Military Culture, A Cultural Melting Pot

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Duty, Honor, Self-less service
Learning Objectives

- Understand military culture to help foster rapport and enhance care
- Impact of military service on military members and families
- Belief System of military members
- Transition to civilian life
- Demographics
- Interaction with mental health in the military across conflicts
- Types of discharges
- Do’s and Don’t when working with Veterans
Reasons Veterans Join the Military

- Serve my country
- Sense of duty
- Be part of something bigger than myself/my calling
- Family footsteps
- Develop a skill or trade
- Leadership training
- College/Reimbursement
- Travel
- Do something different/break the cultural cycle
- Leave my hometown
- Security/economic independence
- Equal opportunities

The military is seen as a societally sanctioned transformative role for men and is historically viewed as a “rite of passage” or springboard into adulthood, whereas women are less likely expected to serve.

Basic Tenants of Military Culture

- **Duty, Honor, Country**
- The military emphasizes discipline and hierarchy, prioritizes the group over the individual, and uses specific rituals and symbols to convey important meanings and transitions.
- Military law requires commanding officers and those in authority to demonstrate virtue, honor, patriotism, and subordination in all that they do.
- Each branch of service has its own mission
Uniqueness of Military Culture

- Military is unlike any other career and the demands of military life create a unique set of pressures on SM and families.

- Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) or Area of Concentration (AOC) deeply defines person

- Provides a sense of deep commitment to unit and mission at any cost

- Rewards physical fitness and emotional stoicism and anything else is considered a weakness

- Maintenance of good order and discipline requires leadership to resolve any conflict with the SM to protect the mission and unit integrity
  - Fight with spouse
  - Alcohol related event
  - Problem behaviors of children in school
Uniqueness of military culture

- Active duty required to be on duty at a moment’s notice during 24-hour day
- Need permission to do anything beyond normal duties
- Actions of the family reflect directly on the SM
- Military requires teaching of black and white thinking with no room for grey area to help SM survive in combat
  - Go no go
  - Pass or fail
Military Belief System

- Uniformity
- Anonymity
- Depersonalization
- Expendability
- Hard Work
- Boredom
- Teamwork
- Take orders

- Strength over weakness
- No emotion (other than aggression and anger)
- Camaraderie
- Loneliness
- Trust
- Orderliness
- All or None Thinking
Uniformity, Anonymity, Depersonalization, All or None Thinking

“...sir, I can handle your Marine Corps, sir.”

“[The drill instructor] punched the recruit square on the forehead. He swayed but his knees did not give. The recruit had made the mistake of using personal pronouns, which the recruit is not allowed to use when referring to the drill instructor or himself. The recruit is the recruit. The drill instructor is the drill instructor or sir.”

From Anthony Swofford, Jarhead
“If you weren’t humping, you were waiting. I remember the monotony. Digging foxholes. Slapping mosquitoes. The sun and the heat and the endless paddies. Even in the deep bush, where you could die any number of ways, the war was nakedly and aggressively boring. But it was a strange boredom. It was boredom with a twist, the kind of boredom that caused stomach disorders. You’d be sitting at the top of a high hill, and the flat paddies stretching out below, and the day would be calm and hot and utterly vacant, and you’d feel the boredom dripping inside you like a leaky faucet, except it wasn’t water, it was a sort of acid, and with each little droplet you’d feel the stuff eating away at important organs. You’d try to relax. You’d uncurl your fists and let your thoughts go. Well, you’d think, this isn’t so bad. And right then you’d hear gunfire behind you and your nuts would fly up into your throat and you’d be squealing pig squeals. That kind of boredom.”

Tim O’Brien, The Things They Carried
Teamwork and Comradery

“That choreography -- you lay down fire while I run forward, then I cover you while you move your team up -- is so powerful that it can overcome enormous tactical deficits.... The choreography always requires that each man make decisions based not on what’s best for him, but on what’s best for the group. If everyone does that, most of the group survives. If no one does, most of the group dies.

“That, in essence, is combat.”

