Transition from the Military into Civilian Life: An Exploration of Cultural Competence

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Citation

Abstract

In this paper, we employ the theoretical framework and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to examine the notion of 'transition' from military to civilian life for UK Armed Forces personnel. We put Bourdieu's concepts of *habitus*, *capital* and *field* to work in highlighting key differences between military and civilian life. The use of social theory allows us to describe the cultural legacy of military life, and how this may influence the post-transition course of veterans' lives. There may be positive and negative transition outcomes for service personnel when moving into civilian life, and by applying Bourdieu's theoretical concepts we explain how such outcomes can be understood. We suggest that the 'rules' are different in military environments compared to civilian ones, and that service personnel must navigate a complex cultural transition when moving between environments. There are numerous and significant implications – including policy applications – from understanding transition through a Bourdieusian lens, and these are highlighted throughout.

Keywords: *Bourdieu, civilian, veteran, transition, identity, habitus*

Introduction

There is a great deal of current political, social, and academic interest in the notion of

transition from the military[1] to civilian life[2]. Transition has been defined as the period of

reintegration into civilian life from the military and encapsulates the process of change that a

service person necessarily undertakes when her or his military career comes to an end (FiMT,

2013)[3]. The processes to facilitate transition are set out in detail by the Ministry of Defence

(2015), and the concept of military to civilian transition (MCT) is internationally recognized

(Castro, Kintzle and Hassan 2014). It is commonly asserted in the literature on military

veterans that the majority make a smooth transition into civilian life, but that a substantial

minority go on to experience difficulties in such areas as finding suitable employment,

maintaining good mental health, homelessness, excessive alcohol use, and crime[4].

Accordingly, finding appropriate ways to support service personnel in making successful

transitions to civilian life is viewed widely as a priority for public policy and research.

Notwithstanding the importance of studying transition across national contexts, this

paper uses UK sources of data and UK terminology will be used throughout[5]. Whilst the UK

military is overwhelmingly white, male and young, the veteran community is a heterogeneous

group. In the 12 months prior to April 2016, 16,540 personnel (or 8.4% of the full strength)

left the UK military (MoD, 2016). The most up-to-date figures from the Royal British Legion

Household Survey (RBL, 2014) estimate that 4.4% of the UK population (2.83m) are

veterans. A further 3.2% are dependent adults (2.09m) and 1.5% are dependent children

(0.99m). In total, it is estimated that 9.2% of the UK population (5.91m) are part of the

veteran community. These figures reflect an ageing population, with 46% of the veteran

community over 75 years of age. Further, the extent to which UK veterans exist as a

'community', (e.g., in terms of coordinated social networks, advocacy, and a public visibility)

is unclear, given that accurate information on veterans, their health and associated needs, and

whether or not they differ from local communities is sparse (Ashcroft, 2014). Compounding this lack of information, the self-identity of ex-Service personnel varies considerably and so many do not even see themselves as 'veterans', often due to multiple interpretations of the term, from World War II veterans, to the present day UK government's definition of having to serve at least one day in uniform (Burdett et al., 2012; Ashcroft, 2014).

The processes and experiences of transition for Armed Forces veterans are not well understood, and research is only beginning to unpack associated issues. One aspect of transition that has been relatively under-theorised is the influence of military culture and what happens when an individual immersed in this culture leaves it and returns to an environment that was previously familiar, but may no longer be so. Following World War II, Schutz (1945) evoked this tension in "The Homecomer", describing emotions of being 'in the wilderness' when returning to what should be intimate and familiar, yet now appears strange and different. More recently, Bergman *et al.* (2014) pointed toward this tension by employing a model of 'reverse culture shock' to describe the unexpected difficulties that some personnel experience in transition. These authors suggest that 'a comprehensive understanding of the issues involved in transition is essential to the provision of appropriate support to personnel leaving the Armed Forces' (p. 60). Like Schutz before, their model of reverse culture shock proposes that a sense of disorientation can occur when personnel transition; as a result of adjustment into and time spent within the military culture, both the individual's frame of reference, and the civilian culture itself may have changed, leading to difficulties in navigating this previously familiar environment[6].

The role of culture

Contemporary social theory has yet to fully consider *how* culture and cultural practices may persist when a Service person transfers to a different social context, and conversely, how

cultural adaptation may take place. In this article, we employ the theoretical framework and concepts of Pierre Bourdieu to explore how processes of cultural persistence and adaptation may take place specifically in the context of the UK Armed Forces. Bourdieu was an eminent French sociologist and an empirical commentator on the variances in social, cultural and class-based structures. Importantly, he conceived the possibility of transformation and social mobility through the application of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capital and movement between social spaces (Grenfell, 2012). The way the UK Armed Forces are constituted, with a hierarchy of officers and enlisted personnel[7], reflects a wide range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, with subsequent social and cultural differences. We discuss the effects of differing types of capital in the military and the requirement for adaptation into a different cultural context, which has implications for a successful transition. The use of Bourdieu's concepts shapes the understanding of the variations in how personnel approach their transition process based on their own backgrounds, experiences and contextual understandings, and the following conceptual framework can be applied across national and geographical settings. Below, we provide a brief review of literature within the sub-discipline of military sociology that holds relevance for the Bourdieusian argument we wish to make.

