotherhood, serves several important institutional goals which we will go into detail below. Its consequences for the individual both inside and outside of the military setting are also evident. In this chapter we will discuss the brotherhood primarily outside of the military setting and its effects on the civilian-military self-dichotomy. Here we will explore how selfhood is comprised as the military member reintegrates back into the civilian world and begin to readapt to the civilian self. Using the term independent will refer the person apart from the comradery and the dependent self is the person connected to the comradery. Additionally, strong relationships to the comradery have repercussions on the success of reintegration and the health and wellness of military members.

Transformations on the body, identity, and the self are deeply rooted in the service members everyday living that is involved in doing war. The training, molding, and the internalization of the jobs military members are called to do involve intimate connections. From a social standpoint, relying on one another builds the comradery needed for group cohesion. As sociality becomes associated with life or death, the individual integrates with that of the group.

Individuality, or the inner self, are less than necessary as ideas of “individuality” are considered counterintuitive to the institution and by extension its service members in the military. Outside of the military enters in a contrasting set of rules to group dynamic, Mike illustrated this below explaining why he decided to go into the reserves and what this meant for him despite physically and mentally not being able to return to full active duty.

**VM:** *I understand that it's taken a toll on your body, but why go back into the reserves then?*

**Mike:** *Because the military is kind of a culture, I call it love/hate, because it's stressful and everything, but there's a culture about it that gives you a sense of comradery and brotherhood, that you don't have when you get out. Not everywhere, you know, for the most part you don't really have that when you get out in the civilian workforce. So for me it was like I sort of missed it and you know with everything that came about in 2001, it almost felt like a duty but I missed it as well, so I knew I couldn't do active duty again. You know, by that point I had gone on to become an engineer and I was wanting to get back in, both feet in, so the reserves let me have that.*

Often and obviously, despite the range of difficulties and hardships experienced in military service, the military world contains elements, events, and realities that are not found in the civilian world. They are both what Mike describes as love/hate aspects of the military. Feeling compelled to use the body and view it as essential to a cause has much to do with the comradery as a form of support and solidarity, which we will speak more to later. Missing certain characteristics of military service, while not uncommon, captures how the selfhood is enmeshed with the desire to be in and around military environments/culture. While the self in military culture is connected with strong hold relationships, civilian culture encourages the self to be separate from societal ties.

Romeo served in the Army for 8 years. For reasons pertaining to their anonymity I cannot reveal what job in the Army Romeo had done. Although he wanted to go to school, for economic reasons he decided to join the military at the age of 18. Having initially enlisted for 4 years he stayed for 8 because he loved it so much. During those 8 years in the military he married, but

once he was discharged the dynamics of the relationship had changed for several reasons such as shifting wages and physical changes, “*I went from an army twink to a fat veteran*”. Now, recently divorced and being out of the military for roughly 5 years, he tells me this is the first time that he is alone. He is in a slightly more precarious situation compared to the other participants of the study. Romeo is a gay man. While this makes the struggles of daily life evident, it has made his time in the military more so. He served most of his time in the military under “Don’t Ask Don’t Tell” and navigated this by separating his “*identity in the uniform from the identity outside the uniform*”. In truth, Romeo explains to me that his position in the military employs members that are more “*intelligent*”, and so problems having to do with “*lifestyle*” (i.e. being gay) in the military are far and few between as his comrades are more tolerable in a sense.

**Romeo:** *I do miss the comradery, it was my family and now that I’m out of the military I don’t have that family but in the military I did. I tried to reestablish that when I went back to school. Like in the military no one asks, you demand, but with classmates there’s a distance there’s no group sense it’s like were friends in school but they don’t want to be bothered on the outside.*

It is not uncommon for military members to establish remanence of the brotherhood or aspects of the comradery in civilian populations. Research done on this topic is far and few between mainly centering on VA support groups or outside military communities’ gatherings together as support systems. Romeo observed in his attempt of finding a military family in his school mates that the dynamic of support in a group of seemingly connected strangers, that civilian group dynamics are both distant and form through growth in familiarity. In many ways, for the military member, the individual self and the social self are faced with contrasting set of ideals that differ from the military context.

Experiencing a disconnect between the self and society dichotomy leaves its affective mark. Affective intensities, like experiencing the changes from civilian to military member, prove important in shaping one’s life trajectory and bears the traces of social experience without

it appearing as social (Lutz 2017:186). A multitude of identities can hold various ambiguous positions in cultural spaces. In the case of a person crossing from the civilian to military culture, subjecting a person to new cultural arraignments reflects attributes of liminality. Victor Turner's theorizing of liminality and "liminal entities" proposed that these persons are between positions and as such have attributes that express symbolic dimensions of ritualized social and cultural transitions (Turner 1969:95). In the case of civilians entering military cultural domains, the change from civilian to service member enables the individual to be reduced to a uniform (for example), fashioned anew, and given additional knowledge that enables them to cope with their new life (Turner 1969:95). Additionally, both the entrance into military service and the return into civilian life presents a time to submit to the community (civilian and military alike) by ascribing to their norms, sentiments, and attitudes (Turner 1969: 103).

While in many ways the western notions that construct the self and emotion are centered on the individual, this premise is something that both contradicts the military institutions methods of deconstructing the civilian self, but also supports a self that is reliant on the institution. Functioning independently from the institution presents the unintended consequence in finding and establishing a new self-separated from the military institution that has been largely shaped by methodological approaches involved in preparing for war. The ambiguity involved in forming an independent inner self contrasted with the dependent self creates a social experience that in many ways is less culturally defined than emotional categories. Rather, the affective and liminal opportunities that are presented in this navigation between independent and dependent self is established by the political power and social order involved in the deconstruction and then formation of the militarized self through training.

*Mike: "I think that's key, again, all this physical pain and, I don't want to use the word brainwashing, but it's all like a crucible. You have this pain and these bodily symbols it forms*

*your ideology and identity, and you take yourself off this crucible and then what maintains that identity? You see a lot of people maintain it through their hats or their clothes that still forces them to associate with that past group and that bond is very strong.”*

Collura et al. explains further why exactly the bond is so strong in the comradery:

It is the strength of social interactions and what soldiers mean to one another, which buttress the ways that soldiers interpret what is going on within the battlefield. These intense relationships and forms of interpreting adversity carry over into civilian life once returning from deployment, and can create difficult situations when trying to adjust back to social norms. No longer are these service members faced with imminent danger; there are no improvised explosive devices (IEDs) lurking underneath a piece of pavement, Taliban snipers waiting to take a fatal shot, or the sound of incoming mortar fire. Rather, soldiers are surrounded with domestic issues (paying the bills, becoming employed, communicating emotions with loved ones), and are expected to deal with such issues with ease and confidence, as if they were never deployed to a combat zone for well over a year (Collura et al. 2012:137).

