THE SOCIAL VACUUM & THE LOSS OF SOLIDARITY FOR VETERANS EXPERIENCED IN CIVILIAN REINTEGRATION

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ABSTRACT

The difficulties many veterans experience upon reintegration into civilian society have been thoroughly documented over the last fifteen years. Though traditional diagnosis such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are undoubtedly a contributing factor to these difficulties, the data show that American soldiers struggle to reintegrate at a much higher rate than soldiers from other nations. Limiting the concept of these difficulties so narrowly on trauma exposure is too narrow. In this research, 25 veterans were interviewed and described their experience of transition from military life to a civilian career. The participants' responses revealed that there was a significant social dimension to the struggles faced upon leaving their military careers and culture. Among these, the loss of solidarity and a perceived sense of trust and unity among their civilian peers was at the epicenter of participants' struggles in their civilian lives.

Keywords: veteran reintegration, isolation, loss of solidarity, loss of structure, career transition

INTRODUCTION

Many veterans face a serious void in their life upon leaving active duty or deployment. Specifically, they often struggle with the difficulty of replicating the types of relationships they forged with members of their platoon when moving into a civilian career (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer, & Moos, 2015; Junger, 2010; Kukla, Rattray, & Saylers, 2015; Browning, 2015; Nelson Goff, Crow, Reisbig, Hamilton, 2007; Friedman, 2005; Demers, 2011; Caddick, Phoenix, & Smith, 2015; Monson, Taft, & Fredman, 2009; Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Though these struggles are often not directly connected to traditional conceptualizations of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), symptoms and struggles may arise for soldiers that are consistent with the range of symptoms often tied to PTSD.

The etiology, course, and presence of PTSD in the DSM-V is classified as a disorder that occurs when a person is a victim of or spectator to a traumatic event (i.e., unexpected death, violence, brutality, aggression, sexual assault, natural disaster, car accident, etc.). In order to be diagnosed with PTSD, a patient has to manifest a series of symptoms from each of the four clusters specified in the DSM, including intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity. These symptoms also must be measured relative to the duration of these symptoms in arousal and reactivity (DSM-V, 2013). Ultimately, when an individual is diagnosed with PTSD, he or she is presumed to be the witness of an unexpected, tragic, life-threatening, or shocking event. The experience of such an event is what gives rise to some range of these physiological, psychological, and somatic symptoms.

PTSD is the most common diagnosis for soldiers who experience symptoms and struggles upon reintegrating into civilian life. However, what is often less accounted for in the conceptualization of these symptoms is the possibility that a veteran is experiencing symptoms related to PTSD but not as a result of standing witness to a traumatic event. In this research project, we set out to test for a larger range of difficulty regarding social reintegration issues for returning veterans. Beyond PTSD and the experience of standing witness to unexpected trauma in war, there are other social and motivational struggles the reintegrating soldier may face when returning from active duty. Among these, we will discuss the effect that connection to one's former platoon members would have on the veteran if he or she were unable to recreate those otherwise strong bonds of solidarity with their current coworkers. In many ways, this factor

differs significantly from the classical conceptualization of PTSD as it currently stands. Ultimately, we argue that the current concept of struggles and symptoms soldiers may face when reintegrating into civilian life should look beyond PTSD and take seriously the social etiology of these symptoms for soldiers who return to civilian society. We argue that the social and, consequently, emotional gap between military and civilian life and culture can account for a significant portion of the struggles soldiers face after leaving an active duty setting.

DIFFICULTY REPLICATING RELATIONSHIPS

A large portion of the existent research has attested to the potency of social support systems and the role they can play in insulating soldiers from developing symptoms related to PTSD upon returning from deployment (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000; Pietrzak, Johnson, Goldstien, Malley, & Southwick, 2009; Westwood, McLean, Cave, Borgen, & Slakov, 2010). Ahern, et al. (2015) offer research that shows three major themes relevant to the social reintegration experience of veterans into civilian life. First, soldiers in this study largely described how many veterans viewed the military environment as a "family" that would sacrifice for them and provide for stability. Second, many veterans felt that their relationships in the civilian world could not match the level of connection they felt to former military members. Finally, veterans found themselves trying to seek out structures of support to aid their civilian life, relational, and work experiences. Demers (2011) offers a multifactorial analysis that presents a positive correlation between a sense of alienation for veterans that results in an identity crisis. According to Demers, this alienation and identity crisis that soldiers tend to experience a sense of being stuck in a social and emotional purgatory between military and civilian culture. Soldiers who have left active duty are no longer a part of military culture and yet, there may still be a serious relational void between the reintegrating soldier and his or her friends and family. It is possible that this relational void leads to a crisis of identity for the newly detached soldier. According to Demers, there is an exigent need for social support groups for veterans. Furthermore, Demers suggests there is a need to raise the cultural competence of clinicians, social workers, and college counselors regarding education of and exposure to the military and military culture.