Sebastian Junger, War
Team Work and Comradery

- “There is no stronger bond between men than those who served in combat”

*Band of Brothers, WWII*
“Brown was shocked that Hampton would admit to being on the verge of tears because she was so tough. The admission made her seem weak and vulnerable. Brown didn’t know of any pilots who would own up to thinking about crying, never mind actually cry. Saying you almost cried was a funny thing to admit, Brown thought at the time. Not only that, but it was a funny thing to feel. Brown thought that way because she, like so many other pilots, trained herself to turn off her emotions. And that works, until someone says there was an aircraft shot down.”

From Kirsten Holmstedt, Band of Sisters- Portrait of American Women in Combat in Iraq
Loneliness

“Delores felt strongly that Army wives had to learn to take responsibility, or they wouldn’t be able to be independent when they returned to civilian life. ‘Figure out how to do for yourself, because your husband is not always going to be there.’ That was Delores’s credo. It was a lesson she knew only too well. She had often been both mother and father to her kids. Ski had missed Cherish’s birth, first birthday, and first Holy Communion; he hadn’t been there for Gary Shane’s high school graduation, or on countless holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. Delores paid all the bills. She didn’t even know if Ski remembered how to write a check. When he was away she mowed the lawn, maintained cars, and ran the household. Wives had no choice but to carry the entire load, just as a single mother would have to do.”

_from Tanya Biank, Army Wives: The Unwritten Code of Military Marriage_
Loneliness Soldier

“The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of War.”

Douglas Macarthur
Contrast with Civilian Life

- Uniqueness
- Individuality
- Choice
- Relaxation
- Luxury
- Emotionality
- Open Lines of Communication
Challenges to Transitioning to Civilian Life

- Draftee vs. volunteer
- Level of combat exposure
- Indirect vs. Direct Combat exposure
- Single vs. multiple deployments
- Reserve/National Guard vs. Active Duty
- Deployed vs. non-deployed

- Male/Female Veteran
- Toxic Leadership
- Branch of service
- Military Sexual Trauma
- Ethnic background
- Type of Military Discharge
- Exposure to Mental Health in the Service
Are all Veteran Experiences the Same?

**Positives**
- Supportive/Fair Leadership
- Pride in service
- Camaraderie
- Teamwork
- Awarded for achievements
- Experiences unlike any other job
- Travel/Deployments
- Physical Fitness

**Negatives**
- Toxic Leadership
- Hostile work environment
- Sexual Harassment
- Sexual Assault
- Viewed as the “weaker” sex
- Prove self consistently
- Travel/Deployments
- Pregnancy
- Single Parenting (more likely to be divorced)
- Family Care Plans/Childcare
- Physical Fitness Standards
- Reintegration
Military Sexual Trauma

- Approximately 9.5%-33% of women Veterans report attempted or completed rape during their military service.
- Approximately 22%-84% of women report experiencing all forms of assault, rape, and harassment during their military service.
- Reports of sexual assault in the Military between 2007 and 2013 increased by 88%.
- Women in military also report higher rates of childhood sexual trauma than nonmilitary women.
- In 2016, 6,300 males reported sexual assault in 2016. Most males will not report sexual assault, they typically see the assault as “hazing”.
- Women who experience MST are 4-9 times more likely to suffer from PTSD compared to female Veterans with no MST.
- Effects of sexual trauma can include physical effects of chronic pain, pelvic pain, menstrual problems, chronic fatigue, headaches, gastrointestinal symptoms, eating disorders, depression, dissociative disorder, personality disorder, substance abuse, panic disorder, and PTSD.
- Women Veterans with MST are more likely to have three mental health diagnoses.
- Women Veterans report sexual assault less and delay the use of health care services more than non Veterans.
Intimate Partner Violence

- Approximately 1 in 4 women in the US experiences IPV during their lifetime
- Approximately 1 in 3 women veterans experience IPV during their lifetime
- “The rates of IPV perpetration among military veterans and active duty servicemen are up to three times higher than those found among civilian samples” (Klostermann, Mignone, Kelley, Musson, & Bohall, 2012)
- Many female Veterans are married to other Veterans or active duty service members
- Active duty service females are less likely to report IPV and more likely to be victims of IPV
- Significant health impacts of IPV are poorer physical health, sleep impairment, chronic pain, concussion, Post Traumatic stress, and alcohol misuse
- The stigma of being thought of as a victim for a female service member is so great that they will not seek help or report IPV
- Health care professionals, including therapists and psychiatrists tend to view IPV as a social problem, therefore they do not ask the questions needed to identify and recognize IPV, nor are they educated in recognizing IPV
2.13 Percentage of Active Duty Enlisted Members and Officers by Service Branch and Gender

This chart presents the percentage of enlisted members and officers by Service branch and gender. Overall, 84.5 percent of Active Duty members are men and 15.5 percent of Active Duty members are women. In comparison, 46.8 percent of the U.S. civilian work force 16 years old and over was female in 2015. The Air Force has the largest percentage of female Service members (19.1%), while the Marine Corps has the smallest percentage of female Service members (7.7%).