Comradery or the “brotherhood” is often used as a method to cope with life outside of the military as a way to maintain the military identity that is strongly associated with the bond between members. In cases where participants resented aspects of or noted negative experienced with their service, the comradery was a reason as why they would return. While tight group cohesion has its strategic purposes within the institution, it seems that it is also a source of reliance, support, and remembrance. In some cases, the quality associability characteristic of the “brotherhood” is so desired that it is searched for in civilian populations. In several cases military members spoke towards wanting to connect with classmates or co-workers but that they found it difficult to relate to them. In the presence of other military members however, relating to stories of being in “extreme situations” and the responsibility of being accountable for lives and millions of dollars established deep connections and intentional empathetic responses. Oscar spoke about this instant connection with other military members.

**Oscar:** *“Its huge [the brotherhood/comradery] , I still talk to a lot of people I haven’t seen in years like we still talk every other day or next a lot, we keep up. It’s weird, I had lived in the same neighborhood and I had these childhood friends and its weird, when I left and then I came back they had stayed the same and I had changed a lot. I realized like I really did have this big comradery thing. You’re out there away from your family and these guys become your family,*



*there's always welcomed to my house, they invite me. And also, being a veteran, you meet people in class that are and you instantly become friends".*

What is clear here and with other participants are the affective intensities of these relationships. Connection with both military members known or unknown prove that despite service members possibly having not served together or having been deployed, there is an almost universal understanding that the shared experiences of military service can only be understood by other military members. Oscar explained that aspects of military service like being “*put into extreme situations*” or being “*accountable for millions of dollars' worth of equipment and the wellbeing of junior enlisted members*”, are elements of service that civilians cannot grasp and that they’ve “*seen so little so far*”, as Oscar would put it. This creates a strong bond and instant connections between military members and sense of disconnection with civilians. Considering this, participants emphasized cases where military friends could not cope with life outside of the military culture, due in part to the lack of comradery. Isolation and substance abuse became a way of life for many, eventually leading to suicide, alcoholism, and overdoses.

**Mike:** *It's gotta everything to do with identity, I don't like to [symbolically identify] ...if you've noticed it's part of the way the military does things. They make you have the tight emotional connection to groups that you're with, they tie you with your units, and you're supposed to develop this thing which binds you so tight that your able to go do your mission, and that tightness just defines people and they don't want to release that tightness. So, you'll see a lot of, for example, army against the navy, well you know it's the same thing right? But to happens at a bunch of different levels and every one of them try and claim you and adhere to the hegemony of that sort of culture. It's a very powerful thing to be identified with that emotionally and mentally and give it your all- it's a lot of brainwashing.*

Often, the affective contradictions between the inner self and the construction of the military self, stem from the homogeneous interpretations that are captured in the public and military discourse about the cohesiveness and national characterization of military culture and service members. These interpretations ignore that within any culture the individual finds themselves in, they are

trying to navigate the identity of “military member” and “self”. The military self and the civilian self-function within two contrasting cultures. The negotiation between civilian and military soldier entails a process of forming, molding, and controlling the body. Militarized bodies, from the point of training to the anticipation or participation of going to war, thus maintain the embodied experience of military practice. This makes navigating the self in either environment particularly difficult as the contradictions in social and self-comprised norms makes reintegrating challenging.

Reintegration into civilian populations is one of the most challenging dimensions implicated in the aftermath of military service. A sense of disconnection to the body, the self, and its surroundings situates the military member in a place that is both unknown territories culturally but familiar in appearance. This affect is rooted in a domain of intensity, uncertainty, and potentiality that preserves traces of past actions and encounters and brings them to the present as prospects of normalcy (Allison 2018:367). When considering institutional goals and moral structures of military organization that contribute to the negotiation of a military members self, the navigation of the self is then enmeshed with conforming to military structure and negotiating ones militarized self and the civilian self. Embodied responses to this climate become evident in the military member-self dichotomy.

We can see this through the way Oscar had made clear his observations of the changing civilian world and the static military world. *“Sexual assault is big in the military, I think the old culture didn’t think about sexual assault like we do. There’s a history of not okay behavior that isn’t taken care of. And now were like “OHHH that’s not okay”? People look confused about why we’re talking about this. We did a lot of non PC stuff, made fun of each other, we had a staff Sargent he was married to a man, he was okay with jokes about that, but like this is what they*

*say in the briefing of what not do. If someone came in mid conversation we would be in the wrong. It's confusing for a lot of people."* Oscar specifically chose to bring up this topic when we had our interview. Upon asking every participant at the end of the interview if they had any comments or thoughts that they thought were necessary to be included in this study, Oscar brought to my attention the inner political and social climate of today's military as did others. Sexual assault, homophobia, misogyny, and racist remarks (amongst some issues) were made clear to be something normalized in the military but socially unacceptable in civilian presence.

Much like culture, as the embodiment and mentality of military service is developed over time, shared learning in a collective environment normalizes behaviors (Lee 2016:56). Adapting to military culture requires retaining core elements of the military identity that are not born from air but made, produced, raised, and grown as highly specific categories of identities and related roles (Gardiner 2013:71-72). These roles, for example, like gender, race, sexuality, branch, rank – links individuals to obligations be that to people, places, or symbols. Thinking of military culture as a system of meaning with social and political consequences facilitates how the articulation of certain behaviors and approaches to health, identity, and embodiment develop over time in and out of the military environment (Lee 2016:55-56).

What makes breaking away from these behaviors difficult for some military members are the crosshairs between the civilian environment and the military environment and their interconnections. Militarization processes as proposed by Lutz (2002) (as referenced to earlier) that do not take on the guise of war and violence and rather are militarized habits not military habits, further affect the social being (Gardiner 2013:72). The irony in these phenomena gathers no attention. Perhaps by suggesting the notion that war implies the degree of health of the nation while sending and preparing young people to protect life, promising them education and work

through college benefits, presents civilians and military members with a distorted picture (Lutz 2002:724). Moreover, for military members, the value of discipline and teamwork nurtured by comradery and brotherhood through the expressions of masculinity further marginalizes anyone but the male heterosexual, the type of body that is seen most fit for combat (Lutz 2002:724).