Military Culture: Socialisation, Gender, Identity

Scholarship within military sociology has explored varied aspects of military culture including the processes by which recruits are socialised into it, the gender ideologies which sustain it, and the influence that culture has on the identity formation of military personnel[8]. With regard to socialisation processes, the literature describes the transformation that civilians go through when becoming a member of the Armed Forces (e.g., Hockey, 1986; Godfrey, Lilley & Brewis, 2012). Through the process of basic training, new recruits enter a forced 'separation' from civilian life to make way for a strong identification with the military

organisation and culture (Godfrey *et al*., 2012). This culture is grounded in a strict code of discipline to which recruits must quickly become accustomed. As Godfrey *et al*. (2012) argue, the deliberate organisational socialisation which takes place within basic training is aimed at producing 'disciplined bodies' capable of carrying out military labour and waging war on the enemy. The civilian is thus incorporated into the military organisation and is inscribed with particular cultural values including loyalty, integrity, courage, determination, and a commitment to duty, that the military seeks to promote (Bergman *et al*., 2014). The process of basic training, whereby recruits first encounter military culture and its associated values, has also been likened to Goffman's (1976) concept of the 'total institution'. This is separated from the rest of society, where the lack of any 'offstage' area to which recruits can withdraw ensures that any sense of a prior identity or individuality is removed, and a full integration into the organisational environment can be achieved (Hockey, 1986). Accordingly, incorporation into military culture is non-optional; new recruits must be assimilated into the culture during basic training. Alternatively, service personnel either decide to take their own discharge before completing training (as around 30% of infantry recruits do) or are required to leave for breaches of discipline. The majority (90%) of these so-called 'Early Service Leavers' do so before they complete basic training (Fossey, 2013; Bergman et al., 2014).

Gender

Another prominent strand of military sociology examines how different 'military masculinities' are cultivated and sustained within the military's cultural environment[9]. The concept of military masculinities refers to a 'particular set of gendered attributes typically found within the institution of the Armed Forces' (Higate, 2003; p.29). The plural version of the term 'masculinit*ies*' reflects the notion that there are a range of gendered practices that take place within military cultural settings and that masculinity is not a fixed personality trait,

but rather a fluid and contextual performance; something that is *done* or acted out within a particular cultural setting. This plurality of masculinities is, however, structured by a rigid hierarchy that positions dominant or 'hegemonic' masculinities as most symbolically valuable. Following Connell (1995), hegemonic masculinity refers to overriding ways of being male, through masculine attributes, practices and identities, which are privileged over other masculinities and which are constructed in opposition to femininity. Within military culture, hegemonic masculinity converges around notions of 'hardness'; of physical and emotional toughness, stoicism, self-reliance, aggressiveness, and a robust sense of heterosexual identity (Bulmer, 2013; Hockey, 1986, 2003; Higate, 2003).

Femininity is employed as a gauge against which masculinity is measured, and invocation of the feminine is thus fundamental to the performance of hegemonic masculinity within military culture (Godfrey *et al*., 2012). For instance, displays of 'weakness', 'dependence' and 'emotion' are construed as feminine, and in opposition to the dominant gendered ideology. Moreover, this gendered ideology and hierarchy remains a prominent component of military culture despite the incorporation of women into the modern military (Basham, 2013; Bulmer, 2013; Kovitz, 2003)[10], including, most recently, the decision to allow females to Serve in the combat arms (Infantry, Royal Navy, Royal Marines and RAF Regiments). Women remain marginalised by the masculine privilege embedded within the institution (Basham, 2013; Woodward & Winter, 2007). It has been argued that gendered identities formed within the military cultural milieu are particularly potent, and may remain tenacious after leaving the Armed Forces and re-entering civilian life (Atherton, 2009; Higate, 2001, 2003).

Identity

Culture also plays a crucial role in the formation of military identities, and a stream of sociological research has explored how individual military identities are constituted by and

within military institutions and cultures[11]. As Woodward and Jenkings (2011) argued, studying the individual level – the 'soldierly subject' – is important for understanding military organisations and their personnel. Such research has revealed how military identities are constructed in relation to space and place, such as the often hostile and challenging environments and conditions in which activities of 'soldiering' take place (Woodward, 1998; Rech *et al*., 2015), and particularly (as described above) with regard to gendered identities (Higate, 2003; Woodward & Winter, 2007). The study by Woodward and Jenkings (2011) also revealed how military identities are rooted in the everyday practices that personnel carry out in military settings. For instance, the possession of military skills such as weapons handling and the use of technical equipment serve as markers of identity for military personnel. The process of training, whereby personnel acquire such skills, is described by Woodward and Jenkings (2011) as a *transformative act* in which personnel take on new identities grounded in their military capabilities. Within military culture, proficiency in such skills and aptitudes is afforded high symbolic value, and consequently identities grounded in these abilities convey a degree of social status within the institution. Linked to the tenacity of military masculinities to which Higate (2003) alluded, the formation of a military identity might therefore carry strong implications for individuals' self-concept, which then act both *for* and *on* them when they transition into civilian society.