Kukla, Rattray, and Salyers (2015) performed research on veterans and found that workplace reintegration is a significant factor in predicting the overall health and reintegration of the soldier. Among the factors that have an impact on workplace reintegration, veterans who

experienced combat had a significantly more difficult time in their reintegration experience. Participants' self-concept of identifying as a veteran was more severe after deployment effecting a difficulty engaging socially with civilian coworkers, managers, and peers. Other research has yielded similar findings displaying the importance of comradeship for veterans who are processing the complexities of war (Schok et al, 2010).

Roberts Browning (2015) provides research examining the reintegration experience of active duty soldiers and veterans reintegrating on college campuses. It was found that the military-friendly campuses that provided such things as veteran's lounges, priority registration, and credit for courses completed during active duty offered a strong social support structure for veterans returning home. The majority of participants on military-friendly colleges reported that they believed they would succeed in this atmosphere and that they were able to retain high levels of camaraderie with other veterans on these campuses.

Collins (1998) discusses the value distinctions between military and civilian society. This distance is termed as a "civil-military cultural gap" and has been exacerbated by the United States largely holding an all-volunteer army for the last 40 years. The result is that former military are less likely than ever to have contact with other former military members when they reintegrate into American society. Hunt and Robbins (2001) report on findings of World War II veterans who experienced social support from their community, family, workplace, and peers. This perception of solidarity became an insulating factor for soldiers and a lifelong coping strategy for soldiers still processing the events of war. Demers (2014) piggybacks on this concept, expressing how identity is deeply linked to one's sense of community and that the growing gap between military and civilian culture has led to a form of identity crisis within the community for the reintegrating veteran. Greden et al. (2010) and Jain et al. (2012) report that "buddy programs" can have a significant effect on improving health outcomes for veterans who have been diagnosed with and are being treated for PTSD. In short, research continues to show that veterans too often report a sense of social isolation that may not only be tied back to the symptoms of PTSD, but also a "cultural gap" between military and civilian worlds (Hoffman et al., 2003; Rahbeck-Clemmensen et al., 2012).

FAMILIAL DIFFICULTIES

Moving further into the nuances of these relational difficulties, familial struggles are at the core of this social examination of veteran reintegration. Goff, Crow, Reisbig, and Hamilton (2007) examine 45 male OIF and OEF soldiers and the level of marital satisfaction upon returning from deployment. The study found that sexual, dissociative, and sleep problems all had a strong positive correlation with marital difficulties upon returning from combat. Though a significant number of studies have found this range of symptoms present for soldiers upon reintegration (Ishøy et al., 2001; Jones at el., 2003; Simmons, Macanochie, & Doyle, 2004), this study reveals how, more specifically, this range of symptoms is likely tied to relational dissatisfaction in spouses upon reintegrating into civilian life. The authors suggest that the presence of these specific difficulties made it more challenging for soldiers to be adequately available emotionally for their partners upon returning from deployment.

METHODS

For this study, researchers conducted twenty-five semi-structured interviews with former military veterans. Participants found our study though advertisements that were placed online as well as in the communities where we reside in Massachusetts and Virginia. We also visited homeless shelters for veterans to solicit participants.

A large majority of our sample had deployed, however, we included participants who did not deploy because we recognize that reintegration to civilian life can be a challenge for those who lived in military careers regardless of whether they have faced deployment. Of those who did deploy, the vast majority had deployed to Iraq and/or Afghanistan.

Our sample was largely male (82.5%) and a majority of participants were married (55%), 29% were single, and 13% divorced. Most of the sample was Caucasian (74%). The age spread was relatively broad, with 20% of participants being between the ages of 20-30; 40% between the ages of 31-40; 17% between the ages of 41-50; and 20% age 50 or above. This gives us representative data beginning with several different theatres of war.

The method used to assess the data was a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis (Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006) espouses a flexible theoretical framework that acknowledges the need to let the data determine the themes and potential theoretical model that may arise. In a

straightforward thematic analysis, there are very few, if any, theoretical presumptions made prior to assessing the data sets. The thematic analysis applied to this data set can be broken down to a five- step process. First, the data were transcribed from the semi-structured interviews. After transcribing the interviews from recording, I moved line-by-line through the transcriptions, combing it for the semantic themes that would arise in the specific descriptions of the participants' lived experience. Second, meanings were assessed as they arose from the themes and descriptions of the themes were fleshed-out, detailed, and made clear. Third, themes were arranged into categories after comparisons were made among themes. In this step, themes with enough commonality were grouped together into categories. Fourth, higher order categories were formed from a comparison of the meanings that were formed from the themes. These themes served to structure a tree of the data analysis, filling in the branches of these themes with the elucidated meanings and supporting data. Lastly, a final review of the plausibility of the themes selected was assessed.

