
11-10-2016

U.S. Military Service Members' Reintegration, Culture, and Spiritual Development

Masako Suzuki

Regis University, msuzuki@regis.edu

Atsuko Kawakami

Tarleton State University, kawakami@tarleton.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr>



Part of the [Quantitative, Qualitative, Comparative, and Historical Methodologies Commons](#)

Recommended APA Citation

Suzuki, M., & Kawakami, A. (2016). U.S. Military Service Members' Reintegration, Culture, and Spiritual Development. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(11), 2059-2075. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2016.2294>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the The Qualitative Report at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Qualitative Report by an authorized administrator of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.



Qualitative Research Graduate Certificate
Indulge in Culture
Exclusively Online • 18 Credits
LEARN MORE

NSU
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY

NOVA SOUTHEASTERN

U.S. Military Service Members' Reintegration, Culture, and Spiritual Development

Abstract

This qualitative study aims to find common themes that may suggest portrayals of former service members' psychological development and their reintegration. We have found their cognitive dissonance from experiencing two very different cultures: the highly structured collective culture of military life and the individualistic culture of civilian life. Former service members tend to develop and maintain the strong ideology of "service to others" in civilian life as their goal or purpose of life. It became clear to us how they have reached to this ideology when we used our ethnic backgrounds and understandings as Japanese researchers who came from a society where collective well-being is highly valued. We came to the conclusion that the macroscopic as well as spiritual views would be beneficial to incorporate when counselors, support organizations, or health care providers are assisting former service members' transition into civilian life.

Keywords

Reintegration in Civilian Life, Psychological Development, Collectivistic Culture, Service to Others

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

U.S. Military Service Members' Reintegration, Culture, and Spiritual Development

Masako Suzuki

Regis University, Denver, Colorado, USA

Atsuko Kawakami

Tarleton State University, Stephenville, Texas, USA

This qualitative study aims to find common themes that may suggest portrayals of former service members' psychological development and their reintegration. We have found their cognitive dissonance from experiencing two very different cultures: the highly structured collective culture of military life and the individualistic culture of civilian life. Former service members tend to develop and maintain the strong ideology of "service to others" in civilian life as their goal or purpose of life. It became clear to us how they have reached to this ideology when we used our ethnic backgrounds and understandings as Japanese researchers who came from a society where collective well-being is highly valued. We came to the conclusion that the macroscopic as well as spiritual views would be beneficial to incorporate when counselors, support organizations, or health care providers are assisting former service members' transition into civilian life. Keywords: Reintegration in Civilian Life, Psychological Development, Collectivistic Culture, Service to Others

Although military culture and the workplace are areas of interest for many researchers in various fields of study, few publications specifically focused on military culture are actually available (Redmond et al., 2015). Service members experience enormous cultural transitions at the time they enter the military and then again when they return to civilian life. Since service members have to be conscious of group norms and thinking, it seems difficult to pursue personal freedom and think for themselves in the military. Compared to the past when the symptoms of service members were underestimated and referred to as "shell shock, nostalgia, or combat fatigue" (Comer, 2010, p. 150) in the eras of World War II and the Vietnam War, a great concern for the needs of and care for veterans has risen significantly. Combat related symptoms, such as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, are widely recognized now. Nevertheless, society tends to consider this phenomenon as an individual struggle and a macroscopic understanding of service members' readjustment to civilian life is not adequately addressed. This study hopes to address a gap in the body of knowledge on reintegration from the military with the macro level focus.

When service members reintegrate into a civilian culture, it is not hard to imagine that they feel bewildered and misunderstood by civilians who have no substantial experience of the military. The feeling of the gap in performance of presumed norms and roles between civilian life and military life can be manifested in psychological symptoms. The gap can be felt within one's self or from treatment of civilians. As a part of the reintegration process, the military offers its service members a debriefing session after their service in order to reduce and readjust psychological injuries impacted by combat experiences. General debriefing sessions, however, are brief ranging from two to several hours in one day, according to our study participants' statements. The service members express that their adjustment period is not adequately secured (Redmond et al., 2015). Numerous previous studies also address substantial difficulties of reintegration experienced by military members and their families. For example, Palmer (2008)

discusses the risk factors for service members and their family when reintegrating into the society include frequent relocation, deployment, exposures to combats, and PTSD. King, King, Vogt, Knight, and Samper (2006) see that it is crucial to assess the psychological risk and resilience factor for service members and their families. Likewise, Joellenbeck, Russell, and Guze (1999) recognize the importance of medical surveillance for service members and their families. Peebles-Kleiger and Kleiger (1994) explained the stress imposed on service members and their families by the unexpected, disruptive, and hazardous duty led into service members' anticipation trauma and their families' trauma. Doyle and Peterson (2005) recognize successful re-entry and reintegration within the family and the community are the key for service members' life on a continuum of readiness for deployment; therefore, they suggest the societal level of support such as the early planning for the family and community integration, easy access to behavioral health professionals, and education of families on available resources.

In line with the themes of the societal level of support, we would like to consider what kinds of perspectives are needed to develop the support system and to minimize the struggles when service members reenter civilian life.

This qualitative study aims to find common themes of psychological development and their integration among service members through their reintegration. There is a need for a macroscopic view to understand service members' readjustment to civilian life. This study should benefit not only former service members to ease their adjustment but also counselors and support groups that tend to focus on microscopic views such as psychoanalysis and psychotherapy approaches. This study also aims to suggest improvement of existing programs in debriefing and counseling.