What Can Bourdieu Add to an Understanding of Transition?

Bourdieu's (1990) Logic of Practice provides a compelling explanation of how and why people act as they do in various social and cultural settings. Bourdieu described three inter-related tools of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital,* which together explain how cultural settings operate according to their own internal logic, and how people – largely unconsciously – become competent social actors within these cultural settings. Military and civilian cultural settings are not equal on either practical or emotional levels.

Habitus is one of the best known of Bourdieu's concepts and refers to a system of unconscious dispositions formed through regular social encounters and experiences, which generates perceptions and actions within cultural settings (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). Such dispositions, or propensities toward actions in a given situation, are frequently described as *durable,* in that once acquired they are relatively enduring, and *transposable,* in that they are also malleable to a degree and may develop and shift with the evolving influence of one's social milieu[12]. Habitus is acquired through experience and exposure to social conditions, yet is embedded below the level of individual consciousness (Davey, 2009). It is ingrained behaviour that socialises individuals to a specific structure (Bourdieu, 1994). Bourdieu (1990: p. 56) described habitus as the active presence of past experience; as 'embodied history, internalised as a second nature and so forgotten as history'. Importantly, habitus also filters and structures new experiences in accordance with the structures produced by past events, therefore incorporation of new experiences (e.g., an unfamiliar cultural environment) into one's habitus is always shaped and constrained by past experiences (e.g., socialisation and enculturation in a previous environment).

Habitus takes shape within particular *fields*; conceptualised as the social spaces that people inhabit. Fields can exist at multiple levels, including on a macro or meta-level (e.g., the military as an institution), and micro or sub-fields nested within (e.g., the regiment, ship, or squadron). A field is understood as a distinct social microcosm, underpinned by its own rules, regularities and structures of authority. The field imposes its rules and regularities upon all those who enter and dwell within it, thereby operating as a site of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1990). A field is where social interaction is defined and power is held, and therefore fields tend to act as arenas of struggle whereby social actors compete for power, status, or recognition (Grenfell and James, 2004; James, 2011). In this article, we conceptualise the military (and its various sub-fields, each with their own peculiarities) as one

field, and the civilian 'world' as a varied collection of alternative fields – the majority of which differ in important ways from the rules and logics of the military field(s)[13]. The concept of habitus is deeply connected to that of field, and habitus attunes to the social field in which a person is immersed. The dispositions acquired through habitus, along with the conditions of the field, crucially influence a person's life choices and experiences (Bourdieu, 1988, 1989; Sayer, 2005). Understanding the social rules of a particular field and how it operates is thus vital to ensuring one can act competently and survive within it.

Fields also exist in relation to other fields. Individuals may be involved in one or more fields and drawn towards them differently based upon their dispositions. In this way, fields can operate as 'magnetic', in that the individual experiences push and pull factors drawing them into one field and away from another and vice versa (Bigo, 2011). For example, the intense nature of the early years of service, with highs of adventure, travel and until recently, the prospect of Operational Tours, draws the young recruit into a strong identification with the military. Conversely, as personnel mature, the civilian field can become more appealing, with perceived freedom from a structured lifestyle, the need for personal relationships and the desire for children becoming factors that may not have been present in the early phase of their military lives[14].

Becoming a competent social actor within a particular field enables one to accrue *capital*, which is understood as the resources at stake in that field. Capital is a form of power that determines a person's relative position within a field, and which also determines how the specific profits arising out of participation and competition in that field are apportioned and allocated (Bourdieu, 1986). There are several forms of capital including cultural (knowledge, skills, titles), economic (wealth and financial power), and social (resources linked to membership within a social group). Cultural capital exists in several forms. It is institutionalised in the form of rank, positions and qualifications. It can also be embodied in

terms of accrual of knowledge and long lasting dispositions of the mind and body (Bourdieu, 1986), and objectified in the form of material possessions (e.g., course/team photographs, books, artefacts, etc.).

Symbolic capital refers to the honour and prestige that a person may accumulate through possession of other forms of capital. Symbolic capital is thus akin to social recognition and the attribution of positive or superior qualities through which a person might 'distinguish' him or herself, and is linked to the acquisition and maintenance of social power or reputation with symbolic displays in the form of medals and badges (Bourdieu, 1990). For instance, symbolic capital may be accrued through combat experience (or, indeed, drinking ability and sexual prowess (Fox, 2010)), which marks an individual out as revered.

Capital is acquired over time and influences the development of habitus. The concepts of habitus, field, and capital are therefore strongly interlinked, and are conceptualised as relational phenomena (Veenstra & Burnett, 2014). The particular forms of capital available within a field are also often specific to that field, and may not transfer to other fields[15].

Scholars across several disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, education and cultural studies, have gravitated towards these concepts. As Veenstra and Burnett (2014) argue, they provide a theoretical model that is able to transcend the divide within social theory between approaches that focus on structural forces and those which emphasise personal agency. Bourdieu's concepts articulate how people's everyday actions and social practices are simultaneously structured by the institutions and communities to which they belong, whilst also operating according to a (negotiated) freedom or autonomy. Limited references to the term 'military habitus' attest to some initial take-up of Bourdieu's concepts within the sub-discipline of military sociology[16]. In the following section, we put the Bourdieusian theoretical framework outlined above to work in order to explore the notion of transition and cultural adaptation in the context of transition into civilian society.