Thematic analysis ultimately allows space for flexibility in interpreting the data from the interviews. The initial coding phase of the data will espouse a, line-by-line and word-by-word, analytic and open-ended examination of the text. In this process, codes that arise within one interview and across several interviews are tied into themes as they recur on a consistent basis, generally staying attuned to codes and themes that occur frequently and with consistency. Beyond only examining the consistencies in the data and naming them "themes," any unique phrases, inconsistencies, or unusual statements offered by the participant become open-game for thematic analysis as well.

With all research, in particular with qualitative research, generalizability can be difficult to fully assess. Certainly, in this project, the utilization of twenty-five interviews was not intended to provide a definitive picture of generalizable themes. It would be consistent with the history and application of qualitative research to use restraint in presuming the possibility of generalizability.

RESULTS

As we hypothesized at the outset of this study, there was a significant connection between solidarity and camaraderie with platoon members, co-workers, and the consequent life satisfaction of the soldier. Likewise, a connection was demonstrated between the level of combat

excitement the soldier experienced and his or her consequent level of current life satisfaction. Ultimately, it was revealed that veterans work well in a platoon because they felt a strong sense of meaning, unity, and value in these groups. Upon returning to civilian life, many participants were disappointed to find that in the workplace and in American society, any analogous sense of unity and purpose was difficult to replicate. This disappointment resulted in participants experiencing frustration, confusion, ennui, and disorientation, as well as sometimes behaving in antisocial or self-injurious ways. Below is brief summary of these findings:

1. Participants almost unanimously reported a high level of solidarity, trust, and camaraderie among former members of their military platoon.

2. Participants in many cases experienced significant difficulties in replicating any similar sense of solidarity, trust, and camaraderie with their civilian co-workers upon their transition to a civilian career.

3. Many soldiers in this study experienced a high level of distrust for civilians at large. However, in some soldiers, this distrust was articulated as a form of contempt and disrespect for civilians.

In this section, we will elaborate on these themes as they recurred in the interviews. We have attempted to clarify and articulate the participants' lived experience of these themes.

SOLIDARITY, TRUST, & CAMARADERIE WITH PLATOON MEMBERS

Participants' responses showed that the experience of solidarity and camaraderie played a significant role in affecting the lived experience of soldiers during active duty, as well as on their reintegration transition back to civilian life. When asked how connected P1 felt toward members of his platoon, he responded with effusive praise: "There's always people looking out for you…everybody is really close." P1 mentions how a level of solidarity was increased as a result of experiencing combat: "It really came down to my survival and the survival of around me…I would definitely say that defending each other at that time, when we were there, increased the connection." P2 takes this idea up as well, describing the difference between the civilian career he was employed in prior to his military career:

> Being in the military, you're a brotherhood. Any soldier or any veteran will tell you that

> the biggest thing is camaraderie and that is what you miss the most when you get out. I also miss the adventures, either good or bad. But you are with guys who would die for you or you would die for them so the bond, the camaraderie, is intense.

This sentiment was almost ubiquitous among participants. In general, participants experienced a high level of connection to their platoon members. However, the epicenter of this connection was regularly tied back to the felt sense that participants believed that the other members of their platoon would die for them if they were put in a position to do so. This sense was rarely replicated in their civilian careers.

P3 mentions how, in many ways, the solidarity between members of a platoon is formed through the process of suffering together in the training process. He mentions how the physical sacrifices made in high level training regimes form a sense of unity among soldiers: "They just smoke the shit out of you for 24 hours and the question is this – what did you learn as a team? Do that for years and now instill it like, get the job done, come on back with all of your boys and then do it again." He offers further assessment of strengthening solidarity through training, emphasizing that it is through the difficulty, struggles, and sacrifice demanded from individuals in a group training exercise:

> Former military are still best friends because they trained together. In Regiment they went to SEER school together. Four of my best friends I still talk to today just because we went through SEER school together. I used to get them punched in the face (at SEER school) but we were in it together! By brining that chaos on board, it builds an esprit de corps, a bond. It goes back to that creed: "I'll never let a fallen comrade fall into the hand of the enemy."