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.
2.19 ♠ Race of Active Duty Members (N=1,301,443)

This pie chart shows the distribution of Active Duty members by race. Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty members (68.7%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 17.3 percent. Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander members make up 4.2 percent, 1.3 percent, and 1.1 percent of Active Duty members, respectively. Over three percent (3.2%) of Active Duty members report themselves as Multi-racial.

* The Army does not report “Multi-racial.”

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2015)
2.20 - Race of Active Duty Enlisted Members (N=1,070,653)

This pie chart shows the distribution of Active Duty enlisted members’ race. Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty enlisted members (66.8%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 19.1 percent. Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander enlisted members make up 4.1 percent, 1.4 percent, and 1.2 percent, respectively. Over three percent (3.6%) of Active Duty enlisted members report themselves as Multi-racial.

* The Army does not report “Multi-racial.”

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2015)
2.21 Race of Active Duty Officers (N=230,790)

This pie chart shows the distribution of Active Duty officers’ race. Members who report themselves as White make up the highest percentage of Active Duty officers (77.2%), while members who report themselves as Black or African American make up 9.1 percent. Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander officers make up 4.7 percent, 0.6 percent, and 0.5 percent of Active Duty officers, respectively. Over one percent (1.5%) of Active Duty officers report themselves as Multi-racial.

* The Army does not report “Multi-racial.”
Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.
Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2015)
2.27 Percentage of Active Duty Racial Minorities and Non-minorities by Service Branch and Pay Grade

This table presents the percentage of Active Duty members who are racial minority and non-minority by Service branch and pay grade. Overall, racial minority members represent nearly one-third (31.3%) of Active Duty personnel.

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<tr>
<td>E1-E4</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>42.5%</td>
<td>57.5%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
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<td>E5-E6</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
<td>65.7%</td>
<td>43.5%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
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<td>E7-E9</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
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<td>W1-W5</td>
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<td>66.7%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
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<td>27.4%</td>
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<td>O1-O3</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
<td>74.3%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
<td>78.0%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
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<td>O4-O6</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>75.5%</td>
<td>18.1%</td>
<td>81.9%</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
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<td>20.1%</td>
<td>79.9%</td>
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<td>O7-O10</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
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<td>12.3%</td>
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<td>7.1%</td>
<td>92.9%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>88.4%</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32.9%</strong></td>
<td><strong>67.1%</strong></td>
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<td><strong>31.3%</strong></td>
<td><strong>68.7%</strong></td>
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* The Air Force does not have warrant officers.

Note: Racial minority includes Black or African American, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi-racial, and Other/Unknown.

Note: Percentages may not total to 100 due to rounding.

Source: DMDC Active Duty Military Personnel Master File (September 2015)
Exposure to Mental Health in the Military

- WWII- Psychiatrists part of mental health screening programs during induction to military
  - Military did not deploy MH in to combat during first two years of war because they thought screening program would eliminate MH difficulties
  - 1943 active duty psychiatrists used sodium panthenol injections to help “shell shocked” to assist them with immediately processing combat experiences
  - Division Psychiatrists and Social Science Research
  - Concept of “shell shock” started in WWI

- Korean and Vietnam- Division psychiatrists provided opportunity for rest and relaxation in restoration areas and tours of duty were limited to primarily 12 months
Exposure to Mental Health in Modern Military

- Active duty and reserve/national guard mental health providers in all branches of service
- In the Army:
  - Brigade (BDE) mental health providers, typically at least one psychologist and one social worker for the entire brigade (i.e., typically 5,000 Soldiers).
  - Combat Stress Control Teams
  - Division Psychiatrist
  - Critical Incident Stress Debriefings
  - Civilian mental health providers that work for DOD Military Treatment Facility
- Similar in the other branches of service, but may be called a different title
- Common terms for military mental health professionals
  - “DOC”
  - “Wizard”
Mental Health and Administrative Discharges

- Medical Discharge for major Axis I condition (i.e. PTSD, depression, bipolar disorder, psychosis, etc).