A Bourdieusian Approach to Transition: Understanding Cultural Competence

The particular relevance of habitus, capital and field to an understanding of military-to-civilian transition can be articulated through the concept of cultural competence. Cultural competence is an understanding of what is appropriate or unacceptable within a particular social and cultural context (i.e. in a particular field). Cultural competence is akin to acquiring a 'feel-for-the-game', in Bourdieu's (1990) terms. Having a feel-for-the-game means that one's habitus is attuned and adjusted to the demands of a particular field; one knows what is expected and possesses an intuitive understanding of the pre-verbal, taken-for-granted organisation and conditions of the field. Bourdieu referred to such intuitive understandings as the doxa; the term for the unquestioned shared beliefs that are both specific to, and constitutive of, a particular field (Deer, 2008). Cultural competence thereby explains how individuals become proficient within a culture; how they learn to 'play the game' and acquire a pre-reflexive and instinctive grasp of the doxic rules that constitute the field. Such competence enables individuals to develop social resources that help them to accumulate status, power, and wealth. We argue that military and civilian fields require different sets of cultural competences and are structured by particular values, and are characterised by different ways of communicating and relating to others, different living arrangements, different criteria for "success", and different standards of behaviour, dress, and bodily comportment (Bergman et al., 2014; Walker, 2012). The doxic position is different in each field, and therefore the veteran in transition must acquire a new competence in the rules of civilian life if he or she is to enjoy a "successful" transition (Demers, 2011).

Cultural Persistence: Challenges to Adaptation

Several authors[17] have identified challenges that service personnel may face on transition into the civilian environment. These include the loss of military community and friendships, the forfeit of previous role or status, adjusting to new routines of family or home life, challenges

of securing employment in the civilian workplace, and a transition in one's identity and emotional shift from being an integral part of the military to an individual in civilian society. Such challenges may be usefully understood as the embodied legacy of a 'military habitus'[18] persisting beyond one's engagement with military life (Higate, 2000; Lande, 2007; Maringira *et al*., 2015). For instance, Higate (2000) used the term 'Army habitus' to describe the lasting effects of Army training on the body and the self. The characteristics of military life are appropriated by and 'work through' service personnel, creating a durable shift in identity and thereby shaping the possibilities for future actions (Higate, 2000, 2001). Through the processes of institutional socialisation we described in our introduction, service personnel thus become habituated to military ways of being and acting in order to become resilient to the demands of military and combat life. Life becomes highly structured and scheduled, bodies and their demeanours change and become hardened and rigid; even breathing becomes regulated by the demands of military life, to the point where "breathing like a soldier" (Lande, 2007) becomes second nature.

The strength of a military habitus and its capacity to endure post-transition has been remarked upon in previous research (e.g., Caddick et al., 2015; Maringira *et al*., 2015). In particular, Maringira *et al*., (2015) provided a forceful portrayal of the deep-seated embodied legacy of military habitus and its effects on former Zimbabwean soldiers. Yet it is also important to recognize that the embodied legacy of habitus is partially unknown to the individual, given that habitus lays down its roots predominantly at pre-conscious levels of awareness (Bourdieu, 1990). The more all-encompassing the setting, the more implicit or unacknowledged the rules; they become beyond consciousness[19]. By the same manner, practice (i.e., the everyday actions one performs in a given setting) "excludes attention to itself [and] is unaware of the principles that govern it and the possibilities they contain" (Bourdieu, 1990; p. 92). Accordingly, whilst people may experience themselves as action-

oriented and purposeful beings, the social forces which continue to shape their conduct often remain implicit or unacknowledged, "beyond the grasp of consciousness" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; p. 93). For the service person in transition, this means that they may find themselves reproducing military cultural attitudes and ways of acting without being explicitly aware of how their conduct remains oriented toward the military field.

When service personnel with a deeply embedded sense of military habitus return to civilian life, a collision or rupture may occur. Bourdieu calls this effect 'hysteresis'; the discord occurring when the new field encountered is too different from the field to which one's habitus is previously adjusted. Hysteresis may manifest in certain 'negative sanctions' such as fear, anxiety or resistance to change (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) and these have obvious consequences for the interventions that may be required for those experiencing a rough transition.

Service personnel who struggle to embrace the different norms and values in the transfer back to civilian life experience the hysteresis effect through the discrepancy between the habitus and the change to a different social field (Bourdieu, 1990; Hardy, 2008). In Bourdieusian terms, the veteran who can negotiate any discord between the military habitus and her or his new field and encounters harmony finds her or himself ''a fish in water'' (Bourdieu, 1989:43). The corresponding fish *out* of water is therefore the veteran for whom the grip of their previous military habitus prevents a meaningful adaptation to civilian life. In such cases, the veteran seeks a continuity with her or his previous environment that is no longer available. The habitus of the past is dysfunctional, the habitus of the future is unestablished, and the support required to establish a new 'civilian' habitus may well be inadequate[20]. One result of this discontinuity can be a sense of disillusionment or 'alienation' in civilian life, as has been well documented in the literature on service personnel and transition (e.g., Bergman *et al*., 2014 Demers, 2011; Walker, 2012).

'Capital as currency' in the military-to-civilian transition

The potential disruption of hysteresis can be further elaborated by returning to the notion of capital. The military equips people with its own embodied form of cultural capital in the technical skills it provides through its training. Within the military sphere, these skills may be rewarded with qualifications or promotions, and thus translated into institutionalised cultural capital. It is recognised that the institutionalised form of cultural capital is vital in the labour market, where qualifications, knowledge and transferable skills are exchangeable for employment (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital thus has financial exchange value. It is often the case, however, that military institutionalised cultural capital does not transfer easily to the civilian workplace. A recent review of military-to-civilian transition (MCT) conducted by Lord Ashcroft (2014) acknowledged such difficulties by highlighting that specialist expertise and skill sets acquired during military service do not always map onto the demands of everyday life and regular employment. The nature of military expertise and the cultural capital accumulated whilst in service thus offer highly valued transferable skills, but may have different applications and values in civilian life. This is illustrated in the vignettes of service leavers consulted during the review (Ashcroft, 2014; p. 66-67):

> 'You haven't got a right lot to offer. The fact that you can drive a tank isn't a right lot of use to Morrisons'.

> 'I was a Warrant Officer but all the questions in my interview were about how I would deal with conflict because they thought I was bound to blow a fuse. I managed 40 engineers in a submarine with a nuclear reactor, and they said they didn't think I would be able to manage a department'.

Similarly, other forms of cultural capital which are highly valued in military society may not be recognised in civilian life. Rank, for instance, carries strong currency in the military, yet is often misunderstood or ignored outside the military field, with associated 'culture shock' to the previously revered individual (Bergman *et al*., 2014). Physical capital, a form of symbolic capital materialised in the body and its capabilities (Shilling, 2004), is cultivated and valued

differently in military and civilian contexts. In addition, there is an entrenched alcohol culture within the military which operates differently from alcohol use in civilian life (Fox, 2010). This culture, tied to the masculine hierarchies and ideologies embedded in military life, contrasts with 'normal' ways of drinking in civilian communities and workplaces. We (the authors) have witnessed the power of cultural capital during two field visits to British Army Regiments, including deference to higher ranks and the use of more obvious representations of power status, such as rank insignia, swagger sticks and separate messes. In general, the Armed Forces as a medium for upward social mobility is often under-represented. For some, the Armed Forces can be a vehicle for education and/or improved lifestyle trajectory, but this may cause discord between status acquired whilst in service and a lack of potential to sustain this in the home environment to which they return. Each of the differences between the separate fields of military and civilian society can potentially undermine the sense of cultural competence a service person may feel when transitioning out of the military.

It is also worth noting, contrary to conventional wisdom, that challenges with transition may actually be accentuated for veterans who served for shorter periods of time, compared with longer serving veterans (traditionally viewed as 'institutionalised') (Bergman *et al*., 2014). Early service leavers (ESLs), defined by the UK Ministry of Defence as those who leave before 4 years of service or are compulsorily discharged (Ministry of Defence, 2015) have been identified as more at risk of mental health problems following discharge compared with longer serving veterans (Buckman *et al*., 2014). They are also less likely to be in employment six months after leaving the Forces, with 52% of ESLs employed compared with 82-85% of those leavers eligible for the full package of resettlement support provided by the MOD (Ashcroft, 2014). Whilst the reasons behind ESLs' transition struggles are unknown (there has been very little research), Bergman *et al*. (2014) postulate that ESLs face their discharge before they have fully adjusted to the demands of military life; "Already

culturally disorientated from commencing the process of becoming a soldier, they now have to face returning to a civilian world which already regards them as 'different'" (p. 65) and with the added burden of 'failure' weighing on them. For junior ranks and ESLs, perceptions of support for transition have also been rated as poorer and as less effective than those of their senior, more established military colleagues, who potentially have developed more or better capital resources (Ashcroft, 2014).

Likewise, for those undergoing a 'forced' transition through a medical or compulsory discharge, the move back into civilian life can be abrupt, complicated and potentially traumatic. A study of veterans leaving the UK military via the Military Corrective Training Centre (MCTC or "military prison") revealed that a swift discharge following a short sentence was associated with poorer transition outcomes (Van Staden *et al*., 2007). Issues such as mental health problems, unemployment, and lack of permanent accommodation were more prevalent among individuals who received brief sentences with few educational or vocational opportunities prior to discharge. Moving quickly, and perhaps unexpectedly, between the military and civilian fields, the habitus thus has little opportunity to adjust, and veterans may become "culturally disoriented." Similarly, for those discharged on medical grounds, discharge may occur unexpectedly and psychological preparation for transition may be limited or non-existent. The majority of medical discharges are for non-operational injuries, but also includes injuries sustained in combat and following diagnosis of mental health problems (Ashcroft, 2014). Regardless of the cause, receipt of a medical discharge can potentially exacerbate the hysteresis effect, and result in a loss of the cultural or physical capital resources an individual might otherwise have accumulated. Messinger (2010) described a complicated process of identity renegotiation in a case study of an injured veteran. The process of transition for this veteran involved a protracted search for answers regarding *how* he wanted to be a 'disabled veteran', and what he would do with the rest of his

life. Accordingly, reason for discharge is an important consideration in terms of transition, and factors such as injury may be associated with a reduction in capital and/or cultural competence.