## **6 NAVIGATING HEALTH**

The economy of war and its cultural politics valorize stories of heroism and “might” and disregard the exchanges of violence associated with increased militarization. U.S. militarization processes have redefined what is seen as a threat to the characterizations of American values of democracy, however convoluted as that statement might be. In the process of militarization redefining the country and its military have made clear the enemy is not the institution. Obscuring the military’s hand in violence in all shapes and forms accommodates an ethos of commending decisions and initiatives despite how ominous and omnipresent they may be. Undoubtedly, the uses of soldiers, their image, and the national symbol their bodies have come to represent are a part of sustaining such ethos. Intimate connections and complicity with the state, economic protections, and benefits that service members receive, has prevented the institution from taking responsibility over the consequences involved in partaking in the forms of violence. By this I mean that the military institution largely disregards the long-term health, mental, and physical effects of military service because they sustain members in and outside of their service.

Furthermore, examining aspects of service such as the effects of training, policy, and brotherhood not only explains what forges the military culture but to also observe the way it disrupts livelihoods. They serve to be the foundation on which health and wellness are conceptualized, navigated, and negotiated. What defines healthy versus unhealthy is dictated by the participants alone. Therefore, through the military institutions direction to mold the soldier

several elements need to be discussed. Actively working to control emotions based on the institutions social guidelines evoke rules that dictate the correct gestures, images, ideas around emotional and self-regulation. Relationality between the self, military group members, and the military organization strives off of the cohesion to the doctrines that help conform and assure the militarized selves place in the military environment and culture.

Additionally, military institutions have long relied on the able bodies of men and women to accurately carry out the skills and services of active duty. However, the stereotypical soldier's body is marked by the masculine and gendered male form that iconically has made distinct the affective life of a soldier. Again, while this thesis is not specifically focused on the construction of gender and sex, the stereotypical hypermasculine characteristics and expectations impact the negotiation of health and wellness. The public characterization of hypermasculine, dramatized, and symbolic national figures has reinforced what an ideal soldier is; these characterizations are still confined by the epitome of national ideals (Wool 2015:9,11). The public and military culture has contributed greatly to the ways service members seek, describe, cope, and make decisions based on their identity as a military member. Navigating the national, institutional, and personal ideals of what it is to be soldiers means navigating health and wellness in ways that contradict what a participant may feel in personally right but may approach their health and wellness, as we shall see, in ways that conform to military standards. When considering institutional goals and moral structures of the military that contribute to the negotiation of a military members self as discussed in the last chapter, the navigation of the self is then enmeshed with conforming to military structure and therefor affecting themselves outside military settings.

The maneuvers across time and space that have situated bodies in ways which categorize, differentiate, and enforce control on them have supported the oppression and suppression of

ideologies outside of heteronormativity. In doing so the military institution reaps the results intended to make the body function in ways that inflict numerous forms of violence. From the historical perspectives that have persisted through the years, the concealed contortions of the military organization to impact bodies, both internally within its establishment but also to carry their doctrines across secular areas, has shown that its influence is one that exercises power abusively and authoritatively. As military power has been secured in obvious and subtle ways, what is clear is the military's stronghold in assuring that masculinity is a principal. Women are unwelcome. Bodies and minds who stray from stereotypically damaging forms of masculinity are also rejected. This also includes ways in which health and wellness are approached when confronted with notions around the capacities and limitations that measure weakness and vulnerability.

### **6.1 Tools for Violence:**

As experience is reconstructed through narrative, the categories and meaning towards political forces that shape context of daily lives develop individual and collective understandings to structure of, social status in, and relationship to the military institution (Singer et al. 2012:249). As the military industrial complex continues to play its part in the disruption and destruction of human health at home and abroad, the powers that produce war and the capital is accumulates propels acceptance of certain ideas about military service and the participation in war (such as being a "tool") (Singer et al. 2010:249). War operates on a scale that binds the body to ideologies and uphold them as it increasingly interacts with said ideology. Service members know that they are "*property of the government*", as Juliette put it. There is a general understanding that a part of the job is to do things and to be put up against immense pressures. The idea of self- sacrifice for the sake of the nation is complicated because it is both transparent

and normalized combined with the militarization of society and soldiers' bodies. Enabling the normalization of sacrifice has provided the dialogue to establish that only the appropriate category ends up dead and that there are necessary evils when it comes to casualties (Gardiner 2013:74). Ritually marking soldiers suitable for sacrifice, as the ones who "volunteer" to serve, begins to shape the service member's experience long before enlistment and long after (Gardiner 2013:74-75). A part of shaping this experience and maintaining the "self-sacrifice" ideology involves re-conceptualizing what the body of the soldier is used for. Upon asking participants what their thoughts were about how the military viewed their bodies one word stood out the most: "tool."

*Oscar: "Ahh (laughs) they don't care, I know guys who had some crazy jobs and the stuff they did and even just training – I don't see how people made 20 years career out of it. And even for me, I worked a lot of hours without sleep, so yeah, they really don't care. They put the mission first and expect you to put the mission first and find a way to take care of yourself somewhere".*

Increasingly the U.S military biomedical research has concentrated on developing soldiers who feel no pain, need no sleep, and suffer no trauma (Bickford 2008:5). These efforts have been defended by the age-old argument of "it will save lives" but the reality is that the labor of war plays on the human element of demand for the military to fight (Bickford 2008:5; Lee 2016:56). Research around this demand has indicated that after effects of service like PTSD has strongly been correlated with rapid change in environments, when one-minute soldiers are being shot at and the next they're on Skype with their families at home (Lee 2016:56). These demands are both taxing on the body, when you're expected to uphold a standard of physical fitness and resilience of the mind, when you're expected to take on a persona of strength and courage.