- Administrative Separations non-medical discharge
  - Chapter 5-17 Personality Disorder
  - Ch 14- Patterns of misconduct
  - Ch 13- Unsatisfactory performance
Barriers to obtaining treatment while serving in the military

- Military Culture by nature fosters stigma for medical including mental health
- Concern about impact on career, deployability, promotion
- Labels and stereotypes
- Military training impacts course of treatment, particularly the ability to fully engage and complete treatments unless a SM is in the medical board process.
Leaving the Military

- **Military Retirement**
  - Medical Retirement
  - 20-year or more service Retirement

- **Military Discharges** - All military members receive a type of discharge whether they retire or not. Type of discharge indicates characterization of service. Separation from service may be voluntary or involuntary.
  - Involuntary separation - not progressing in rank, separation due to medical discharge, poor performance, or patterns of misconduct.
  - Voluntary separation - individual has chosen to separate from the active military at the end of their active duty contract.
    - Typically active service commitment is 3 years active and 5 years in a reserve capacity until they are completely discharged to receive an honorable discharge.
Leaving Military with Medical Discharge

- Medical Retirement: When leaving with a medical discharge SM has been found unfit for duty based on failing medical condition.
  - Placed on TDRL for a period of 5 years where the individual is brought back yearly for evaluations.
  - If disability is determined to be permanent and rated at 30% or higher by military, individual placed on Permanent Disability Retirement List (PDRL).
  - If disability is assessed as non-disabling any longer veteran may be brought back on active duty for remainder of their contract.
Types of Discharges

- **Entry Level Separation**
  - Military member unable to handle rigors of military life or very poor performance, this discharge can only occur during first 180 days of service.

- **Honorable**
  - Received good ratings throughout active service without significant issues of misconduct.

- **General Discharge, Under Honorable Conditions**
  - Military members performance is satisfactory, but not all expectations were met for good conduct.
    - Typically this will only with Chapter 14 separation if a military member completed several years of good service, but are being separated under patterns of misconduct for something that happened later in their career.
Types of Discharges Continued:

- **Other Than Honorable Conditions**
  - Most severe type of administrative discharge usually relates to significant infraction: security violations, patterns of violence, conviction in civilian court that would lead to jail time.
  - Most lose all benefits, however, VA care is now being allowed for emergency medical or mental health treatment.

- **Bad Conduct Discharge**
  - Only given to enlisted service members who have been convicted of a crime and sentenced in a court martial proceeding. This usually incurs military prison time.

- **Dishonorable Discharge**
  - Charged with reprehensible behavior in court martial proceedings, usually related to offenses of murder or sexual assault. May incur jail time, no benefits awarded.

- **Officer Discharge**
  - Officer can be discharged for negative behavior and violations of military code. However, they are only given a dismissal notice, but still retain rank. This is similar to dishonorable discharge of enlisted.
  - *All of these discharges an individual will likely lose VA and educational benefits*
Do’s and Don’ts when working with Veterans

**DO’s**

- Take time to learn what the Veteran did in the service and how that impacts them today, Don’t Assume!
- Thank them for their service when opportunity arises, don’t assume they want to be thanked.
- Listen non-judgmentally with empathic stance and take time to get into their world.
- Ensure Veterans and families are aware of all resources available to them.
- Help Veterans learn to advocate for themselves from a strengths perspective, Remember they are used to only doing things when told.

**Don’ts**

- Don’t try to talk the talk; let them know that you are open to their experience without “proving” yourself.
- Provide your opinions of a particular war.
- Assume that Veterans serving within the same time period had a similar military experience.
- Don’t assume Veterans of the same gender had similar military experiences.

Fostering a Bicultural Civilian Soldier/Identity

- Acknowledging important skills learned during military service
- Honoring important relationships while in the service
- Moving toward identity integration individually, with non-military friends, and family
- Allowing for discussions of increased engagement with chosen values through greater awareness of cultural norms and flexibility in enacting them
Service Members from Various Conflicts
Questions
References

References Continued:


