Military Transition, Identity and Health

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Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
5 March 2018
Purpose of the Presentation

• Provide an overview of the Military Transition Theory.

• Provide examples that support the Military Transition Theory.

• Describe the importance of military identity during transition.

• Provide recent findings showing how identity relates to health.
Outline

• Military Transition Theory
• Constructs of Military Transition Theory
• The Military Culture
• Military Transitions
• Key Health and Wellbeing Outcomes
• Types of Military Transitions
• A Successful Military Transition
• Empirical Support for the Military Transition Theory
• Military Identity
• Military Identity and Health
• Summary and Conclusions
• Point of Contact
Importance of Theory

A useful theory does several important things:

- Identifies the important constructs (i.e., things) we should be paying attention to
- Makes predictions about the relationships of those constructs
- Identifies areas or points in which interventions may be useful
Flaws in National Comparisons

Rates of PTSD: US, UK, Canada

Crude Comparison Rates of PTSD: Telic “Teeth Arms” vs. Combat Infantry OIF

Possible Explanations

Wessely Explanation
- US service members are exaggerating their symptoms
- UK service members are better trained and/or have better leaders
- British character is superior to that of the US

Castro Hypothesis
- US service members deploy longer than UK service members
- US service members have higher combat experiences
- US service members are younger than UK service members
Comparison of Rates of PTSD: US, UK

Properly Adjusted Comparisons Showed No Differences in PTSD Rates, and Higher UK Rates for Alcohol and Aggression

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PTSD</th>
<th>Alcohol</th>
<th>Aggression</th>
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<td>3.9</td>
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<td>3.6</td>
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**Source:** Sudin, Herrell, Hoge, Fear, Adler, Greenberg, Riviere, Thomas, Wessely & Bliese, Brit J Psychiatry, 2014
Good theory transcends culture, eras and national militaries.
Military Transition Theory states that the transition of entering the military, the transitions during military service and the transition of leaving the military creates opportunities for growth and susceptibilities to negative outcomes.
Constructs of Military Transition Theory

- Military culture and experiences
- Transitions
- Health and well-being
Key Characteristics of the Military Culture

- Unique Mission of the military is to fight and win our Nation’s wars, involving exposure to extreme traumas
- Value-based organization
- Collective Socialism – full employment, housing, medical, dental, commissary, etc. all provided to service members
- Hierarchical – chain of command, subordination
- Unique formal and informal rules and norms
- Team work, cohesion, leadership
- Unique and nuanced language
Immigration as a Metaphor

- Employment
- Housing
- Health care
- School/Education
- Sense of belonging
- Legal issues
- Financial issues
- Community connection
- Sense of purpose
Disruption Points and Opportunities for Growth

Military Transition Theory asserts that transitions are inherently stressful for a variety of reasons:
• Produce changes in relationships
• Alterations in work context
• Changes in social physical support networks
• Challenge personal and social identity

Important to appreciate that transitions can be either positive or negative.
Types of Military Transitions

- Joining the military – Basic Training ("Boot Camp")
- First duty station
- Temporary duties for training
- Field exercises / sea duty
- Deployments: combat, peacekeeping, humanitarian missions, etc.
- Frequent duty relocations – every 2-3 years
- Leaving the military
Positive Aspects of Military Service

- Full employment, good pay and benefits, retirement
- Education, new job skills
- Health and dental care
- Safe environment to raise a family
- Strong organizational values
- Meaningful, real world mission
- Team-focused
- Opportunities for self development, leadership, physical fitness, self-confidence
- Serve country, continue family tradition, patriotism
- Travel, experience new cultures
Key Health and Wellbeing Outcomes

- Employment
- Health (physical and psychological)
- Housing
- Strong relationships with family, friends, and community
- Finances, legal
- General wellbeing and contentment
A successful military transition includes a meaningful, well-paying job, strong relationships with family, friends and community and a sense of wellbeing and contentment.
Support for Military Transition Theory
Military Transition Theory postulates that returning home from combat and deployments can make reintegration difficult, which can be magnified by the trauma and stressors of the deployment.
Military Transition Theory postulates new recruits to the military to be more vulnerable to sexual attacks due to their lack of a strong social network.
Female and Male with Prior History of “Unwanted Sexual Contact” (Sexual Assault) Before Entering the Military

3 - 5 X more likely to be sexual assault victims.
Percent of male and female pre-9/11 and post-9/11 veterans who were sexually harassed or assaulted during military service.
Empirical Findings

• Approximately 85% of sexual assaults among female service members occur within the first two years of military service.