Increasingly as the focus on resilience grows the more these contradictions make themselves visible. One's ability to bounce back, survive, and cope with little damage during stressful circumstances takes on a myriad of definitions depending on the context it finds itself

in. Between the biomedical meaning and military meanings behind resilience, the picture painted takes on two very different meanings shaping the spaces in which ideas of resilience and vulnerability are conceptualized (Leatherman et al. 2014: 291). Biomedical interpretations of resilience are often described in verbiage we are familiar with such as “full recovery”, implying resilience being predicated on the bodies ability to recover from illness, to essentially be absent of disease or infirmity (Leatherman et al. 2014: 289). Military resilience involves behavioral, physical, mental, and social toughness often contradictory to the promotion of help and health seeking behaviors that biomedical resilience often calls for. Anthropologically speaking, the idea of resilience can contribute to minimizing the effects of challenges and hardships such as the impacts of PTSD and other traumas (Barrios 2016: 30). The idea of resilience often questions what we are trying to achieve by being resilient, a result of the systematic and structural violence that undermines military members help seeking behaviors (Barrios 2016:31).

While there is an understanding between soldiers that their body is “government property”, ideas of how this “government property” should be cared for follows an ambiguous set of rules that are interpreted on a case by case bases. Part of this interpretation starts with how their bodies are defined by the military.

**Juliette:** *“There’s always this joke in the military that you could get court martialled for getting a sunburn because your burning government property. So we understood that we were the property of the government.”*

**Mike:** *“Definitely a tool it's definitely a physical tool. Tool in the rawest form to enact of violence. In that sort of sense, they build you up and they force you to stay in a certain capability to do that physical violence.”*

Defining the body as a tool in these ways implies that the body needs to both be kept up to a certain standard (“capability”/ “court-martialled for a sunburn”) and uphold an expectation of the bodies capabilities to perform to a certain capacity. As the U.S military increasingly heads



towards a more “resilient army”, the ability to maintain and perform through adverse conditions leads soldiers to navigate their health during their service in ways that they know are for the wellbeing of the “team” (Collura et al. 2012:134). Additionally, military biomedical research, military doctors, and military “higher-ups” in charge of teams of military bodies are not tasked with the maintenance of health and wellness; rather, they monitor the strengthening and ensure resilience of the soldier through means of job threats and hazing (Bickford 2008:6). Alleviatory care is less of the focus for the military and instead, the production and control of the soldier through the medical “needs” of the military (Bickford 2008:6).

**Juliette:** *“There were things that would hinder you from wanting to get help. So when I was in bootcamp I got a stress fracture in my femur and I ran through that to get through bootcamp so I wouldn’t be stuck...once I went in for my final appointment for my leg to get off of limited duty they told me that essentially if I ever went back to medical for the same problem I would get kicked out. When they told me that I had a minor panic attack, like if I get discharged now what am I going to do?”*

Not uncommon through military service are the physical ailments associated with strenuous physical forces on the body. More than half of the people I interviewed had reported service related physical health problems. This included multiple hip replacements, service related osteoarthritis possibly mediated by military service, lower limb pain (knee pain, ACL and meniscus surgeries, etc.), nerve damage in upper extremities, migraines, and chronic back pain. Mental health problems ranging from PTSD to GAD were also reported with all but one participant.

PTSD is particularly difficult to understand in military populations as the diagnostic interpretations follow a medicalized model of the “psychiatric disorder”. PTSD can also take on different meanings, much like Finley’s (2011) approach to documenting PTSD, diagnostic distinctions limit to representation of military members experience (8-9). Anthropologically speaking, PTSD presents in countless ways from one or more manifestations such as memory disturbances, negative appraisals of self, mistrust in people or surroundings, severe anxiety, and

a multitude of psychological and behavioral changes (Collura et al. 2012:133). The behavioral and social dynamics of PTSD (in the military environment) has largely been established by the military institution's construction of "right" and "wrong" while attempting to interpret the cultural ranges of "acceptable"; this has largely shaped the interpretations of what soldiers are experiencing personally (Collura et al. 2013:136; Finley 2011: 49-50). However, when biomedical physicians employ the same scripted approach to understanding the mental health affects related to service in both combat and non-combat military members the approach further presumes that kinks in human function can be isolated (diagnosed) and fixed (medicated), with little to no attentions to overall human condition or experience (Collura et al. 2013:133).

My focus here is not with the dynamics of PTSD but rather with how the military medical system treats, diagnoses, and secures active duty members. Over time the use of the demand and supply system of health treatments for soldiers has affected how military members navigate the system for their mental and physical health. Moreover, medical services are strongly associated with loss in job title and security and the denial of physical pain as it is strongly associated with weakness, an emotional experience antithetical to the American super soldier image. Thinking back to Juliette's earlier comment on her leg and the stress of possibly losing her job and economic security, the demands on and of soldiers' bodies are exasperated by the military's medical system connection with national goals. Again, with the focus on combat systems, the demand for bodies to support military endeavors capitalizes on human strength and the mitigation of weakness while sustaining a standard of decreased responsibility over the health of its soldiers unless it is disadvantageous to the cause (Bickford 2008:6).

*Oscar: Like if you sacrifice yourself physically to do something, they can try and throw it back at you that you didn't take care of yourself, that it wasn't us [the military institution]. I've seen that happen. I had a buddy who just trained hard and his knee wasn't working, and he wanted to get paid for his knee but he didn't have the paper trail for it and it was like if he complained about it*

*was an issue for the squadron, so he just sucked it up. He put the needs of the squadron first. "I'm not going to go to the doctor", and they said "well you should have". I've seen some people, careers just end because of stuff like that.*

Double standards surrounding health create a complicated picture. As the reliance of the brotherhood creates a bases for military members to latch onto because of the relationships it creates, the brotherhood is also a reason to avoid seeking medical care. Charlie is 90% disabled (percentage is determined by the VA). He tells me that because the jobs that he and other combat service members do that the physical pain is something you push through and is, in fact, a part of the culture.

***Charlie:*** *Especially in the jobs that we do, if you have pain, you still want to be there with your guys and be there for your team, so I didn't go to medical many times until the end, my last two years in the army. I didn't go into medical and those types of jobs that I did and it's the culture for sure. In combat arms that's the culture.*

The bond in teams and the individual accountability to the team is influential to service members. The cohesiveness of the group is fundamental to the goal of the assignment given to the group. At the individual level, the service member has a duty to not themselves but to the group and their livelihood. For Charlie, and many other service members, yearly exams to measure the fitness of a military members are source of concern for job stability.