We have found service members' cognitive dissonance stems from experiencing two very different cultures: the highly structured collective culture of military life and the individualistic culture of civilian life. Meanwhile, former service members have developed and maintained the strong ideology of "service to others" in civilian life as their goal or purpose of life. It became clearer to us how they have reached this ideology when we used our ethnic backgrounds and understandings as Japanese researchers who came from a society where collective well-being is highly valued. Considering those findings and the processes of our analysis, we came to the conclusion that the macroscopic as well as spiritual views would be beneficial to incorporate when counselors, support organizations, or health care providers are assisting former service members' transition into civilian life. Before discussing these topics, acculturation of the military in comparison to civilian life is briefly explored, followed by a description of the data and methods we employed, to induce our findings. Finally, the conclusion and suggestions for future direction of study are also considered.

Acculturation

When individuals join the military, they experience a new culture. Military service members learn a new set of values, attitudes, and behavior in a strict environment that is different from what they had acquired in civilian life. This experience makes an enormous impact on young enlisted service members in terms of self-identity. In this section, essential values and culture of the military will be discussed including the negative effect of group dynamic.

Core Values

It is important to note that not all service members are assigned a combat mission and, in fact, humanitarian services—supplying necessities, medical assistance, and disaster relief—also are important parts of their service (U.S. Army, n.d.). However, the military has

traditionally been shaped by men and regarded masculine characteristics as ideals. So, when individuals enter the military, regardless of gender, they are trained to become highly masculine. These masculine features include physical strength, toughness, resilience, aggression, emotional inhibition, and heterosexuality (Keats, 2010). The institution promotes seven core values as guiding principles: loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (U.S. Army, n.d.). Similarly, the U.S. Navy's core values include honor, courage, and commitment. The official website of the U.S. Navy (n.d.) states, "We will be mindful of the privilege to serve our fellow Americans."

The concept of "privilege to serve" is noble, but it is not unique to the U.S. Navy's value. For example, the Japanese culture attaches importance to the practice of *omotenashi*. The direct translation of *omotenashi* is hospitality; however, it has a deeper meaning than the English literal translation. *Omotenashi* is the selfless desire and humbleness to take care of others (Joraku, 2012; Oshima, 2012). Traditionally, Japanese culture places high values on collectivistic behaviors and well-being. Likewise, the military culture upholds the belief that service members can develop to choose morally right conduct in the face of imminent danger. This will lead into the increased chances of collective survival.

Norms and Social Roles

With respect to its core values, the military has cultural norms that powerfully control its members' behavior and also create cohesiveness within the group. From a perspective of social psychology, it is relatively hard for the military to maintain cohesion because its members are not naturally formed with similarities, such as shared interests and backgrounds, to keep them together. Instead, the institution serves as a group in ways that command a new set of rules (e.g., uniforms, salute, marching, and curfew) to perform together (Marques, Abrams, & Serodio, 2001; Schachter, 1951). Thus, the military is a performance-oriented organization, and it significantly influences one's development of group identity.

Another important feature of the military is its highly structured bureaucracy with distinct ranks and division of labor. It helps identify the person in charge—to whom one is supposed to look for orders, guidance, and leadership. This relationship is called the chain of command, and the ranks bind all members together as a team (U.S. Army, n.d.). In other words, the military has a number of well-defined social roles that help to delineate certain positions and expectations. In theory, when people clearly see their roles, they tend to be satisfied and perform well. However, sometimes people become so deeply involved with a role that their identities and personality become diffused (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973; Zimbardo, 2007).

Zimbardo (2007) analyzed that the setting of the situation, not personality traits, is a causal factor that provokes bad behavior such as humiliating a prisoner of war. The military guards are under tremendous stress, have little supervision, and may be even asked to set their own rules for interrogation of the prisoners. Therefore, it is easy for them to dehumanize the prisoners and they cross the line of humanity. This analysis clearly suggests that people may find difficulty in resisting the social influences in an extreme situation, and the powerful influence upon their personal identities that are interwoven into the characteristics of the culture. For former service members who experienced such conditions, it is not difficult to imagine that they feel disconcerted and misunderstood by civilians who have not experienced collectivistic military life.

As a Japanese psychotherapist and a Japanese sociologist who have lived in the collectivistic culture of Japan and individualistic culture of the United States, we are interested in the views of service members who experienced the collectivistic military life in the very individualistic country. In order to better understand former military members' transition to

civilian life, the following questions must be considered: What made them feel comfortable or uncomfortable when transitioning into civilian life? How did the former service members overcome their confusion and achieve equilibrium? In order to better assist their smooth reentry of civilian life, what approach should counselors, support organizations, or health care providers take?

Methods and Data

Selecting Qualitative Inquiry

Although it is imperative to acknowledge, our emphasis is not essentially to study the recovery processes of former service members with mental disorders (e.g., PTSD) when they returned to civilian life. Since numerous scholars have already studied PTSD in the past (e.g., Beckham et al., 1997; Kubany, Gino, Denny, & Torigoe, 1994; Nezu & Carnevale, 1987), this paper gave special emphasis to the general experiences of everyday life among former service members that they found noteworthy, different, and challenging. Our focus was not on psychopathology, and thus we did not intend to diagnose a particular symptom from their description of their state of mind. Instead, our focus was to uncover the common themes that former service members found from their experience of acculturation and reintegration between military and civilian lives. Miles and Huberman (1994) describe that the rich and holistic qualitative data gives the potential of revealing complexity of the study subject in a real context. As such, we found an inductive approach facilitates the best approach for our study to uncover the common themes of former service members' acculturation and reintegration to their everyday life and civilian experiences in the complex society.

Grounded theory allows researchers to deliver a conceptual overview of the phenomenon while providing opportunities for participants to articulate their thoughts to reflect on the issues, which will lead into acquiring new insights (Glaser, 1998). This would be ideal as we hope to suggest improvement of existing programs in debriefing and counseling with the macroscopic approach in relation to former service members' psychological development.

