Exploring Cultural Capital in Agricultural Education Spaces that Provide Training to Military Veterans

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Presentation Overview

- Introduction
- Background and Literature
- Theoretical Framework
- Methodology
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- Recommendations
'Rarely, if ever in ordinary life are people required to focus, with such purity, everything in them-mind, emotions, physical strength, perception, and skill- on the present moment with so many others... Euphoria [of war] is addicting and self-sacrifice is transcending; but equilibrium is life-sustaining and reciprocity is the heart of love” (Brock & Lettini, 2012).
There are **challenges**, including symptoms of PTSD and moral injury, are part of this **transitioning process** (PTSD, 2014, Brock & Lettini, 2012).

Many of today’s military clinical treatments do not include assistance in the formation of **specific cultural, organizational, and occupational identity** (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013).

**Critical connections** with **military symbolism** may serve an important role for **educational success, civilian identity, and entry to a civilian society** (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013).

Growth continues with military veterans seeking **careers in agriculture** (USDA, 2014)
Research Questions

What is the role of adult agricultural education programs in transforming a military veteran’s cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?

- How are veterans with moral injury and PTSD symptoms socialized through their new role of farmer?

- How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an adult agricultural education program?

- How (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in agriculture assist in forming a civilian identity?
Cultural Capital Theory

- **Cultural capital** is the collection of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that one uses to demonstrate their cultural competence, and standing in a society (Bourdieu, 1974).

- **Cultural Capital Theory**- established by Bourdieu (1974) to analyze these relationships between actions and social structures that impact cultures (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).

- Values power of symbolic representation of each.
Symbolic Interactionism Theory

- Explains social behavior in terms of how people interact with each other through the use of symbols (Blumer, 1969)

- People respond to symbols based on the meanings they have for specific symbols; and these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretation (Blumer, 1969)

- Uses language or symbolic inter-changes to make and revise meaning of their self and culture (Prus, 1996).
Theoretical Framework

Blumer (1969)
Bourdieu (1986)
This agricultural farming center is a non-profit organization designed to educate emerging farmers on techniques that are needed to be successful in pest control, soil management, seed selection, marketing, and farm business planning.

This veteran farming program is a 12 month program designed for veterans who want to explore agriculture, it is ran like the military reserves and meets one weekend a month plus, requires a 40-hour service learning project.
Methodology
- Qualitative
- Ethnographic bounded case study as described in (Creswell, 1998)

Methods
- Observer-participant observations (4 months)
- Focus group (1 FG; n=12)
- Semi-structured interviews (n=12) with photos
21 initial participants
14 agreed to participate in the observational study
12 participated in the focus group discussion

- 7 males/ 5 females
- 7 Army, 3 USMC, 2 Air Force
- 3 African American, 3 Latino, 7 Caucasian

12 completed interviews
Major Themes

- Situating Participant’s Military Identity
- Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming
- Influence on Societal Mobility
- Transitioning of Service
- Agricultural Identity Formation
Utilized to understand program participant **background** and participation in the program

**This incorporated**
- Use of physical objects to represent military identity
- Use of language to represent military identity
- Expressing military identity through comradery and team work
- Recognition of military identity by self and others
- Symbolic military identities through military behaviors
- Military influence on identity formation after discharge
- Transitioning challenges
Physical Objects “The flag means so much to me. I have been in situations all over the world where you see the flag and it gives you context that this is who we are and this is what it is all about. It represents are service, our brotherhood, our home, our family” (George, OVFP participant)

Military Influence “The military made me stronger and made me look at life different. I had a purpose in the Army. I want that purpose again.” (Luz, OVFP participant)

Language “I use these words because they are a second language to me, it is no longer different, they are one in the same and this is how I talk. It is who I am. It's is my culture.” (Rob, OVFP participant)
Q. 1: The military veteran program participants utilized a peer group of military veterans to socialize within the adult agriculture education program.
Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming

- Shared experiences in the agricultural education program design
- Veteran symbolism in the agricultural education program design
Veteran Symbolism in this Educational Program

**Symbolic Military Behavior** “This program reminds me of the military. Putting up the hoop house was probably the most military thing I have done without actually being in the military. We were outdoors, they structured it this way so that is easily identifiable and with patterns. The communication lines were very comfortable for me and allow me to participate in it much more.” (Ethan, OVFP participant)