When asked what it takes to make it through these high-level training schools, P3 is succinct: "Teamwork."

P4 mentions how, though he wasn't excited about the aspect of combat, he did feel a desire to move out of the safer places in the forward operating bases while deployed:

> If I was sitting on base I felt like I was wasting away and I wasn't doing my part. I wanted to be out there and I wanted to be on the line. If someone else in my platoon or my company is going out, I felt like I should be out there with them…My goal was making sure that the guy on my left and my right was coming home. That was the main objective in fighting for me.

This passage is unique because it demonstrates a connection to combat arousal here but through solidarity and desire to uphold the duty of shared sacrifice among his platoon members. When asked if this was a meaningful time in his life for being responsible for the life of the person next to him, P4 says, "Oh yeah. I would never change it if I could. The camaraderie and the brotherhood that you have while you're in the military, there is nothing like it. I would never change it."

Finally, P6 describes the connection of shared sacrifice he has with former members of his platoon and his coworkers now. When reflecting upon his relationships with members of his former platoon, he says:

> They are very good (relationships). I can text them right now and say, "Hey I just got arrested, do you mind giving me $100?" I would probably end up with $10,000 in the bank real quick…I am doing a ruck to raise money in a few months. In one week I raised $11,000 contacting these guys…I have not been stationed with them since 2009 and I could call them up right now and they would say, "move in."

In this case, P6 expresses the sense that there is still a felt sense of shared sacrifice and connection to his former platoon members. Years after deploying with these soldiers and without any continuous or regular level of contact, former platoon members are still unequivocally the individuals who display the deepest sense of trust and solidarity.

A LACK OF SOLIDARITY & CAMARADERIE WITH CO-WORKERS & CIVILIANS

Just as participants expressed a solidarity with former platoon members, soldiers' experienced a serious void of solidarity and camaraderie with their civilian coworkers. P1 expresses how there is a lack of connection to his peers and coworkers in his day-to-day life. When asked if he would prefer that being in the military be viewed by society as just another job in America (like a firefighter, teacher, or nurse) – as opposed to a unique career that deserves praise and cannot be understood - he expresses:

> That would obviously be great; it is nice that people appreciate what we do and all because your life is on the line. I would never want to say that people shouldn't be appreciative of (our job) but sometimes people just want to focus on you all of a sudden for some reason. My wife is a nurse practitioner and I was out with her friends. I was trying to get the conversation going about them and once they find out I am a Marine, the conversation was all on me. I get it but she saves lives too!

P1 is a full-time student completing his undergraduate degree. When asked about how connected he felt to other students in his classes, he says: "I am not connected (to them) really at all…I kind of just go there to learn and I don't try to build rapport a lot." When asked what the perceived difference is between his fellow students now compared to his former platoon members, he mentions how with students, "(there is no real) looking out for each other. People that I know around here are like, 'when you leave, you leave,' but in the military it's like, 'if you need anything I'm here for you,' and you can always rely to call him up." When explaining why he believes he is more connected to his former platoon members more than civilians, P1 mentions how there was a unique understanding and experience between himself and former soldiers: "[My platoon members and I] have all been miserable [together]. That's something that brings people closer together. When you're miserable, going through training and all of this, life is just hard and it brings people together."

P8 mentions the difference between his peers in college versus the members of his former platoon:

> College is a totally different thing…Everybody is just going about their lives…But when you go to the military, the people that are in your platoon or squad, you're close with like that. There is not a greater bond. Your friends in street or whatever might say, "Oh, I'd take a bullet for you or something," but you know for a fact that in the military they really will.

Resonating with the theme expressed in the previous section, the belief that the individuals around one would be willing to die for you forms a profound bond of connection. There are so few civilian careers that would even broach such a possibility. We speculate that in most civilian careers, there is a loathsome resistance on the part of human resource departments and upper-management to ever authentically address issues and events relating to sacrifice, courage, and the bonds that one forms with peers in a dangerous environment. This is a fundamental juxtaposition from military careers where mastery of this territory is at the epicenter of the training process. Furthermore, when moving into one's civilian career, there is, at best, massive ambiguity over who might offer one's life for another. Beyond this, there is uncertainty for the soldier over the circumstances that might call one to demonstrate sacrifice for his or her peers in civilian careers. In short, the stakes are not the same and many soldiers felt these lowered stakes led to a diminished sense of trust.

When describing the relationship between his former superiors in the military versus his civilian bosses, P12 says:

> Sometimes rank can be intimidating but usually its always in good faith. If they are telling you to do something there is always a reason for that in the military. [After I left the military], I've had bosses that were younger than me. I had a boss that was younger than me and he tried to basically boss me around and I ended up quitting because I've done things in my life that were so much more impactful. What's he done? He tried to boss me around. I just walked off.

P12 finds that there is a severe and almost elemental distrust toward his bosses when reintegrating into his civilian career. With his civilian bosses, his tendency is to question their credentials, intention, and integrity ("What's he done?"). Certainly, P12 was harshly directed by platoon sergeants and superiors during his military career. It is not as if during his military career he was spoken to and directed with gentleness and care while in his civilian career he was treated harshly. The tone of instruction and direction may not have been much different from the military superior to the civilian superior. Yet, the differences lie in a belief in the intentionality of the superior.

P3's civilian career led to a unique opportunity among our participants. Despite never completing a graduate degree, he had procured work as a college instructor in the Military Sciences department at an elite undergraduate American college. Despite this otherwise prestigious position relative to the careers many of his former peers and the soldiers in this study were able to land, he expresses a profound disconnect between himself and his fellow professors:

> So when I go into a meeting at the faculty of [the undergraduate institution] and I go and talk to them because they're always in the books, books, books, which is fine! But they lack the social skills you need. When you're in a real position of leadership, you're always interacting.

When asked about the leadership he experiences at the college, he discusses the detachment he experiences between the college deans and the students/faculty:

> The only time they talk to students is if they need to attend to something because of an award or because one student got in trouble. I don't see interactions as much as the military would. The mechanical engineers don't talk to the math people. It's like, "Who are you again?"...So we go to faculty meetings, and we have the social time and the provost starts it off and he asks questions, and there's no interactions. "What do you guys

> think about this?" But no one says anything, and the guy is like "hey we can't leave here until decisions are made." It's so frustrating. Whether right or wrong, as a leader you make a decision and give your subordinates an opportunity to agree or disagree. It may be happening, but I don't see that as much in the civilian side.

The sentiment expressed here is that there is some basic lack of a form of knowledge among college deans and faculty. In short, there is a unique form of insight into the values, communication styles, and duties one ought to demonstrate in order to lead a group of one's peers and subordinates. Furthermore, he perceives a lack of leadership that causes a vacuum for the group and an ambiguity about how to move forward with difficult decisions. P6 goes on to express what type of civilian career might have been a better fit for his leadership style: "My brother is a cop and if you don't do things exactly, and you don't do things step by step how it's supposed to be, you're done, you're fired. So there's no flexibility."

P25 describes the juxtaposition between his experiences with his 1st Sergeant in Iraq versus his civilian boss when he returned home:

> We were under fire in Fallujah. It was the height of the combat there. An RPG came into my unit and I was the radio operator so even at 19 years old I was high value to the unit. My 1st Sergeant dove on top of me to protect me from shrapnel. When I returned home, I had a career working as an armed guard for a money delivery truck. One of the banks I was dropping money off at that day was being robbed. My boss didn't even call me. I was expendable to him.

The juxtaposition here may have been one of the starkest among participants when asked about the difference between their leaders in their platoon and their civilian bosses/managers. For P25, as a teenager in Iraq, his boss (1st Sergeant) clearly risked his life so that P25 might continue to fight the enemy. P25 was a radio operator in his unit and his 1st Sergeant found him to be so valuable to the platoon that his life was worth sacrificing for. Upon returning to the country that he had fought for as a young Marine, P25 had limited employment opportunities, many of which only existed in the sector of private security. He was hired to guard money as it was being delivered to banks and ATM's. In juxtaposition to his 1st sergeant risking his life for P25 in Iraq, his boss in America failed to communicate to him that his life was imminently at risk. It is important to understand the nuances here. One of the primary responsibilities for managers at money truck companies have is to monitor warnings on the routes of their employees and notify those employees if the bank is at risk or being robbed. His boss's inability to communicate this

to P25 was not only a basic failure of his responsibilities; it communicated to P25 that he was replaceable and worthless to the company. This is a stark juxtaposition, but P25's story can serve as somewhat of an archetype for many of the participants' experiences in their civilian careers and with their civilian bosses.