***Charlie:*** *The yearly exams, I used to worry about those, so I used to cheat on my exams. For one its easy – you listen to what these guys say on these eye charts, you stand in the back and you listen to what people say, you memorize it (laughs).*

Perhaps, for Charlie, his admiration for the job and the military as a whole holds a large place in his desire to beat the health exams and to deny seeking medical care for his physical pain. Seeking help in mental and physical health problems is a direct opposition to military values of psychological toughness, resilience, collective responsibility, and group loyalty (Besterman-Dahan et al. 2014:114). Often members are caught in the dual messages of destigmatizing efforts that encourage them to reach out for evaluations and treatments, and the

military culture that places priority in the mission above the individual's well-being (Besterman-Dahan et al. 2014:1149).

**Romeo:** *GAD, it is service connected, not sure how or when it started but it was about 5-6 years ago. In the military you push things down deep and when I got out I guess it just hit me all at once. Putting your own needs aside to serve, that catches up with you. Like when I tore my meniscus I didn't say anything or I would look weak or look like a meanderer or not as capable and people would look at me like I was weak, but the injury was real! Now, I have to take care of myself, in the military people don't do that. You put yourself aside and when you get out you can finally do what you want. When you join- you just mentally pause.*

In Romeo's case, the context of mental health and illness, can be viewed by others as cowardice, character flaw, or result in social exclusion (Besterman-Dahan et al. 2014:114). The social ramifications of seeking help reflects the systemic denial of the impacts of military training and service on life after doing/going to war but also reflects military values, culture, and policy surrounding the operational security of military matters (e.g. classified information) (Gardiner 2013:72). The privilege of information that service members (depending on job, rank, etc.) can be subjected to depend upon on several factors, but all in all as these military habits and values shape bodies and minds, normalizing the denial of a range of emotions, feelings, and experiences serve to mitigate the possible compromise of their job security.

**Oscar:** *It's a double standard, they say "get help go to mental health" but there can be ramifications for that. I was having trouble sleeping and had a heart condition. I go to mental health, but then it's on my record that I went to mental health. So a lot of people don't want to seek help because It can affect their career. I know a lot of people who went and got help with anger management or drinking, and then later when a promotion or training comes up, they can't do it.*

Oscar often talks about the experience of "otherness" in the military. Part of this has to do with his intentions as a participant in this research. He made it clear that he felt it was important to share his and others' stories and experiences in the military and to illuminate the struggles, realities, and the disassociation that service members often feel in and out of service. His and others' experiences with the dual messages surrounding health presented by the military

demonstrates the degree to which military members will suppress emotional responses and physical ailments to keep their jobs, intelligence clearance, and overall to “save face” in the company of others. Juliette has also had extensive experiences with dual messages of the military system. She not only was bullied profusely by higher ups to the point that she felt “targeted” on daily bases, but she also suppressed her mental health problems for elongated periods during her time serving.

*Juliette: That actually affected me a lot. I got that fixed when I could finally go to therapy when I was out. I had a top-secret clearance, so I was told If I ever went to therapy that would get taken away. And I didn't realize it till I got out, but I was so depressed that I would occasionally contemplate suicide, but I didn't because I felt If I did the navy would win.”*

Again, waiting for military service to conclude to seek help is common for the preservation of the job and the team. It is not uncommon for service members also become “lost” in the military mentality, eventually realizing that they may have mental health problems as a direct result of the military during reintegration. India likewise, expressed delaying seeking help to keep her job positions.

*India: I got diagnosed with migraines, they said they couldn't guarantee if it was exasperated by the military or the effects of the military. But getting healthcare while you're in is near impossible. I couldn't get help with my rape because of that. To do EOD, and the thought of losing that job was horrible. That wasn't so much the fault of military physicians but rather the talk about how if a girl where to go get help that she was just asking for it, or if you go forward your just weak. You would hear it around, it wasn't just from lower levels and also the higher levels.*

Two of the 3 women who I interviewed expressed difficult experiences with their time in the military. While the military environment relies heavily on the male form, the introduction of women into the military has been received with pushback. While arguably, women in uniform are more accepted today, sexism and misogyny are ingrained in and by the institution. Lima is arguably my only outlier of this study. She is the only female to report not having any issues with her service and in fact wanted to serve her 20 years but could not because of injuries and

surgeries she had while in the military. Her outlook regarding the military as a positive one has much to do with her past. Lima describes herself as an active person and was both a firefighter and an EMT (Emergency Medical Technician). Having entered the military at an older age than the average recruit, the embodiment of military habits has affected her substantially less as is my understanding. However, she also had her eyes set on “*servicing the country*” and that it was her “*duty as someone with an abled body*”. It should also be noted that she comes from a military family, so the reality is that the military has had a strong presence in her life. While she tells me she has had no concerns about her time in the military she has had substantial pain from 2 hip reconstruction (on the same right hip) mediated by military service as well as mental health issues but declined to talk further about her experiences with mental health.

*Lima: I have good days and bad days. I think the hardest part is physically. It makes my job harder too. But I wouldn't change I would do all again. My daughter is pretty understanding when I'm having a bad day and I can't pick her up or I can't sit down on the floor with her. I deal with it, and mentally, I mean I've got some mental health issues and what not that have come from the military, I also come from a family with a lot of mental health issues, we're very open about it in my family.*

The effects that military service has had on Lima does not escape her. It affects her daily through work and with the times she spends with her daughter. First, the women in this study who I spoke with reported just as much variation in their general military experience in contrast with the men. Secondly, the experience itself with bootcamp and training was generally the same in terms of the physical and mental stressors and encounters, but all women described additional stress in having to prove one's self in a male dominated environment (Finley 2011:161). Lima argues that women do have more difficult times in the military, but in truth they need to understand the job that they are called to do. Again, Lima's life experiences have certainly affected her perception of the military and its effects on her body as a necessary job hazard.

*Lima: I've always been a tom boy and I've done things that are male dominated. I played ice hockey with the boys and I got used to being in the man's world, the boy's world. I just fit in with them. Yeah you have to work a little harder and some will accept you and sometimes you have to prove yourself. In all honestly there is a physical difference between men and women, and I have a different view than most women towards that, but yeah. You go into a job the person next to me, my partner is depending on me if need be, I am an equal in their eyes and they need to understand that, and yes, I need to prove myself and be stronger and work harder to prove myself more than a man does.*

While the age-old argument of women being physically lesser than men exists, what has been prevalent through the history of militarized sexual politics is that women and their capability to respond to the military institutions needs has been largely disregarded, reduced as meaningless, or discredited (Enloe 2000 38:47). Inner workings of those military officials and civilian state authorities responsible for preparing for and waging war have tried to maneuver women and what comprises femininity so that each can serve military objectives (Dichter et al. 2018:845; Enloe 2000:36). The reality is that the identity of women and its effect on female service members certainly exists, but for the women who I interviewed they made clear that they face the same threats alongside their male service member and often face the same degree of difficulties in rebuilding the postwar life (Finley 2011,162). This is not to say that the difficulties encounters are the same, just the degree to which there is difficulties in reintegration.

Additionally, as the identity of “service member” intersects with a military culture, which is predominantly male, the stress of having to prove one’s self has negative impacts on “help seeking” behavior for mental health issues for service women (Besterman-Dahan et al. 2014: 124; Finley 2011:8). India’s experience with rape and the military system demonstrates that even seeking help and reporting sexual assault is considered a sign of weakness. It was not until after India’s time in the military and a VA doctors’ appointment did she realize that she had complication from her MST. It must be stressed that MST is an experience and not a mental

health diagnosis, rather it is the response to MST that merits diagnoses or intervention affecting their mental and physical health years later (U.S VA 2018). For example, MST is associated with a greater risk of developing PTSD than any other trauma including combat (Finley 2011:162).

The dominant discourse around MST contend that women working in male-dominated teams are inherently predisposed to the risk of sexual assault. Terms like “barracks whore” (women who engage in sexual activity with one or entire groups of military teams) are routinized and show that this type of language implies mistakenly that military women face deterministic outcomes of being in the military. Yet, MST is prevalent in both male and female service members (1 of 4 military servicewomen and 1 in 100 military servicemen who report) (Hannagan 2017:626; U.S Department of Veteran Affairs 2018). Essentially, MST and the discourse around it is set in stone, and the effects of MST are mostly silenced by a military culture that perpetuates an environment that sees MST disclosure as a vulnerability or victimization. Even in terms of gender and sexuality are the effects of military service directly affecting health navigation of the service member.

## **6.2 Aftermath: Living with the Repercussions**

Romeo tells me that he is now working on his nursing degree. In many ways, it was his upbringing with a brother who has cerebral palsy and epilepsy that drew his interest into nursing. He finds it rewarding and purposeful but overt aspects of military habits has made him seem irresponsible. Learning to break the mold that the military has used to restrict bodies is both possible but takes resilience and understanding. Romeo recognizes that if he is not physically at 100% , then how can he take care of others?

***Romeo:** In the military when your injured you just suck it up. But in nursing, like I injured my back and I ended up going into work anyways because I just have to push through the pain right but how do I take care of patients when I’m trying to fight through this pain and I’m not alert and attentive to patients because of that. So I’m learning to take care of my equipment.*



Re-learning to take care of yourself after years of military service for Romeo is literally a matter of life and death for his patients. Pushing through the pain in this new environment produces a body where military habits are practiced in civilian environments. The irony does not escape Romeo, now he must show weakness to keep his job rather than concealing it. What is clear is that military members must re-learn how to navigate their health and it is a process of coming to terms with militarized habits.

*Charlie: yeah, I have PTSD, I mean I get anxiety some, I'm affected by it some, if drinking 18 bears a night in 2008 after my last deployment is affecting me...I was on medication, but I stopped taking it, I feel wonderful, everything gets better with time. I had a live-in girlfriend, there was no trust in the relationships- and that's what triggered it [the PTSD]. I killed people in stuff in the war and I used to think they weren't exactly guilty sometimes. PTSD is like it's about juxtaposing the shadow part of you and the person that you are, the loving person and I love people and yet in the war I was all shadow, I was evil, how do I reconcile in with the individual that I know lives inside my soul. That's what I'm dealing with.*

Charlie quickly explains the course by which he is improving. After 20 years of service and several deployments he has PTSD and is learning to deal with it. His story about heavy drinking is not uncommon among military members. In fact, drinking is a big part of the military culture. Oscar tells me that after being stationed in Korea he did not realize how often he was drinking and how “weird it was”. Mike also says that “*military culture sort of brings in this extended period of access to alcohol, the culture of alcohol. Not that its affected me horribly yet. But I definitely still, when I meet former members, it's always based of this culture of alcoholism. I've seen a lot of people that its impacted.*” No doubt that deployment has affected Charlie and his PTSD has certainly contributed to the juxtaposition of identities that he finds himself deciphering.

Issues of identity formation after service stem from service members prior to enlistment understanding their identity, entering military service, and the shift to a more restricted identity.

They are not allowed to build on their own identity as a person outside of the military, and this neglect can help foster dissociation and dislocation once they are to maintain a civilian identity (Collura et al. 2013:138). As the military identity attaches meaning about the world around them, dealing with the interpretation of doing and going to war can shape reintegration experiences. The expectations between civilian and military culture is not easily navigated and almost always calls for some type of support system as a means of reaffirmation, purpose, and justification of suffering (Finley 2011: 173-4). This explains why the comradery is a source of social support once out of the military. Charlie tells me he does not have constant meeting with service members, but rather a service dog has helped him immensely in reintegration.

I do not want to minimize Charlie's and other service members experience with PTSD or other physical and mental obstacles, but the reality is that not all service members have the resources, support, or find leaving the military environment incomprehensible. Oscar tells me it is important for people to know what service member go through inside and outside the military culture. We talked extensively about what he calls "non-PC" aspects of the military from misogyny to homophobia. While he knows the comments made behind closed doors are wrong, he still laughs because they are memories of the once strong relationships he had with other service members. But the tone quickly changes as he tells me about his experience with suicide.

*Oscar: Suicide its big, I saw like four suicides in my career. I don't know what to say about that... From what I've seen there is ... the military takes care of you , you never have to worry about your pay checks or where you need to stay, and you have this safety net and when something goes wrong and you have these underlying issues ,PTSD or just something, like some young lives take their lives . . . they leave home, they never really had to deal with something with a major loss. The military helps them out and life is cush and then their girlfriends leave them and they don't know what to do and they're in the middle of this base. I remember being really close with my first Sargent and he told me he remembered when you called this kids mom, and this guy is tough as nails and this is the first time I've ever seen him choke up, but he said he would never forget her scream. We both knew the guy. He was just saying you gotta look out for people.*

This is the reality. Often service members who have not been in combat situations reduce their feelings to nothing, that their service was nothing compared to others who have been in the trenches. But the reality is that facing combat or not, the military morals and values affects service members and their families. Sources of strength and the commitment to controlling life after service is a narrative that is difficult to document when military members are taught to suppress emotions.

Through the course of this research we have seen the effects that these types of values have on the bodies and minds of service members. Focusing more on the socio-cultural factors that shape the interpretations of experience, navigating the biocultural consequences of military culture are shaped by these interpretations. While there is consensus that the bodies of service members are used as tools, it is the ways these “tools” are treated that really impacts health and wellness. Unequivocally making evident the military mentality and embodiment of denial of feelings, emotion, and self produces injuries and illnesses that carry on throughout and after service. Essentially, concealing mental and physical health issues facilitates pain and suffering, of which service members endure for a lifetime if they can accomplish resilience and support.

Mike tells me the following: *“Literally the platoon that we were in like half of those people are dead from that platoon from the 90s, and a quarter of them aren’t in good shape, either medical, physical or mental.”* Another participant yells in my direction later that day about how people need to recognize that military member are not bad people, that they have higher moral character despite the atrocities they have committed. I am overcome with emotions and left depressed after the two interviews. I realize that I am both out of touch with the way the military operates and out of touch to the experience of others. No amount of reading or interviews will help be understand what they have gone through and I cannot do them justice. Even so, I am

reminded of the last question I ask the participants through the interview process. “What do civilians need to know, what can we do to do you better?”

## **7 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this work I have looked extensively at the military industrial complex as an institution whose influence has affected the bodies and minds of the people who work in its system. I have argued that as service members adopt the identity, behavior, and values associated with the military environment a shift in perspectives and realities take place. This shift occurs through deconstructing the civilian cultural framework and remolding the mind and body to fit values that are essential to the military system. Connections to the comradery, training, and experience, military service members embody the military culture through bodily and psychological means. Additionally, these experiences with the military directly impact the ways service members navigate and understand illness, health, healing, and cultural importance and utilization of the military health/wellness model through the values and morals of the military institution. Being a part of and navigating the military institution is then a transformative process of the mind and body.

To better understand those factors that have influenced the health and wellbeing of service members I have chosen to approach this research through the form of narratives that detail the personal stories of the participants in their own words. This research does not indicate that service members cannot function outside of the military or that once inoculated, they are no longer “themselves” but a product of the institution. Rather, it is that their training and involvement in the military is not without embodiment that affects them and their health. I have not discussed and asked why these health models of the military exist. Instead, I have contextualized its affective properties and what the continuation of prioritizing war will continue

to do to service members if it persists (Gardiner 2013, 78). Issues with reintegration (and really reacculturation), social awareness, depression and anxiety, and inability to express their experiences have lasting consequences which effects behavioral and social dynamics, and constrains their health and wellness (Collura et al. 2012;133).

Looking on to the future, the application of this type of research will recognize the military service member as whole and not just isolated aspects of the person. Improving research in this domain that has largely centered on psychological research and interventions will not ignore these areas of study but add other possible forms of affirmation for military members. Showing the often devastating and lifelong impacts of military service for the millions of veterans today, people currently serving, and those who will serve alternatively exposes civilian populations to the realities of military culture, life, and profession.

While civilians continue to remain out of touch with the military world, the values held by the military and civilian culture have developed the normalization of these and other behaviors (Lee 2016,55). How these cultural systems of meanings are expressed in individuals suggests that the social and political consequences of the military industrial complex create the normalization of cultural behaviors and a network of choices. Military members emotionally working to meld with civilian populations is not only arduous and labor intensive but also anchors the embodied life experiences that are centered on its disorienting linkage of doing war (Hochschild 2003;95-6; Wool 2015;4). Culture with its capacity for shaping the emotional resonance of events, seems to play a central role in making the determination of what is traumatic be that reintegration, combat events, or MST; a range of possibilities exists (Finley 2011:50). Crafting the body for and encountering war is difficult too, but perhaps the hardest part is coming home- “leaving war might not mean finding peace” (Finley 2011:50). Participants in

this study suggested that for civilians to meet the needs of service members, or how I phrased it “do you better,” that we simply need to recognize what is going on.

**Romeo:** *Everyone experiences their service differently. I know I lucked out. I have friends who are legless, alcoholics, they died, or they were supported [as in there is a range of support systems or a lack thereof]. Every experience is individualized, I know people are compelled to thank us for our service, but things are difference when we're not in service. Don't thank me for shit that doesn't matter anymore.*

Participants had expressed that the act of thanking them for their service was either unwanted or unnecessary. What is evident in Romeo's and others' sentiment is that while saying thank you implies a level of gratitude; the truth is that as civilians, this action does not actively recognize the realities of doing war and has morphed into a platitude. In addition, commending military members for their service once they are discharged ignores what they may be going through in the aftermath of their service. It begs the questions in response to Romeos, “*Don't thank me for shit that doesn't matter anymore*”; then what matters now?

**Charlie:** *You don't have to thank me I enjoyed my job very much. In fact, I don't know what people think about me and what I did in the military, who knows, I'm sure you'll get a response – I never really asked about it. What can you do better? For me, I guess recognize it better. It's also better than Vietnam, were certainly not getting treated like that. When people realize what we do, and there are atrocities and soldiers have done horrible things, but by and by in large were all a good military, were a moral service were not pervasive, recognizing that for the civilian population. I used to tell my soldiers that we are our own person, and there are orders that we might not want to listen too.*

Americans' understanding of soldiers' wrongdoings through the course of the years following Vietnam have certainly changed. Although individual soldiers play a direct role in forms of violence it is important to also consider that consequently soldiers answer to the larger military industrial complex. Charlie and others recognize this implying that individual soldiers have the agentive capacities to make choices, but that all in all they are still recognized as a group who kills and is killed. Civilians largely disregard who it is that service members answer to. Recognizing that soldiers are more than the prescriptive set of actions they have long stood

for is the first step in dismantling the idea that life during and after war is underpinned by its obligations and dependencies to the military (Wool 2014:1).

Furthermore, navigating the complexities of military service is often overshadowed by the push for “normalcy” and a theoretical shift to rebuilding life to its former self (the self that was present prior to military service) (Wool 2015: 191). Essentially, the rhetoric around service members is that as a society we must work to “fix” the service member once they return from military service. Normalizing this dialogue does not solve the problems involved in reintegration, physical, and mental health problems. There are still systemic and societal problems that alienate the service member. This is not to say that various methods used to help service members are ineffective but instead civilians are largely ill equipped with the knowledge to support service members.

While a thank you may seem impactful and a small effective intervention, advocating for military reform and veteran services reform may be just as impactful. Comprehending exactly what we are saying thank you for by working to recognize military members, the environments they work in, and adopting critical perspectives towards the institution they work will accommodate better communication and acclimation. In addition to the recommendations of the service members who participated in this ethnography, I would also like to put forth my own recommendations. These recommendations are aimed at the military industrial complex. Together these recommendations will present strong guidelines to challenge the military industrial complex to hold responsibility and for the public to become more critical.

- 1- **Continue to support research on the effects of military service.** Rather than centering focus on amending problems that occur from service (occupational hazards), work to reflect inward and focus efforts to destigmatize, reevaluate the

effects of certain behaviors, and understand the impact this may have on the health and wellbeing of soldiers through their life course.

- 2- **Continue to research and provide sustainable support systems for soldiers before, during, and after service.** Providing the resources institutionally that help maintain sources of support in and out of service are beneficial for soldiers. These efforts may lessen the effects of mental health problems, strengthen coping strategies, and reinforce purpose in life that many soldiers feel they lose after service.

Maintaining, encouraging, and inviting systems of support for soldiers is and should be a responsibility of the military industrial complex. Aside from VA related support systems, other types of resources (private and public) should be plentiful and readily available for service members to access and select from.

- 3- **Invite the public to get involved with education and outreach.** Introducing public entities, such as those outside of the military or VA setting can help lead to healthy and productive reintegration environments of soldiers. With the help of the public and their involvement, understanding what resources service members need may leverage necessary change in resources unaware to the military industrial complex. Inviting the public to be involved in education and outreach assists in destigmatizing efforts. This also provides an opportunity to present soldiers as not damaged beings, but rather beings with ability to recover in different ways than what the public is used to.

Through demanding policy, legislation, institutional reforms, and further research on familial and other form of support systems, the standardization of medicalization as the only form of help service members have may begin to broaden. Civilian engagement in these efforts



present a case that the military with its purpose of existing to fight and win wars on behalf of the nation, can still exist without hosting the side effects of service (Lee 2016: 56).

In the aftermath of this research there are still a series of questions and concepts that occurred to me in the finalization of this project. In the future this research could be the starting point for more in depth studies on resilience and its place in the military institution and military medical services. It would be relevant to also highlight liminality at greater length because it is associated with a moment of in-betweenness that many persons in this study found themselves in. The multiplicity of cultural arrangements reflects attribute of liminality, an aspect of the study I did not discuss at length. As soldiers continue to occupy spaces that are neither civilian nor soldier to them, it reveals how deep the military identity goes. In many ways, you never really leave the identity of soldier.

Additionally, other opportunities to explore the more nuanced dimensions of the study involve the crossing between biocultural and sociocultural approaches to military research. Socio-cultural approaches have dominated this project but also has led me to question how the ongoing shift to the super soldier (the soldier that never eat, sleeps, goes to the bathroom) is imprinting itself in the body and mind. Without a doubt the turn to a more physically and what may appear to be mentally resilient soldier will have impact on human biology. The extent to which these changes may be damaging, effective, or ineffective to the military will differ in definition to the individual whose body becomes to super soldier.

There is still plentiful research that needs to be done to further understand the effects of military service. While there is not a way to undo trauma, the efforts to minimize its effects are crucial to the health and wellbeing of its survivors and should be and continues to be worked on. My question here then is as we continue to work to curve the effects of service related problems

when do we begin to question the military culture as whole? Are efforts to put the responsibility in the hands of the military industrial complex futile? No matter the answer, I find hope for change in the service members for whom I spoke with over the course of these months and the thousands of service members like them.

Formulating a study that tackles and centers itself on subjective experience is demonstrative of how a complex system manifests itself in a person through making meaning of one's personhood. Making meaning from what is entailed in being a military member is a larger component that is overlooked. Identity that is shaped and reshaped by lived experience and interpreting this discourse offers meaningful conversations and empowerment of the diminishing power often felt by military members silenced by the institution and the greater public sphere. Through the process of formulating this project, I have seen that in finding an identity misshaped by the institution, the act of finding yourself through the twisted vines has proven that these stories are ones of resilience.

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## APPENDICES

### 7.1 Participant Information:

#### **Charlie**

Age: Late 40s – Early 50s  
Self Identifies: Male  
Race/Ethnicity: N/A  
Branch Served In: Navy, Army  
Marital Status: Single  
Occupation: Student, N/A

#### **India**

Age: Late 20's – Early 30s  
Self Identifies: Female  
Race/Ethnicity: White  
Branch Served In: Army  
Marital Status: Divorced/Single  
Occupation: Student/ N/A

#### **Juliette**

Age: Late 20s – Early 30s  
Self Identifies: Female  
Race/Ethnicity: White  
Branch Served In: Navy  
Marital Status: Single  
Occupation: Student, N/A

#### **Lima**

Age: Late 30s – Early 40s  
Self Identifies: Female  
Race/Ethnicity: N/A  
Branch Served In: Army  
Marital Status: Divorced  
Occupation: N/A

#### **Mike**

Age: Late 40s – Early 50s  
Self Identifies: Male  
Race/Ethnicity: White  
Branch Served In: Navy  
Marital Status: Single  
Occupation: N/A

#### **Oscar**

Age: Late 20's – Early 30s  
Self Identifies: Male  
Race/Ethnicity: N/A  
Branch Served In: Airforce  
Marital Status: Divorced/Re-Married  
Occupation: Student, N/A



**Romeo**

Age: Late 20s – Early 30s

Self Identifies: Male

Race/Ethnicity: N/A

Branch Served In: Army

Marital Status: Divorced

Occupation: Nurse