Institutional Review Board

In line with the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) condition, all study participants signed a consent form prior to answering any questions. The participants received a copy of the consent form along with information about a variety of support organizations to inform them that help is available just in case they started to feel distressed or show any sign of agony or anxiety during and after the interview and survey. Since our focus is the general experiences of reintegration in everyday life among service members, we purposefully avoided collecting data from former service members with severe mental disorders. Although we indicated that our plan was to collect data from former service members who are mentally stable and physically healthy, the IRB restricted the second author to contact the participants since she is not trained in counseling psychology. Therefore, the data was collected solely by the first author who has such training and was able to intervene with the available services and necessary information when the informants' well-being was at risk.

Under the IRB's condition, the first author asked how the participants were feeling at the conclusion of each interview to ensure that the interview questions did not cause discomfort or reopen an old emotional wound. Some participant preferred the written questionnaire instead of face-to-face interview. In that case, the questionnaire asked the same question about how the respondent was feeling at the end. The participants were instructed to contact the

researchers if they feel any emotional distress. Providentially, no serious mood changes, anxiety, or discomfort were reported during or after the interviews.

Collecting Data: Identifying and Recruiting Participants

Since the attention has been given to the former service members' mental and physical issues and their recovery in the past, this study focused on former service members who were given less attention: well-adjusted individuals. They were the carefully chosen individuals who were seemingly well adjusted to civilian life after experiencing military life. We defined "well adjusted" individuals as those who were not currently having any substance abuse and addiction problems, those who were independently maintaining their financial means to support their life such as earning incomes, managing their savings and investment, or operating their own businesses, and those who had a stable residence. They may or may not have had experiences of addiction, financial problems, or homelessness in the past, but at the time of their interviews, none of them had such issues. This condition was important to this study since one of our research themes was acculturation and reintegration between military and civilian life from the perspective of psychological development.

The snowball sampling method was chosen by starting with the former service members who were personal acquaintances of the authors. After the first few interviews, we asked the informants to refer potential participants who were seemingly well-adjusted in their civilian life. Based on the first author's occupational training and knowledge as a psychoanalysis counselor, she assessed potential participants' current mental conditions to make sure that those referrals were also well-adjusted before starting interviews or sending a questioner form. The snowball sampling continued until no more new themes and concepts were brought up by the participants. At the end of each interview, the first author made sure that no participants were distressed when she concluded each interview or received the completed questionnaires. All participants displayed a well-adjusted civilian lifestyle and showed no or minimal issues about sharing their experiences in military.

The first author and the second author constructed 19 survey questions together. We used open-ended, semi-structured questions for this qualitative study. The detailed information about the questions is listed in the appendix. Study participants selected either a face-to-face interview or a written form survey. The interview and surveys questions are listed in the appendix. We asked about the participants' experiences such as the most memorable moments they could recall when they were reentering civilian life, what they like/dislike about civilian/military life, or whether they have utilized any services or organizations to support their re-adjustment to civilian life. Along with those questions, we collected demographic information of study participants such as their gender, current occupation, age, and years of military. However, we removed names of all informants and other identifiable information such as names of cities and states and replaced with pseudonyms in order to ensure their privacy and confidentiality.

We encouraged study participants to express their feelings and opinions freely. All questions were semi-structured; however, when participants were passionate about answering certain questions and expanding the topics, we let the conversation take its own direction. We audiotaped all face-to-face interviews and transcribed to be stored electronically with password protected computers. The average length of interviews was about 40 minutes but the longest interview was approximately two hours. Some questionnaires were answered electronically via e-mail, and some questionnaires were hand-written on paper. After receiving the questionnaires, hand-written answers were typed to be stored electronically.

Composite Descriptions of Study Sample

A total of 11 in-depth interviews were collected with personal narratives of civilian life reentry from April 2014 to February 2015 for this survey. There were nine males and two females who were veterans, former service members, retired service members, and active reserve members who served in the Navy, Air Force, Army, and National Guard. As for terms, some participants are discharged, some are retired, and some are still active reserve members; however, they are all referred to as former service members in this paper for the fact that they have experienced returning to civilian life after their deployment at least once in the past. For example, one participant joined the military after the 9/11 attacks and was deployed in Iraq for 18 month of combat mission. He has not completely left the military yet because he became a reservist in National Guard. However, he spends most of his time as a civilian with the exception of his required training hours. He strongly expressed his interest in this study since his current civilian work pertains to support former military members' smooth transition. He also expressed his own experiences of having anxiety, disorientation, and difficulty to return to his civilian work and life in general when he came back from the combat mission. For the fact he experienced the drastic transition from the extended period of combat in Iraq to the fulltime civilian work and life in the United States, we consider his stories and experiences resonate with this study's main themes. Therefore, we included his interview as valuable data.

The respondents were living in the southern and southwestern regions of the United States with an age range of 22-67 years. The mean age of the study participants was 42 years old. The mean average years of service was eight years with the longest service of 23 years and the shortest service of two years. Table 1 describes the distribution of military branches the participants served in.

Branches	Number of Persons
Army	7
Air Force	2
Navy	2
Marine	0
Coast Guard	0
National Guard	1
Total *	12

*The total number of the service members in this table exceeds 11 because one individual served in one of the branches and still serving in National Guard part time.

Table 2 and 3 are the summaries of the total years in their service and the decades they served.

Total Years of Service	Number of Persons
0-2 years	2
3-4 years	5
5-8 years	1
9-12 years	0
13-15years	1
16-20 years	0
More than 20 years	2
Total	11

Service Periods	Number of Persons
1951-1960	0
1961-1970	2
1971-1980	3
1981-1990	3
1991-2000	5
2001-2010	5
2011-current	4
Total*	22
* The total number of the service members in this table exceeds 11 because some individuals served in multiple time periods.	

All respondents were physically healthy and no one was receiving any counseling or mental health care services at the time of the interviews or surveys.