**Military Symbolism through Patriotic Imagery** “We are training military veterans to be farmers on land that the world's most famous military veteran [George Washington] fought for and once cultivated. And there is poetry in telling the story, and I think that it gives our program some gravitas. And I know that the vets dig it.” (Kate, SAFC Program director)
“I chose this picture because it was our first day at Operation Veteran Farming program. We were at Mount Vernon and there were the flags in the front of the room, stars on the floor, an eagle in the back of the room, and pictures of George and Martha Washington on the walls. It felt very patriotic and I knew I was at the right place!” (Luz, OFVP participant)
Q:2: Social patterns changed as veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program.
Influence on Societal Mobility

- Facilitating purpose
- Civilian connection
- Knowledge and skill obtainment
- Recognizing military attributes
Connection to a new Purpose “Operation Veteran Farming program helped everyone recognize that we served your country, now we're helping the people where we live locally with the food products that are made because everybody's gotta eat. And I think with that, that is kind of a service that is a recognized service.” (George, OVFP participant)
Connection to a civilian Job  “This [Operation Veteran Farming Reserve Program] has been that security blanket. The job that I am doing came directly from [program director]. Before, I was kind of more of a recluse in the civilian communities.”  (Kylee, OVFP participant)

Civilian Connection  “I noticed the civilians around this program are starting to see that veterans perform well and that we fit well for the needs in farming. I am not just a veteran with PTSD anymore.”  (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming program)
Q:3: These veterans reinterpreted military symbols in this agricultural education context to assist them in forming a new cultural identity.
Transitioning of Service

- Redefining Service
- New mission
“Just the idea of service definitely appeals to me. I want to find a way to give back. I think it's through this thing, agriculture. But when I see the American flag and I think about service and how we're doing something for this country that others are not doing, it motivates me. I mean, if you think about how few people join the military and then how few people are farming, it just definitely connects to me. I have to do something more.”

(Luz, OVFP participant)

[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “George and Rob discussed that they were excited to provide food security.
“..one of the main reasons I joined the military was because of my dedication to the family... The farming and the military are family traditions.” (Kylee, OVFP participant)
“The program allowed me to feel safe with other veterans while at the same time learning what it takes to be successfully and honor my family’s long tradition of farming.”

(Kylee, OVFP participant)
Agricultural Identity Formation

- New farmer identity
- New civilian identity
Agricultural Identity Formation

**New Farmer Identity** “I think for me this program has helped me change from that of a military personnel to that of a farmer. My mission changed from the mission of protecting my position of danger to the mission of service through growing food and harvesting food for others.” (Rob, OVFP participant)

**New Civilian Identity** “This program has helped me to find my purpose and redefined it. I think because of this program, I have more confidence as a civilian.” (Kylee, OVFP participant)
"Wow that thing took a bullet for me." So, a bullet raced across my back and it was so close ... it was probably less than inches from my spine... There's this tidal wave of emotion that sometimes is uncontrollable and it sometimes I have a good handle on it and other times I'll just start bawling... and I don't know why but the point is that's just who I am. That's just a part of me” (George, OVFP participant)
“...here we are on this adventure, on this odyssey that we're starting up on our own. We're getting educated. I mean I love it... and to live this next chapter of my life here, the way I want to live it... This has been like a blessing, it's like a present” (George, OVFP participant)
“This picture is me in Iraq and I was talking to woman in the village. I was having a good time doing what I was doing.” (Jade, OVFP participant)
“This picture is me clearing out my yard and preparing for a garden next year. I am holding a giant spider. Which I would not usually do, but I am doing it now. Being a farmer makes me feel good.” (Jade, OVFP participant)
Adult Agricultural Education Program for Military Veterans

Created Social Mobility and Identity

Q1: New Habitus Formed
Q2: New Cultural Capital Formed
Q3: A New Field created

Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming
- Shared Experiences
- Symbolism

Influence on Societal Mobility
- Knowledge and Skills
- Purpose
- Attributes
- Connection

Transition of Service
- Redefining Service
- New Mission

Agricultural Identity
- New Farmer Identity
- New Civilian Identity

- Eased PTSD and Moral Injury
- Increased Resilience

- Assisted with acclimation into a civilian Community
Conclusions
Summary

- This program provided shared experiences and understanding that is often absent from clinical services (Albertson, Irving, & Best, 2015).
- Participants indicated that the use of familiar military symbolism allowed them to connect and participate in this program.
- Interactions increased between veteran and nonveterans as the program progressed.
- The program provided patriotic symbolic purpose.
- The use of such symbolism is in turn, being used to create non-military cultural capital and identity.
Recommendations for Practice

A need for educational programs to incorporate:

- The creation of a veteran specific agricultural education community
- Use of familiar military symbols and language in an agricultural education context
- Use of symbolic military educational practices
- Facilitate connections with civilians
References


THANK YOU!  
Any Questions?