



Kristina Fleuty //

I wonder, does engaging in writing practices offer any health benefits specifically to the veteran population? Furthermore, if there is evidence of health benefits; does any of this evidence offer insight into how the individual comes to terms with their changing bodily and psychological identity during the transition process? I would like to conduct a more in-depth review of existing studies and secondary literature that explores creative writing and bibliotherapeutic practices in relation to a veteran cohort. I would like here to explore some preliminary ideas.

To delve into this further, I need to consider anew what it means to be a part of the military and then to later transition out of the military. What is transition? A key report on transition defines it as the period of reintegration into civilian life after leaving the Armed Forces (Forces in Mind Trust, 2013). Mostly, transition is discussed in terms of what support an individual might need in order to find somewhere to live, find new employment, manage their finances, gain further qualifications and adapt to 'every-day' life as we in the civilian world generally understand it. This report does discuss identity and states that being able to develop a new civilian identity is an important aspect of transition and will 'inevitably be bound up with emotional health' (Forces in Mind Trust, 2013, p. 54). Nonetheless, focus remains on how civilian identity is reconfigured through finding success with the more practical aspects of transition, such as establishing a career.

Recent research draws attention to the importance of understanding the enduring influence of military culture when an individual leaves and returns to a civilian environment that was once familiar but is no longer so (Cooper et al., 2016). Irrespective of finding a new job, leaving behind the uniform and moving house, what are the more subtle enduring effects on the individual? Military life is described as giving the individual a sense of purpose, with the military identity as a 'powerful and all-encompassing feature of life in service' (Forces in Mind Trust, 2013, p. 53-54). Anecdotally I have heard former military personnel talk of training 'breaking' them and piecing them back together into the military way of thinking, ready to work as an effective team and with

the strong bond of camaraderie as a driving force. This suggests the military is more than a career, it is a complete way of life. We might thus understand how it would mean a huge identity shift to separate the self from the 'military way' when it comes to an end. Research has begun to discuss how the military legacy endures after Service, with military culture continuing to shape the individual post-Service (Cooper et al., 2016). This research begins to recognise the nuances of transition as more than the process of organising the practical aspects of existence.

I am not suggesting that veterans are broken people emerging from the military with no semblance of self-identity remaining. Far from it, research actually suggests that most people make a smooth and positive transition out of the military (Ashcroft, 2014). However, there is something intriguing about how the individual begins to understand themselves when they separate from the military and just how difficult the 'hidden' aspects of transition might be to come to terms with. For example, how does someone associate with a civilian body that no longer derives status through uniform?

This sense of bodily transition could be further complicated, for example, if someone comes back from Service with an injury, either visible or invisible. It may be that that injury triggers the transition process before the individual has had opportunity to prepare. Research refers to this kind of 'forced' transition as being potentially abrupt, complicated and traumatic (Cooper et al., 2016). I discussed medical transitions in a previous article and the use of language in relation to the injured body in *Metaphor, Medical Decisions and the Military Mindset*. How does sustaining an injury whilst serving add a further dimension to the transition process and the coming to terms with a physically altered body? Irrespective of circumstance, there seems a need to reclaim aspects of the bodily and psychological self that contribute to an individual's sense of identity.

There is a long tradition of writers using language as a way to establish, recreate or define their identity. So, why choose veterans as a cohort of interest to explore in relation to writing practices? Could the discipline of writing offer not just a way to understand but a way *to* transition? Becoming a military veteran signals a unique type of transition; identity shifts in interesting ways that we are still trying to fathom.

Writing practices offer a way for the individual to reformulate those more subtle aspects of identity; the way someone feels about their transition; a way to organise thoughts about an individual's transition through the physical act of writing. Writing engages body and mind simultaneously. I think back to the many people who have 'written themselves into being', such as Frederick Douglass, learning to write and literally constructing himself an identity through words in *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*. I am keen to point out that these stories and circumstances are very different, but there is something shared in committing to engaging with the written word and producing a written account as an act of 'creating' something; the individual crafting for themselves a way to see anew. Enabling the combining of the psychological and physical adjustment of transition. This is something for which there is a lot more to be explored.

References

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