P5 and P16 experienced similar career transitions to P25. P16 was a reserve soldier serving as an LPN in his civilian career as well as for the U.S. Army. He deployed to Iraq for an 18-month tour of service, took a two-week vacation, and returned immediately to work in the hospital that employed him in his civilian career. After 91 days, P16 was fired by his employer without cause. The explanation was brief – his manager told him that his coworkers felt uncomfortable around him and they perceived he was "on edge" while at work. He conceded experiencing some level of anxiety during this 3-month period; he had just returned from a major combat zone during the height of the Iraq surge. Nonetheless, when following up with P16 about whether or not he was "on edge" while in Iraq, he likewise conceded. However, he expressed that when he was anxious at work in Iraq, his platoon members were able to empathize and even be upfront with him, telling him bluntly to regain his composure. In his civilian career, he never had one direct communication or even blunt confrontation with his coworkers. When reflecting, he had become a pariah and an outcast in his civilian career. His coworkers and bosses were unable to aid him in this difficult transition and he was essentially discarded by the company. Lastly, it is vital to note why he was terminated after 91 days – 90 days is the legal limit that an employer must retain a soldier returning from deployment.

P5 describes his first career after returning from Afghanistan, working at a fortune 1000 company:

> I worked for an industrial laundry and facilities services company…There was a small leadership team and I was part of the leadership team. I had a group of 10 guys that would go out and drive all over the state. I was one of two veterans out of two to three hundred employees. No one understood who I was or what I was doing or where I was coming from or anything I'd done. It was a male dominated workforce but (the workers) were just kind of you know, "He's just a he's a crazy veteran." That was kind of the attitude - "Oh, he was in Afghanistan." They were naïve to a point of not knowing what questions to ask and not ask and all that kind of stuff. It wasn't a bad experience, they just had no idea how to deal with it. Most of them hadn't met anyone who had been overseas before. My boss certainly didn't know how to deal with it. He just wanted to see the numbers. The job

> sucked; I hated it.

All three participants express, albeit to varying degrees, a striking level of disconnect and mistrust of their coworkers and bosses. However, the main connecting piece to all three accounts appears to be a sense that the former soldier simply is not as valuable or significant to his or her civilian bosses and coworkers as he or she was to members of their former platoon.

DISRESPECT & CONTEMPT TOWARD CIVILIANS

Moving a step beyond this felt sense of disconnect among participants in their civilian lives and jobs, some participants went further, expressing an open disrespect and contempt towards civilians. When asked about what was missing from his civilian life and relationships, P2 says:

> I wouldn't hold it against anyone [in my civilian life], but I would say yeah, that lack of understanding could play a role. It's harder to understand what it's like to go through deployments or move away from your family when a lot of people have never even left their hometown for more than just vacations. That is just something different (between soldiers and civilians).

When following up with P1 as to what a solution to this might be, the interviewer asked him to reflect on how he might feel if he were now a veteran living in a society that required mandatory service. P1 expresses:

> It would be good for citizens to experience something like a military – it doesn't have to be the Marines – but it would be a good growing experience for them. Do I think that would be the best thing for the military? No. I think volunteer forces are more proactive. But even some kind of homeland security job or something. I think civilians would benefit greatly from it. **Now they would actually be contributing to America rather than just living off of America, you know?** That's one of the biggest things I look at (with civilians), doing something for the place that you live in. But not everybody's fit for the military.

The tone and content of P2's contempt for civilians grows as the interviewer continues to press on the subject and it was by no means uncommon for participants to express their frustrations and anger toward civilians in this way. Nonetheless, the contempt is deep and ubiquitous here. P2 begins this passage by saying the gap is only one of understanding – a lack of perspective resulting from a lack of shared experience. However, similar to other participants, he felt that many civilians were not only unfit for military service, but that by not serving in the military, they were not making a serious and tangible sacrifice or service to their nation.

P5 is more explicit in describing the gap between his relationship with former members of his platoon and his civilian coworkers and peers. When asked if he feels connected to, supported by, or understood by civilians, his response is striking:

> No. Honestly, not really. I don't know, I just think **they are like a different breed**...They just go about their daily life. They don't really understand what goes on in the world. Not just war lives, but there is people out there starving. There is people out there that are homeless. Civilians are oblivious and you know a lot of them just don't have any common sense. But I don't know. I don't really have any problems with them.

Similar to P2, the curious part of this passage, is how the participant feels a need to buttress the contempt for civilians with an expression of emotional detachment from that sense. "But I don't know. I don't really have any problems with them," is in fundamental juxtaposition with his previous statements on civilians, referring to them as, essentially, a different form of human, a form that lacks empathy, awareness, and a proper sense of responsibility for his or her world. He also explains that he has little faith in the possibility of building trust or solidarity with civilians he works with. He states, "I came to the realization that it is not going to happen because civilians are not in any kind of situation like we were and we are not going to build that trust."

As mentioned before, P6 has had the unique opportunity of serving as faculty at a prestigious college in the department of military science. When asked if he feels like he fits into his workplace or with his coworkers, he describes a significant gap between he and his peers at the college:

> I probably only converse with two people. One of those two is the generator guy – a great guy – and one is a girl in the Registrar's office. But everyone else, no. When I walk by an instructor or professor and I say, "Hello," or "Good morning," they say, "that's good morning **professor**." So I rebut and say, "Well that's good morning **master sergeant**." They get pissed...Most of these professors are liberals over there – "let's put vaginas on our head and march for Hillary," or something. With my job profession and entire uniform and I'm not into politics. I don't give a fuck who is my boss – democrat, republican, I don't care. So the other professors? No. I am not connected to them at all.

Again, a clear level of mistrust and contempt for one's peers is articulated. P6 feels no respect from other professors and holds a deep mistrust for their social and political ideology. Similar to the previous participants, there appears to be some contextualizing of the contempt

("I'm not into politics. I don't give a fuck who my boss is") as the participant attempts to gain some distance from his original disdain for his peers and colleagues. However, when P6 asked why he does feel connected to the custodians and generator workers and his response was succinct: "Because those are the guys who get things done."

P6 goes further, explaining why he feels so disconnected from his neighbors and peers. First, there is a severe gap derived from the lack of knowledge civilians have around basic components of military culture:

> It annoys me to talk to a civilian and they are like, "Yeah, I know about the military because my brother is in the Army." It's like, "shut the fuck up." [My neighbor] comes over and is like, "Yeah, my brother in law is in the SF." "Oh, yeah? What is his name?" I don't even know this guy and I know everyone in that unit. This dude doesn't have a clue…this motherfucker.
>
> My wife looks at me – because she knows, she was Air Force – and she's just like, stop. Please, stop…

He continues, expressing how he feels that his neighbors are vapid and superficial and that he cannot identify with their lack of true values:

> Everyone in our neighborhood owns their houses except us; we rent. They all play the money game. "Oh, look what I can do." Meanwhile, I'm like, I'm gonna cut my grass but I don't care if it's the greenest grass. No. I'm just riding this thing with my beer…I lose too much energy with these people who don't understand.

Beyond his colleagues at work, P6 also expresses a level of contempt for his neighbors and those he interacts with in his community on a day-to-day basis. This contempt seems to be drawn from two sources. First, he perceives a lack of knowledge civilians have over military life and functioning. He mentions how his wife understands because she has had prior service. However, his neighbor – making what could be attributed to a very simple misspeak regarding the activity of his brother-in-law – provokes an experience of disdain, as well as a mistrust of this individual's intentions. Any attempt by the neighbor to empathize with or attempt to understand P6's military experience is met with utter contempt ("This dude doesn't have a clue…this motherfucker"). Second, P6 perceives an egregious level of vanity among his neighbors. Something as basic as how everyone mows their lawn is a symbol of detachment and self-centeredness. In his estimation, the lawn being cut is a practical matter, not an aesthetic

one. Yet, the reason why it becomes an aesthetic matter for his neighbors – a vanity matter, at that – is because he believes his neighbors are all playing some competitive game that he simply feels is his beneath him.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have led us to reflect on the role that the vacuum of solidarity and combat excitement might have on the soldier as he or she reintegrates to their civilian career. This study, though inductive, leads us to suggest that with some soldiers, the symptoms related to PTSD might be tied back to the relational and psychological voids experienced in the transition to a civilian career. We draw several conclusions for further research from these results.

First, we think it's worth reexamining whether PET – used as a treatment for PTSD related symptoms - should be used in an isolated setting. Typically, PET is a form of therapy where the patient – in this case, the soldier – recounts the details of his or her traumatic experiences repeatedly in an effort to reappraise his or her perceptions of the event and gain a sense of emotional and cognitive control. It is quite likely that the difficulties experienced by the patient in PET are exacerbated by the isolating nature of the therapy. Despite lacking much empirical backing to date, the results of this study dovetail with theoretical and anecdotal literature to suggest that a form of recounting/retelling that is more public and shared with the community would have a greater benefit for the soldier (Tick, 2004). In short, the results of this study show that the isolation experienced by veterans, by the sheer nature of the small number of Americans who serve, should not be doubled-down-on in the therapeutic setting.