• The trauma of sexual assaults that occurred while the service member was in the military interferes with a successful transition back to civilian life.
Examples of Hypotheses Derived from Military Transition Theory

Military Transition Theory postulates that service members are at most risk of dying by suicide when they join the military, when the return from deployment and when they leave the military.
Veterans have significant psychological health issues, including PTSD and suicidal ideation.
Empirical Findings

• 25% of all suicides in the military occur during the first two years of active service.

• One half of all suicides in the Army occur within 6 months of returning home from a deployment.

• The highest rates of suicide among military veterans occurs within two years of leaving the military.
Military Transition Theory

MILITARY TRANSITION THEORY

Approaching the Military Transition
Managing the Transition
Assessing the Transition

Military/Cultural Factors
Nature of the Transition
Personal Characteristics

Military Transition Management

Individual Factors
Social Support

Transition Trajectories

Community/Civilian Transition Support

TRANSITION OUTCOME INDICATORS

Work
Family
Health
General Wellbeing
Community
Military Transition Theory asserts that transitions are inherently stressful for a variety of reasons:

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- Challenge personal and social identity
Military Identity

• Fostered and developed within most militaries around the world.

• Increasingly recognized as an important contributor to wellbeing.

• Especially important for when one moves from one culture to another.
Dimensions of Military Identity

• Military identity is multidimensional

• Seven dimensions of military identity
  - Exploration
  - Commitment
  - Public
  - Private
  - Centrality
  - Family
  - Connected
Identity Exploration

Sample Items:

“I have spent time trying to find out more about the military.”

“I have often done things that will help me understand my military service better.”
Identity Commitment

Sample Items:

“I have a strong sense of belonging to the military.”

“I feel a strong attachment towards the military.”
Public Regard for the Military

Sample Items:

“Overall, veterans are highly thought of.”

“Society views veterans as an asset.”
Private Regard for the Military

Sample Items:

“I believe that I have many strengths due to my military service.”

“I often regret my military service.”
Military Centrality

Sample Items:

“In general, being a veteran is an important part of my self-image.”

“Being a veteran is not a major factor in my social relationships.”
Military as Family

Sample Items:

“I wish I could go back into the military.”

“By leaving the military I lost a family.”
Military Connection

Sample Items:

“During my time within the military I always felt like an outsider.”

“Throughout my time in the military I resisted believing in military rituals and norms.”
Military Identity and Years Served

- Public
- Private
- Family
- Connected

Commitment
Centrality

Years Served

(+)

(+)

(+)

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University of Southern California
Military Identity and Number of Deployments

Commitment

(+)

Family

(+)

Number of Deployments
Military Identity and PTSD

Exploration → (+) → PTSD

Public → (-) → PTSD

Private → (-) → PTSD

Connected → (-) → PTSD
Military Identity and Depression & Suicide

- Exploration
  - Family
- Public
- Private
- Connected

(+)

Depression

(-)

Suicide
Military Identity and Somatic Symptoms

Exploration
Commitment
Centrality
Family

Somatic Symptoms

Public
Private
Connected

(+)
(-)
Military Identity and Difficulty Adjustment

- Exploration
- Commitment
- Centrality
- Family

Difficulty Adjustment

- Public
- Private

(+) and (-) indicate relationships between the elements.
Military Identity and Time to Figure Out

- Exploration
- Commitment
- Centrality
- Family

Time to Figure Out

Public

(+)  

(-)
Military Identity and Life Satisfaction

- Public Commitment
- Private
- Exploration
- Family
- Connected

Life Satisfaction

(+)

(-)
Transition and Interventions

- Key transitions are optimal times for interventions.
- Interventions should be evidence-based.
- A transition approach to intervention moves us away from a “one size fits all.”
- Transition theory recognizes that not everyone is equally vulnerable all of the time.
Summary and Conclusions

• Military Transition, Health and Well-being:
  o Recognize the military as a unique culture.
  o Changing cultures can be challenging and rewarding.
  o Challenges in the military to civilian transition are related the health and wellbeing.

• Military Transition Theory provides a useful model for understanding the health and wellbeing of service members.
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