Analysis

Qualitative research methods recognize the usage of researchers' subjectivity as a valid implement for research which includes what the researcher chooses to study, which methodology to use, and how to formulate hypotheses and analyze data (Ratner, 2002). As for analyzing data and formulating hypotheses, we counted the similar expressions and phrases from different participants. By reading each transcribed response, certain themes became apparent as Van Manen (1997) describes this process as immersion. After we gathered common themes, we used the selective coding approach as we were interested in both psychological and sociological understandings in participants' transformation. One of the strength of qualitative methods is not only to make a new contribution in a certain topic or setting within different subjects or another aspect of the same focus, but also to formulate addition of theory or refinement of previous studies which encourages theoretical innovations (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006). As for our tasks to contribute for this particular study subject, we conceptualized the common values that participants developed after serving the country as their significant psychological development in relation to organizational and social norms. Former service members in peace time and war time showed different attitudes toward military life, but some aspects of their opinions are strikingly similar such as internalized values based on their military experiences. The following section will illustrate our findings followed by the analysis and discussion to suggest a new contribution in the subjects of service members' reintegration into civilian life.

Findings

From the interviews, five major themes were extracted as follows: (1) freedom of choice, (2) the contrast between the "sense of alertness" among wartime service members and "sense of boredom" among peacetime service members, (3) discipline, (4) comradery, and (5) service to others.

Freedom of Choice

Almost all participants mentioned that civilian life allows individuals to have freedoms such as choice and expression they were not able to enjoy or exercise while enlisted and that became more evident after they experienced their deployment. One participant said, "Civilian life is an opportunity to pursue your own destiny and to make your own choices. Either success

or failure is determined according to your own choices. It is challenging and exciting for those reasons.” Other participants also said, “Personal freedom. I think being in the military means that you give up your own freedom and you fight for freedom for your country, not your personal freedom;” “[In the military] you don’t have to think individually; everything is being told [to you] and you just do what you are told. So you could be brainless;” and “Just after getting off the military, I realized that I didn’t have to listen to others telling me what to do and do what I wanted.”

In exchange for freedom of behavior, thoughts, and expression in civilian life, one former member who served in Vietnam War was stunned by the gap between how veterans expected to be seen and how they were actually seen by the civilians.

The hostile and seemingly unappreciative society and disrespect for a decision I made—my first major life decision—to serve this country. And, a population and news media that demanded I change my world view to fit theirs or be called a “killer,” “pro-war,” or any other number of hateful and vindictive labels and stereotyping coming from the peace movement, which I found very hostile.

The gap can be felt within one’s self or from treatment of civilians. This informant expected to be respected at least, if not treated as a hero, but what he learned from the peace movement covered by mass media was that society’s main stream opinion was very contrary to his own belief. His feelings of betrayal may be due to the fact that he returned from deployment during a time of strong war protest in the 1960s, but much younger generation, a 22-year-old veteran who just came back to the homeland also expressed that “most people don’t appreciate what they have.” He certainly noticed that personal freedom in civilian life, but service members’ efforts to keep the freedom was underappreciated by civilians.

Alertness of Wartime Versus Boredom of Peacetime

Participants’ military experiences were quite different according to the particular time of their service. The first group was comprised of those who joined the military in peacetime such as during the Clinton administration between Gulf War and the 9/11 attack; they expressed how they dealt with “void” time as follows: “[The military was] very bland like being in a lukewarm water. Sometimes you have nothing to do and have to deal with your boredom;” “No combat stress, but useless tasks that are meant to keep you busy;” or “Your performance can be really easy. You do what you are told, and you don’t have to think add reason to it. Just perform by following the command from the authority.” One participant expressed how he was not prepared or trained well enough to be a combat medic during peacetime as he said, “It was such a different time, so I do think that 9/11 and subsequent wars did really change the structure and expectations in the military. I think it probably changed for the better.”

For those who served in wartime, their experiences were quite different from the above statements. For example, a 64-year-old former service member who experienced 12 months of combat expressed, “I felt unwelcomed by society and protesters who would not listen to my opinions and experience but insisted on their anti-war opinions as the only valid ones.” The other former service member in wartime expressed, “When you go to the military, you have a heightened state of vigilance in the whole time, and you completely focus on a mission and a job at hand, as well as your survival and the survival of your subordinates.” This service member also describes his experience of separation anxiety about his weapons to which he has developed closeness over the course of his military life:

When you are in combat, you have to carry a weapon anywhere you go, even on the base or having a meal at a dining table. ... So when you come back to the U.S., ... you sort of have unconscious separation anxiety [due to disposition of a weapon] ... it is resemblance to that you had your wallet or cellphone but it is more amplified so to speak.

Needless to say, these statements imply the service members' hypervigilance and constant attention to their surroundings became a part of their behavior and drastic shift in their mind. One participant described when he saw some garbage or a pothole in the road in Afghanistan and Iraq, he would typically swerve to miss that object and speed up on the road because it could often be the site where an improvised explosive device or a roadside bomb is placed. This kind of response became so automatic, when he came back from his combat deployment, he automatically would avoid potholes and garbage even on U.S. land. It is understandable that former service members in wartime and peacetime have very different opinions about their military life. However, whether one served in peacetime or wartime, there are a few common sentiments that were shared and highly valued among former service members such as self-discipline as described in the following section.

Discipline

When participants were asked to characterize the military, participants described self-discipline as an important element that they learned during their service regardless of the peacetime or wartime. Structure, confidence building, team building, and experience the sense of self-esteem developed as a result of the military's ability to teach and instill the importance of self-discipline, responsibility and accountability. A 39-year-old veteran said:

[In the military], they tell you every aspect of your life that is pretty much controlled by the military. However, the life control by military becomes one's "sense of internal control" as another former service member said: "I noticed that I would wake up at 5:30 a.m. every morning. That is something that I was trained in the military and that became my habit. I don't like waking up so early each morning, but I like the sense of internal control.

Acquired valuable lessons include action, discipline, leadership, structure, and respect for authority. These features became one's internal structure that holds who he/she is as he expressed "even long after I left the military, they were integrated within myself." The military tries to build individuals with a strong internal locus of control which gives them the ability to adjust to changing external events in order to be effective team players. It is the shift in cognition to accomplish their mission. However, when service members return to civilian life, the seemingly unorganized behaviors of others and surrounding environments appear too inefficient to them. "Those who never experienced the military do not understand leadership, rankings, and simple things that need to be in order." Interpersonal communications or relationships in the office seem to be unproductive work practices for some former service members rather than seeing them as a way to accomplish the mission harmoniously or getting consensus. For example, another participant described, "[Former service members] are having a hard time with the idea that getting along with the office environment may have more to do with what people call 'politics [of the office],' or 'interpersonal relationships,' than that have less to do with a mission at hand." It requires the shift in the ways of communications and cognition when former service members reenter their civilian life.

Comradery

With the awareness of disunity and unorganized behavior of civilian people that former service members observed as a result of their acquired self-discipline, they also recognized comradery that leads to a sense of security and trust through their experience of the military and that was indispensable. For example, 22-year-old participant said, “[Civilian] people don’t care about others but themselves.” Many other participants also made similar comments. For example, “There is no safety net. If you make a mistake, it’s all on you [in civilian life]. Nobody will have your back to pick you up, especially in business.,” “In civilian life, there are no common-set values that people live by. The code of conduct that is considered honorable and the concepts like honor are much more rarely adhered to the civilian people.,” “[In the military], I liked that you could travel to any base and work with other military in the same career field and it was as if you’d worked together for years. People get to know each other quickly and most are very supportive of each other.,” “...the sense of belonging, knowing the people around you have your back always.,” or “Being in comradery with my fellow shipmates was great, and I remain friends with them 20 years after my service.”)It is apparent that former service members were quite passionate talking about the sense of comradery in the military life because they tend to miss a sense of belonging and connection that they had in the military regardless of the length of service or which era they served. From each comment we listed, one can see how the military structure effectively and quickly creates the sense of comradery among service members and its result is long lasting.

Service to Others

When participants were asked about their purpose of and goals in life, participants found them in relationships with others such as “I would like to help fellow veterans—men and women—enjoy their civilian life by successfully transitioning back in to a civilian sector. ... I would also like to continue to serve my community in any way I can as an educator and as a concerned citizen.,” “It is service to others. I would say it is to give back, create the world to change. Social change, whether or not it’s with my children, my career, or to my education in service to others;,” “To serve the God of my understanding in helping others who have problems with unresolved trauma and addiction find the knowledge ... and motivation they need to live their lives to the fullest;” and “Simply put, living life everyday by waking up and reaching others.”

Types of careers that they find ideal include those of educators, police officers, and counselors. These career choices are, needless to say, primarily focused on connection and service to others. Examining the common themes former service members expressed, it became apparent that they experienced the shift in values and cognition along with tremendous life style change. After experiencing the strong sense of comradery, the idea of serving others probably resonates well with them. These data shall add valuable knowledge for counselors, support organizations, and health care providers to examine how those former service members have successfully incorporated their military experiences in civilian life.

Discussion

Cognitive Dissonance

From the perspective of identity development, the significance of regimentation, group norm, and group consciousness of the military is hard to ignore. As Zimbardo (2007) indicates, the development of one’s personal identity is influenced by the social situation and social

norms. Military culture is composed of group mentality and structure. Self-improvement, commitment, and personal responsibility are all stressed by the military. The normative ways of thinking and acting according to military culture become ingrained in the lives of service members even after having completed their service (Redmond et al., 2015). Service members are aware of individuality through unity, and they are accountable for finding their values, but they seem to find it hard to be validated whether they fit or unfit in the civilian norms. They recognize a shift in values and behaviors with which they feel significant cognitive dissonance. According to the classic study of Festinger (1962), cognitive dissonance tends to occur when one becomes aware within oneself that two or more values are significant and yet contradicting to one other.

Our participants observed and assessed that civilian people are “disorganized,” and “caring less for others but more for themselves;” it is hard for them to grasp the complexity of interpersonal relationships that are not based on performance but the ability to sense the politics or tacit agreement of civilian environment, which seems to be visible to civilians but invisible to military individuals. Their disappointment and confusion are evident in those statements. They recognize that their norms and code of conduct that worked in the military are no longer effective in pursuit of their values in civilian life.

Because this internal inconsistency is sometimes felt beyond their expectation, service members are likely to experience psychological distress involving confusion, doubt, and mistrust of the world, which may also develop to significant traumatic symptoms (e.g., PTSD). Hufford, Fritts, and Rhodes (2010) call this phenomenon “moral injury” (p. 76) or existential crisis that is prominent to service members. In recent years, more companies actively involved with support and employment opportunities for former military members. The reality is, however, that they still are insufficient for understanding and being competent about military culture (Redmond et al., 2015). For example, Redmond et al. (2015) indicate that employers may misinterpret ex-military employees’ behavior as lazy or unmotivated because military culture strongly regulates people’s performance and subordinates will wait for the leader’s direction to start and also they may not perform beyond what they were told. This may give an impression to the employer as that the employee is reluctant to do anything. With proper understanding and guidance, giving explicit instructions to ex-military employees is highly recommended (Redmond et al., 2015). In this way, it will promote mutual understanding and avoid the risk of giving discouragement and wrong impression of the civilian work environment to ex-military employees. In this regard, researchers suggest that the process of reintegration is not merely a series of tasks to be completed. Instead, these participants indicated that reintegration briefing should contain practical, useful information (Rivers, Gordon, Speraw, & Reese, 2013) that address their frustration, confusion, and uncertainty about their confidence that they may feel during their reintegration into civilian life.