Second, military attitudes toward civilians and the disdain that was expressed from some participants demands immediate further research. In every creed and oath an American soldier swears allegiance to, there is an explicit and unconditional imperative to serve and protect the life, liberty, safety, and wellbeing of every American citizen. The level of contempt expressed by some participants toward civilians is quite likely to cause difficulties for the reintegration of that soldier from a purely prosocial and relational perspective. Moreover, an argument could be made that feeling this way toward civilians is also likely to damage the soldiers' tasks and duties while serving in the military. Reconciling this disdain and forging healthier mindsets toward civilian culture should be of the utmost importance in all levels of military research (i.e. social

reintegration, motivation, work performance, etc.). In light of what was clearly a sentiment of, at minimum, distance and distrust from participants to civilians, what can be done to bridge this gap in a nation that does not require mandatory service? Further research must continue to probe this chasm and establish grounds for an appropriate therapeutic and social/cultural response to mend this gap veterans often experience when reintegrating into civilian society. As a result, we believe that significant research should be devoted to this topic, as it is unlikely to come up right away in an inductive setting, and certainly is likely to stay tacit in quantitative research.

Theoretical considerations - The allure of war

A broad array of thinkers (Junger 2016; Junger, 2010; Hedges, 2004) – from psychologists, to philosophers, to war journalists – have speculated upon the draw to war and other violence circumstances for those who engage in conflict and/or live in warzones. It is important to examine the allure of war, violence, and violent circumstances in relation to a lifestyle that conditions and promotes violent tendencies, mindsets, and behaviors.

Sebastian Junger's renowned and acclaimed documentary "Restreppo" was produced and released alongside his book "War" (2010). Both serve to recount the experience of the young men who served in 110th Infantry Battle Company in the Korengal Valley in Eastern Afghanistan between the years 2007 and 2008. When Junger discusses killing, he turns his attention toward the complex relationship that some soldiers have to this facet of combat. Despite the antipathy to some aspects of combat (e.g. death of comrades), there is an incredible sense of purpose, meaning, and connection to one's peers that an individual may find in violent situations. Junger writes:

> Perfectly sane, good men have been drawn back to combat over and over again, and anyone interested in the idea of world peace would do well to know what they're looking for. Not killing, necessarily…but the other side of the equation: protecting. The defense of the tribe is an insanely compelling idea, and once you've been exposed to it, there's almost nothing else you'd rather do. (Junger, 2010, p. 214)

In this case, the draw was a primal reckoning of certain instincts that lead an individual, even a sane and moral individual, to return to violent circumstances. Despite the fact that neither the vulnerability of one's platoon members nor the killing of the enemy is totally

satisfying to all soldiers, there is an incredible sense of honor and dignity in standing courageously in the midst of risking harm to oneself for the sake of others.

Furthermore, Farrell (2001) focuses on the sense of disposability that is experienced by those who engage in high-risk careers in American society. He argues that there is a socialized form of misandry toward those who take up these careers and, essentially, a societal lack of concern over the risks involved in high-risk lines of work. Connected to Junger, one can see how a form of apathy, frustration, and dissociation might be formed in soldiers who come from active duty to civilian life. In military settings and communities, there is high regard, mutual respect, and true understanding for the nature of the work soldiers engage in. It would be difficult to replicate this sense of purpose and mutual empathy in civilian life even if the society one was returning had a strong regard for these careers. In a culture that does not value their work, the soldier is likely to form a deep sensitivity to this disregard. The transition from a world of regard and respect to one of disposability is likely to exacerbate some of these psychosocial struggles.

Junger's most recent work (2016) explores the cultural and anthropological history of societal connectedness in society. The text opens with a reflection upon the juxtaposing cultures of early Native American tribes and the early British colonial settlers to America. Junger reflects on a curious historical phenomenon at the beginning of this cultural melting pot. As British culture was pushing itself up against Native American culture, Junger recounts how there were hundreds, if not thousands, of cases of British settlers fleeing the confines of Protestant British culture for life with the natives. Junger does not look to reduce the etiology of this desire, however, he points to one significant factor accounting for the exodus. Native American tribes offered a source of solidarity and connection for settlers who had been living in a isolating and self-empowering society. The unity and shared sacrifice of the tribes offered a level of identity and meaning for these settlers well beyond the myopia of individualism. In many ways, life was more difficult for an individual fleeing colonial society, but the price was worth it. He writes, "Humans don't mind hardship, in fact they thrive on it; what they mind is not feeling necessary. Modern society has perfected the art of making people not feel necessary" (Junger, 2016). Junger

continues, connecting this to the gap between military personnel and civilians in modern society:

> What would you risk dying for – and for whom – is perhaps the most profound question a person can ask themselves. The vast majority of people in modern society are able to pass their whole lives without ever having to answer that question, which is both an enormous blessing and a significant loss.

According to Junger, it is on these grounds that an overwhelming division has been established between military culture and American society. Veterans experience this social vacuum when they return to the society that they defended and the experience is undoubtedly disorienting.

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