Cultural Adaptation and Transformation of the Habitus

The Transition Mapping Study, commissioned by the Forces in Mind Trust (FiMT, 2013: 5) defines a good transition process as one that 'enables ex-Service personnel to be sufficiently resilient to adapt successfully to civilian life, both now and in the future'. Yet despite the fact that the majority of veterans reportedly adapt well and go on to succeed in civilian life (Iversen et al., 2005), research has overwhelmingly focused on problems experienced with transition[21]. With such an exclusive focus on the problems, there is a danger of problematizing and pathologizing the very notion of transition itself. There are notable exceptions in the literature, as one doctoral thesis by James McDermott (2007) entitled "Old soldiers never die: They adapt their military skills and become successful civilians" makes clear. McDermott argued that successful veterans accepted the end of their military service and began planning for transition well in advance, and that they were able to adapt their skills to ensure they would be marketable to civilian employers. In other words, the mobilization of capital and appropriate action through pro-active behaviour is necessary prior to leaving the forces, and some may require support in order to adapt.

Given the specificity of militarized cultural capital to the field in which it was produced, how might such adaptation take place? The Bourdieusian answer lies in the sense of agency and creativity which habitus represents. As Davey (2009) put it, "if habitus accents continuity, it recognises potential for change too, and this is most likely realised through individual movement across social space" (p. 276). For Bourdieu, practice (what an individual *does*) is an interaction between habitus and field. By changing that interaction, for example by moving from the military field(s) to a new field(s) in civilian society (or

simultaneously into multiple fields, such as family life, civilian employment, local communities), habitus may become more of a fluid process, and practices evolve (Ingram, 2011). Hysteresis, then, can prompt the evolution of one's habitus to fit the logic and the doxa of a new field. Bourdieu (1990) argued that habitus is malleable and never straightforwardly *determines* practice[22]. Thus, on the one hand habitus appears durable and resistant to change, yet on the other hand, encompasses the potential for cultural adaptation (Davey, 2009). How the adaptation of habitus plays out in relation to a veteran's transition may depend upon a range of influences such as her or his role within the military and the degree to which an individual engages with the transition support available to them. For instance, some roles such as a Royal Air Force clerk are more 'civilianized' than others such as an Infantry soldier, and the degree to which one's habitus will have been shaped by the dominant masculine 'warrior' culture will differ between such roles (Higate, 2003). In addition, if a service person has prepared for transition by utilising the support available through the military and through the Career Transition Partnership[23], he or she may be much better equipped to present transferable skills in ways which maximise the re-deployment of his or her military cultural capital (Fossey, 2013).

There are numerous ways in which cultural adaptation to civilian life might take place. One way may be to explicitly seek a line of continuity between one's military and civilian occupational environment. Some veterans, for example, choose to move into civilian employment of a variety that is consistent with military environments, such as the police force, the prison service, private military companies and other uniformed organisations which absorb a proportion of ex-military personnel, and which offer an experience of professional continuity in terms of transferable skill-sets and a masculinised occupational culture (Higate, 2013). This may be interpreted as the habitus seeking to maintain a sense of homeostasis, wary of too great a change in the field which it must occupy. In Bourdieu's terms, "Through

the systematic 'choices' it makes among the places, events and people that might be frequented, the Habitus tends to protect itself from crises and critical challenges by providing itself with a milieu to which it is as pre-adapted as possible" (1990; p. 61). There are perhaps two ways of viewing this type of search for occupational continuity: one is a refusal to adjust to the doxa of civilian society (to 'play the game'), or the other is an agentic action – produced through the habitus – taken to establish oneself in a new field.

Another form of adaptation may be to re-mobilise the military habitus in ways that confer a strategic or competitive advantage in civilian fields. This may be done by correctly marketing the transferability of military skills, or for instance by drawing upon success-oriented military cultural attitudes; dispositions created through immersion in the military field(s) and embodied in the habitus. Walker (2012) identified a 'typology' of Army leavers from "transformed" through to "blighted". Whereas "blighted" captured soldiers for whom service life had been damaging in some way, a prevailing orientation was for soldiers to view themselves as "transformed"; as permanently changed for the better by their service. They described themselves as being "a cut above" and exhibiting a "get-it-done" attitude towards key tasks such as finding employment in civilian life. Habitual orientations toward "getting it done" and "getting on with it" have been identified in other studies as a way of adapting military resources to solve problems in civilian life (Caddick *et al.,* 2015). Following Kerr and Robinson (2009), such strategies may be considered as a creative response to the hysteresis effect, whereby moments of uncertainty, anxiety, or resistance to change may serve as critical moments of learning.