Finding Values

Value can be better understood by tracing in its origin. According to Hufford et al. (2010), value came from *valere*, a Latin word for being worth and is also connected to the concept that makes something desirable. Human values are derived from rules for making proper decisions in life. Thus, morality is a set of such values, which vary from one culture to another. In the military, moral conduct is crucial to unit cohesion and to compliance with the rules of war, but they may not be appropriate in civilian life (at least from the service members’ perspectives).

Morality and values are existential concepts. May (1977) argues that freedom is a principle value of human vitality, and it is a shift from a threat of nonbeing to an affirmation of being. May conceptualizes that the threat of nonbeing is tied to one’s subconscious

awareness of meaninglessness and helplessness in his or her existence, which can be manifested in anxiety. In order to achieve those existential threats, human beings need to be aware of their responsibilities and choices for a meaningful life. According to Sartre (1965), individuals are essentially free, but this comes with a conscious act of choice and responsibility. This awareness is ultimately an avenue to get in touch with existential freedom, or in other words, with the authenticity of self. Furthermore, loving is an act and emotion that manifests caring and connecting for one's self and others (May, 1953). Loving or caring then dissipates existential isolations. From this speculation, it is quite understandable that many participants identified their primary goal is to serve for others. Military life emphasizes that service members make conscious acts of serving others and their own country, and that is considered as the military's moral conduct.

Researchers may conclude in a general understanding of why former service members place service to others is that their value because of their habitual practice of selfless act and service in the military. However, we argue that that is just surface level of truth: former service members may desire to find their own meaning of life through connecting with others to affirm the significance of their existence. They can find their existential significance through the act of serving for others. This ideology of "serving others" is deeply and strongly tied to core values in a personal level. It is no surprise that the majority of participants, regardless of their age disparities, are attracted to professions—those of educators, counselors, and law enforcement officers—to become an advocate for others and help them in their needs. One participant felt "genuine concern for others who are influenced by their past and a willingness to learn how to help them find their way." He said, "I measure my success by the way I can transcend my life [and] grow my concern for others."

Analysis of the participants' ideology from the perspectives of researchers' ethnic/cultural backgrounds. Speaking of concern for and service to others, this type of discipline has been practiced since the 1300s for achievement of subtleties and intricacies of humanity in the Japanese tea ceremony and Zen meditation (Yoshizawa, 2009; Sekida, 2005). It helps individuals achieve to be disciplined in daily life. It was also considered as the ethics of samurai warriors and their ideal mannerism (Joraku, 2012). Therefore, samurai warriors were encouraged to practice tea ceremony and zen meditation to cultivate their calmness in the combat fields to be effective combatants and selfless desire of serving others which turns to be beneficial for their collectivistic survival. This ideology of "selfless desire of serving others" seems to resonate well among any individuals who have been a part of an organization which requires combat or combat training for their collective survival.

Both samurai warriors' selfless desire to serve for their load and the former service members' strong desire of serving others can be understood as a way of finding their own meaning through connecting with others for affirming the significance of their existence. As Japanese researchers in the United States, understanding the study participants through our ethnic backgrounds gave us a new dimension to approach the themes presented by the participants as well as to apply them in practice of supporting former service members in general. It is imperative to incorporate the macroscopic view and explanation during the comprehensive debriefing programs and let all service members know that they actually experienced two very different cultures: collectivistic military culture and individualistic civilian culture that they are about to re-enter. Some individuals may not even acknowledge that they were actually living in a totally different culture or society since the military is the organization within the United States. It is important to let them know that any discomfort or difficulties are not solely caused by or deal with as an individual matter. Counselors, support organizations, or healthcare providers can encourage service members to explore one's struggles deeper and expand understanding about himself/herself by introducing different

world views based on diverse ethnic beliefs, religions, or healthcare practices that are available to service members.

Discipline and Spirituality

As such, according to Eastern ethics and mannerism, discipline is considered as a conduct of deescalating suffering (Chodron, 2008), including one's feelings of disconnect, displeasure, and dissatisfaction. Discipline and self-control are often synonyms and interchangeable in the semantic context of the English language. However, Eastern culture regards self-control as being in constraint and limiting oneself whereas discipline is, in accordance with the Buddhist tradition, to release and become mindful without preconceptions or restrictions. From this concept, it is compelling that service members tend to embrace the value of self-discipline in order to find comfort in their civilian lifestyle as one participant said: "acquired valuable lessons including action, discipline, leadership, structure, and respect for authority. These features became my internal structure that holds who I am, even long after I left the military, they were integrated within myself." Another participant who became an artist after he finished his service also expressed that he was not sure if he had been able to reach his abstract, circular, inner artistic world view in civilian life without experiencing strict disciplines and structured life in military.

Gollnick (2008) states that mid-life is often characterized by a sense of disorientation because preconception and possibilities from earlier life are re-visited and reassessed, and their existing life structures are compromised as people struggle with the dichotomous tension of destruction v. creation, and attachment v. disconnection. This awareness leads to one's reevaluation of underdeveloped aspects of their personalities. As a result, all of these self-reflective aspects contribute to new reality formation.

In regard to psychological development, spiritual maturity does not necessarily correlate with chronological age but is rather mediated by life's significant events (Goss & Madsen Gubi, 2015). One can achieve his/her spiritual maturity by departing from imitation of others and gaining the capability of reflection, creating comfort and self-justification, maintaining ethical standards, and appreciating life that is beyond one's choice and decision (Goss & Madsen Gubi, 2015). Beliefs are ideas that a person embraces as true and that are in a non-physical dimension of life. Value system is categorized in this dimension and can be understood from a perspective of spirituality.

As for holistic approach of substantial intervention for veterans' reintegration, Hufford et al. (2010) recommend that spiritual fitness should be included in debriefing programs. A spiritual fitness approach includes enhancing individuality, resiliency, optimism, mind-body self-management techniques, building relationship to one's own spirituality, and peer counseling opportunities. This should help veterans to build a tool box of resources for successful and optimal transitioning to civilian life.

Conclusion

Military service members encounter challenges and difficulties in adjustment to civilian life. This is a continuous, arduous task which involves reflexivity and uneasy feelings of self-examination in the society where the commonly held sense of direction is unclear. Finding one's own values involves differentiating oneself from others and searching for self-defining meaning, which are understood in the field of existentialism and spirituality. The difficulty of finding one's identity, values, integrity, and goals lies in disparity of cultural assumptions and norms.

Considering those aspects, the aims for this study was to grasp former service members' voices from the perspective of psychological development with the macroscopic view to suggest improvement of existing programs in debriefing and counseling. The quality of service members' experiences is rich and worthy of respect. We have argued that former service members place high value on the ideology of "service to others" not just because of their habitual practice of selfless act and service in the military but also that they affirm their meaning of their own existence through connecting with others and their significance throughout their value transformation. Utilizing macroscopic and ethno-historical views, we understood how former service members tend to embrace the value of self-discipline in order to find comfort in their civilian life in the United States where individualism is highly valued. Through the processes of our analysis, we came to the conclusion that counselors, support organizations, and healthcare providers should be mindful to incorporate the microscopic view in order to understand former service members and possibly utilizing the concept of "spiritual fitness" (Hufford et al., 2010) in debriefing programs to assist smooth reentry of civilian life. It is noteworthy that this qualitative research was conducted by researchers from Japan and utilized their ethno-historical background to further understand the American participants who had very different life experiences than the researchers. We believe adding different interpretations based on ethnic backgrounds, history, religions, or any other aspects in analysis only deepens the understanding of the study subject and enriches the suggestions for solution.

This is a preliminary qualitative study with the limited number of snowball samples. All participants were relatively well-adjusted individuals who experienced a military life at various times. Further study is needed to have a better understanding of veterans' reentry into civilian life with a wider range of mental states. Also, future direction of this study includes expanding different institutions that provide strict rules, regimentation, and group consciousness. Total institutions such as prisons may fit in this category, and interviewing former prisoners and comparing their experiences to the service members could be worth investigating.

References

- Beckham, J. C., Crawford, A. L., Feldman, M. E., Kirby, A. C., Hertzberg, M. A., Davidson, J. R. T., & Moore, S. D. (1997). Chronic posttraumatic stress disorder and chronic pain in Vietnam combat veterans. *Journal of Psychosomatic Research*, 43(4), 379-389.
- Chodron, P. (2008). *The places that scare you* [Audiobook]. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- Comer, R. J. (2010). *Abnormal psychology* (7th ed., pp. 121-158). New York, NY: Worth Publishers.
- Doyle, M. E., & Peterson, K. A. (2005). Re-entry and reintegration: Returning home after combat. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 76(4), 361-370.
- Festinger, L. (1962). *A theory of cognitive dissonance*. Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Glaser, B. G. (1998). *Doing grounded theory: Issues and discussions*. Mill Valley, CA: Sociology Press.
- Gollnick, J. (2008). Religion and spirituality in the life cycle. *Mental Health, Religion, & Culture*, 11(2), 247-249.
- Goss, P., & Madsen Gubi, P. (2015). Life-span development and spiritual needs. *Spiritual accompaniment and counseling* (pp. 95-111). Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley.
- Haney, C., Banks, C., & Zimbardo, P. (1973). Interpersonal dynamics in a simulated prison. *International Journal of Criminology and Penology*, 1, 69-97.
- Hufford, D. J., Fritts, M. J., & Rhodes, J. E. (2010). Spiritual fitness. *Military Medicine*, 175(8), 73-87.

- Joellenbeck, L. M., Russell, P. K., & Guze, S. B. (1999). *Strategies to protect the health of deployed U.S. Forces: Medical surveillance, record keeping, and risk reduction*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press. Retrieved from <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/9711.html>
- Joraku, M. (2012). Spirit of Omotenashi. *WAttention*. Retrieved from <http://www.wattention.com/archives/omotenashi-the-heart-of-japanese-hospitality/>
- Keats, P. (2010). Soldiers working internationally: Impacts of masculinity, military culture, and operational stress on cross-cultural adaptation. *Intentional Journal of Advanced Counseling, 32*, 290-303.
- King, L. A., King, D. W., Vogt, D. S., Knight, J., & Samper, R. E. (2006). Deployment risk and resilience inventory: A collection of measures for studying deployment-related experiences of military personnel and veterans. *Military Psychology, 18*(2), 89-120.
- Kubany, E. S., Gino, A., Denny, N. R., & Torigoe, R. Y. (1994). Relationship of cynical hostility and PTSD among Vietnam veterans. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 7*(1), 21-31.
- Lofland, J., Snow, D. A., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. H. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: A guide to qualitative* (4th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Marques, J., Abrams, D., & Serodio, R. (2001). Being better by being right: Subjective group dynamics and derogation of in-group deviants when generic norms are undermined. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 81*, 436-447.
- May, R. (1953). *Man's search for himself*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- May, R. (1977). *The meaning of anxiety*. New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Nezu, A. M., & Carnevale, G. J. (1987). Interpersonal problem solving and coping reactions of Vietnam veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 96*(2), 155-157.
- Oshima, C. (2012). Research on different approaches in the interpretation of hospitality across cultures. *Tsukuba Gakuin University, 7*, 31-39. Retrieved from <http://www.tsukuba-g.ac.jp/library/kiyou/2012/03OSHIMA.pdf>
- Palmer, C. (2008). A theory of risk and resilience factors in military families. *Military Psychology, 20*(3), 205-217.
- Peebles-Kleiger, M. J., & Kleiger, J. H. (1994). Re-integration stress for Desert Storm families: Wartime deployments and family trauma. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 7*(2), 173-193.
- Ratner, C. (2002). Subjectivity and objectivity in qualitative methodology. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 3*(3), 16. Retrieved from <http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/829/1800>
- Redmond, S. A., Wilcox, S. L., Campbell, S., Kim, A., Finney, K., Barr, K., & Hassan, A. M. (2015). A brief introduction to the military workplace culture. *Work, 50*, 9-20.
- Rivers, F. M., Gordon, S., Speraw, S., & Reese, S. (2013). U. S. Army nurses' reintegration and homecoming experiences after Iraq and Afghanistan. *Military Medicine, 178*(2), 166-173.
- Sartre, J. P. (1965). Being and doing. In R. D. Cumming (Ed.), *The philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre* (pp. 242-281). New York, NY: Vintage Books.
- Schachter, S. (1951). Deviation, rejection, and communication. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 46*, 190-207.
- Sekida, K. (2005). *Zen training: Methods and philosophy*. Boston, MA: Shambhala.
- U. S. Army. *The Army values*. The official homepage of the United States Army. Retrieved from <http://www.army.mil/values>
- U. S. Navy. *The United States Navy*. The official website of the United States Navy. Retrieved from http://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=193

- Van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. London, ON: The Althouse Press.
- Yoshizawa, K. (2009). *The religious art of Zen Master Hakuin*. Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press.
- Zimbardo, P. (2007). *The Lucifer effect: Understanding how good people turn evil*. New York, NY: Random House.

Appendix

The Retired/Discharged U.S. Military Personnel Survey

We are researchers from the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh and Regis University in Denver, Colorado, and we have created this survey in hopes of learning more about the experiences, challenges, and feelings that retired/discharged U.S. military personnel undergo during their transition into civilian life. We believe that information about your life experiences will benefit other individuals who are going through similar significant changes in their own lives. We greatly appreciate your willingness to participate in this survey. Your opinions and the other relevant information that you share are of great value to us. The survey should take 30-60 minutes to complete. Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete it.

Please note that this is an anonymous survey, and all data results will only be stored and reported anonymously. Your identity and any other personal information that may allow you to be identified as a participant will not be disclosed. Your participation is completely voluntary, and by your completion of this survey you acknowledge your consent to participation. Feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns you may have.

– Atsuko Kawakami, Ph.D., (Department of Sociology, University of Wisconsin, Oshkosh, 920-xxx-xxxx, kaxxxxxx@uwosh.edu)

– Masako Suzuki (graduate counseling student, Regis University, 303-xxx-xxxx, msxxxxxx@regis.edu).

Thank you for your consideration.

1. What is your current age?
2. Are you male or female?
3. How old were you when you joined the military?
4. Which branch of the military did you belong to? (Army, Marines, Airforce, etc...)
5. How old were you when you left the military?
6. What caused you to join the military?
7. What caused you to leave the military? (term to retire, ending a certain term, or discharge?)
8. What is your current occupation?
9. Did you experience any difficulty in transitioning to a civilian life?

Yes or No

If you answered “Yes”, could you explain why it was difficult?

If you answered “No”, could you explain why it was not difficult?

10. Did you use any services or organizations to assist your re-adjustment to civilian life?

Yes or No

If “Yes”, what services/organizations did you use? Tell us how those services or organizations helped you or did not help you.

If “No”, tell us why you did not use services or organizations to transition into civilian life.

11. What were the most memorable moment(s) you experienced when you were transitioning to civilian life?
12. What do you like about civilian life?
13. What do you dislike about civilian life?
14. What did you like about military life?
15. What did you dislike about military life?
16. What is your goal for the future (What is your purpose in your life)?
17. What is your success? How do you measure it?
18. Would you be willing to refer your friends who are retired military personnel with a good general state of mental health?

Yes or No

If yes, please give us the name of the person and his/her phone number or e-mail address.

19. How do you feel now? Are you feeling depressed, agitated, or having suicidal thoughts right now?

If you feel any discomfort, depression, agitations, or suicidal thoughts, please let us know now or anytime. Our contact information is <Atsuko Kawakami, Ph.D., 920-xxx-xxxx, kaxxxxxxxxx@uwosh.edu> and <Masako Suzuki, 303xxx-xxxx, msxxxxx@regis.edu>.

We have information and resources of counseling services. Please do not hesitate to seek help.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Author Note

Masako Suzuki is a registered psychotherapist in Colorado and practices at a community counseling agency, Healing from the Heart, as a family and adolescent counselor in Denver, Colorado. She also manages support groups for adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse at the WINGS Foundation, and she is a Certified Addiction Recovery & Mental Health Nutrition Coach. Her research interests include support and counseling for families, adolescents with poverty and trauma, active and former service members, and the populations that are culturally marginalized from mental health care. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: msuzuki@regis.edu.

Atsuko Kawakami is an assistant professor of sociology in the Department of Social Sciences at Tarleton State University in Stephenville, Texas. Her research interests include social support groups and system, transnational migration, health, gerontology, and Japan studies. Correspondence regarding this article can also be addressed directly to: kawakami@tarleton.edu.

Copyright 2016: Masako Suzuki, Atsuko Kawakami, and Nova Southeastern University.

Article Citation

Suzuki, M., & Kawakami, A. (2016). U.S. Military service members' reintegration, culture, and spiritual development. *The Qualitative Report*, 21(11), 2059-2075. Retrieved from <http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss11/4>