The transition from service person to civilian requires the veteran to adapt their culturally acceptable behaviour from military constructs into civilian norms. Given the lack of research on successful transition experiences, more needs to be done understand *how* veterans adapt their behaviours and habitus during the process of transition. The use of our

conceptual framework enables reflection on social and cultural contexts in different local and national settings. We suggest a recognition of differences in field, habitus and capital between military and civilian life has the possibility to shape and inform a more successful transition in practice.

Implications of a Bourdieusian Perspective on Transition

The Bourdieusian approach provides implications for how transition is managed in the UK military, and also in other state militaries which operate similarly to the UK in terms of personnel management, service careers, and trajectories. One policy imperative (echoed by the findings of the Lord Ashcroft review (Ashcroft, 2014)), would be to develop a central strategy for translating or transferring skills and qualifications gained in the military into forms which civilian employers can understand and recognise, already achieved in part among the technical services and trades. Crucially, this would facilitate the transfer of capital from within to outside of the military field, and enable career progression. This is especially the case among lower ranks and ESLs who are more likely to report a lack of skill transferability, and difficulties in finding 'suitable' employment post-discharge, for whom additional training and transferable skills may be required. Civilian employers have an active role to play in understanding military culture and the capitals at stake within it. Indeed, over 900 British companies have signed a 'Corporate Covenant' (part of the wider 'Armed Forces Covenant'; see MOD, 2011), by which they pledge their concrete support to the UK Armed Forces community[24].

This paper adds weight to the recommendations generated by previous studies regarding personal development planning and work placement schemes for personnel *prior to* their point of discharge (Ashcroft, 2014; Fossey, 2013; FiMT, 2013). The Transition Mapping Study (FiMT, 2013) recommended that, throughout their service, all military

personnel should engage in a personal skills programme involving the cultivation of life skills such as housing, financial management, and the requirements of civilian life and occupations. Such a programme, or Personal Development Plan (PDP), as Ashcroft (2014) termed it, would enable personnel to become cognisant of the 'rules' and logic of civilian fields throughout their service career. The UK Ministry of Defence recognises this, and work is on-going to develop a similar 'Personal Development Pathway' as a component of their 'New Employment Model'. Our theoretical approach suggests that the resettlement support provided to all service leavers should include training on the differences between military and civilian fields, and in practical terms, how the legacy of military life stays with them when they leave and how they might use this to their advantage. Work placements would also enable service leavers to begin the process of re-mobilising their military cultural capital prior to discharge, and thus enable them to acquire a stronger sense of cultural competence in civilian life.

Whilst these recommendations are strongly substantiated by our theoretical approach, they are not new, and have been stated before (e.g., Ashcroft, 2014; Fossey, 2013; FiMT, 2013). What is needed now are coordinated efforts on the part of governments, businesses, local communities, and the military in order to implement them. Veterans' ambassadors, such as HRH Prince Harry in the UK, may have a role to play in advocating for the changes needed. Building on the success of Prince Harry's initiative, the 'Invictus Games', promoting positive outcomes for wounded, injured and sick veterans, more can be done to support 'ordinary' veterans who have not experienced trauma, but who may require assistance in the process of cultural adaptation and adjusting to the demands of civilian life. Service leavers too cannot be idle in this process. The field to which they will return will not be the same as that which they left to join the military. 'Home' has changed – as families, communities, and nations do change over time – and so has the service person (Schutz, 1945). A high level of

planning and preparation, for months or perhaps years in advance of one's discharge may be required in order to navigate the complexities of this cultural shift with skill and competence.

For researchers, the question of how to support transition and cultural adaptation will no doubt continue. One priority for research should be to explore in detail the process by which the military habitus may evolve as veterans creatively adapt their behaviours to develop cultural competence in civilian life. Our framework suggests that service personnel who are able to negotiate capital within two different regulatory fields to its full advantage will reap the greatest success (Veenstra and Burnett, 2014). There are questions in particular for Early Service Leavers, who are an understudied cohort with regard to transition. One pertinent question may be to what extent the military habitus is embedded prior to discharge for the majority of UK ESLs who do not complete basic training. Understanding at what point one's identification as a soldier begins to take place, and how even a short spell of military life may leave its mark on the habitus, would help to illuminate ESLs' transition journeys and outcomes.

To these suggestions we add two final caveats. First, the Bourdieusian concepts we draw upon are not at all intended to replace the study of real veterans' lives. They are not abstract concepts with which to conduct theoretical exercises; they are practical tools for understanding the situation of the empirical individual and how his or her transition needs can be properly met. Second, applying a Bourdieusian framework needs to acknowledge the nuances of transition where these exist, such as between the different services (Army, Royal Air Force, Royal Navy). While this paper has focused on transition from the perspective of the military as a whole, it may be that cultural and structural differences within individual services (and roles within service) could influence the way in which the legacy of military service expresses itself through the habitus (Higate, 2003).

Conclusion

Using Bourdieusian theory, we have attempted to articulate the challenges of negotiating different military and civilian fields, which, if successfully achieved, would ultimately aid a positive transition. There are distinctive forms of institutionalised cultural capital that are embodied and valued within the military. An understanding of how to mobilise this capital into accepted civilian norms is essential to a 'good' transition, to enhance the possibility of successful employment and personal outcomes. Bourdieu's framework aids our understanding of the transition process by acknowledging that veterans will encounter competing structures, underpinned by dispositions and behaviours within the habitus and subsequent fields. The structural values that exist in the Armed Forces leave their legacy – for good or bad – on veterans. The doxa, or unquestioned behaviours within the Armed Forces community is necessarily different to that in civilian life. Therefore the dominant, masculine habitus that is embedded in military personnel needs to be renegotiated and adjusted in order for a successful transition to occur. It is important for the veteran to recognise that the discharge process may require a significant shift in identity, in order to allow the adaptation from military to civilian habitus. Coordinated efforts on the part of governments, military institutions, local communities and businesses are also required in order to promote positive transition and cultural adaption. Our use of a Bourdieusian framework provides a conceptual underpinning to understand the military-to-civilian transition process, with a practical application. We believe this new way of thinking about transition could enable veterans to take more control of their transition journey and concomitantly advances the theory and application of transition within the current disciplinary landscape.

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[1] For the purposes of this paper, the term 'military' includes the Royal Navy, self-identified as 'the Senior Service' and not, strictly, military.

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[2] See Ahern et al. (2015), Ashcroft (2014), Bergman, Burdett, & Greenberg (2014), Demers (2011), Fossey (2010), Forces in Mind Trust (2013), Ray & Heaslip (2011), Walker (2012)

[3] We use the term 'Service Personnel' to describe those currently in Service or in the transition period prior to leaving the Armed Forces. The term 'veteran' refers to the UK government's definition of ex-Service personnel, being anyone who has served in uniform for at least one day of basic training (Ashcroft, 2014).

[4] See Bergman et al. (2014), Fossey (2010), Iversen et al. (2005)

[5] We believe the conceptual framework we develop below can apply across different contexts, and will aim to note particular instances where this may be the case.

[6] Beyond time spent in the military culture, there may be additional impacts on veterans who experience the legacy of combat. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to review the impact of specific conflict on veterans' transition to civilian life, it is worth noting that the cultural legacy of some conflicts (e.g., Vietnam, Iraq/Afghanistan) have received considerable attention from military sociologists whereas others – in particular the Falklands war have been largely ignored from both the British and Argentinian perspectives. For one recent exception, see Bonnin (2016).

[7] It is noteworthy that most militaries/armies are constituted in a similar way and this has much do to with the persuasive influence of the British colonial legacy.

[8] See Hockey (1986), Woodward & Jenkings (2011), Woodward & Winter (2007)

[9] See Atherton (2009), Caddick, Smith & Phoenix (2015), Godfrey *et al*. (2012), Hale (2008), Higate (2001, 2003), Hockey (2003), Woodward & Winter (2007)

[10] At the time of writing this paper significant change is happening, including the acceptance of transgender personnel into the US military and women into front line combat. It is beyond the scope of this paper to review the implications of these changes with regard to gender hierarchies.

[11] See e.g., Higate & Cameron (2006), Hockey (1986, 2003), Woodward (1998), Woodward & Jenkings (2011)

[12] Whilst space prevents a more nuanced description of the complex notion of habitus (readers may refer to Grenfell, 2012), it is notable that the degree to which one's habitus may be flexible or malleable may relate to myriad factors such as one's class position, capital resources, and the pull of the field and the doxa which shaped the original habitus.

[13] Certain occupational (e.g., other uniformed services) and sporting (e.g., elite competition) fields may share some characteristics with military fields (such as a masculine gender ideology). To this extent, our arguments in this paper will be relevant to other forms of transition. Yet, we maintain there are crucial differences between military and non-military fields which calls for specific attention to be devoted to the implications of moving between them.

[14] The authors have been party to conversations with junior soldiers during recent field visits that reflect these examples.

[15] The transferability (or not) of forms of capital has particular relevance for transition; a point we seek to emphasise throughout.

[16] See e.g., Higate (2013), Lande (2007), Maringira, Gibson, & Richters (2015)

[17] See e.g., Bergman *et al*. (2014), Fossey (2010), FiMT (2013), Pranger, Murphy & Thompson (2009), Ray & Heaslip (2011), Wolpert (2000)

[18] In using the term 'military habitus', we do not propose there to be a single, universal habitus characteristic of military life, and note that important differences will exist between services (Army, Royal Navy, RAF) and roles within the services. Rather, we refer to a basic, general set of shared dispositions and experiences which mark out military life as distinct from other (e.g., civilian) ways of being.

[19] We thank an anonymous reviewer for providing us with this useful phrase.

[20] Skills training workshops are commonly provided to help the veteran transition to the civilian job market; yet such workshops cannot address the cultural transition veterans must make, much less initiate the lengthy period of adjustment required for a transformation in the habitus.

[21] See e.g., Ahern *et al*. (2015), Danish & Antonides (2013), Pranger *et al*. (2009)

[22] Importantly, the degree of 'malleability' may depend on capital availability, such that officers may, for instance, be better positioned to transition successfully than enlisted men (not to mention the social class advantage they also likely possess).

[23] A UK military contractor tasked with providing transition and resettlement support to veterans

[24] Data concerning how companies are delivering on their commitments in the Corporate Covenant are lacking at present, but would constitute a worthwhile topic for future research.