

***A TRANSITIONAL NARRATIVE OF MILITARY IDENTITY:
ERIC'S STORY***

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Abstract. Military culture shapes a narrative military identity which gives rise to a military I-position of the self. This may become a dominant voice in the dialogical self. As military personnel leave active duty and begin the transition to civilian life their personal narrative as a military professional becomes disrupted. Additionally, the transition introduces new concepts of who they are into the personal narrative and the self. This may affect the dialogue of the self, as new and old I-positions do not necessarily share the same desires and needs. By using a narrative approach with a dialogical framework this study aims to understand in what way such a transition might affect a subject's self. The findings suggest that the transition creates decentralizing movements of the self, which are in need of centralization, integration and improved dialogue.

Keywords: dialogical self, I-positions, military identity, narrative identity, transition

Military culture shapes a military story of who I am among service members. This military story serves as a narrated military identity and it also creates a specific military I-position to the multiplicity of self. Such a military I-position may become the dominant voice of the dialogical self. When military personnel leave active duty and begin the transition to civilian life, their personal narrative as a military professional becomes disrupted. This transition forces the narrative of identity to change, as the individual develops a new story to address both who and where they are. Additionally, it introduces new concepts of who they are into the personal narrative and the self. The dialogical self is affected by such a process, as the new and old I-positions do not necessarily share the same desires and needs. The transitional process may in fact start a decentralizing movement of the self, which impairs or even disconnects the dialogical capacity (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). The self may need to reorganize I-positions in the service of integration and centralization and for the purpose of restoring the dialogical capacity of the self. Such a process may support the innovation of the self (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007).

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The purpose of this article is to use one empirical case study to explore and describe what happens to the self during the transition from active duty into the civilian population. The article will utilize a narrative approach with a dialogical framework. The article addresses one particular research question: What happens to the self during the transition from active duty to civilian life as accounted for in Eric's story? The following sub-questions will inform the analysis.

What is Eric's military story?

What is Eric's story of transition?

What happens to Eric's self during this process?

The article begins with an introduction and continues with the method, results, discussion and conclusion sections.

A Literature Review of Military Culture, Identity and Transition

From the middle of the twentieth century onward, many attempts have been made to describe features of the military culture. Many researchers within the sociological and psychological field agree that a common thread of the military culture is a collective and anti-individualistic perspective, which places combat buddies and the group first and foremost, since camaraderie is reinforced at every turn (Boose, 1993; French, 2005; Goldstein, 2001; Huntington, 1957; Verrips, 2006; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). Deep bonds and relationships develop between military personnel through their service, and these bonds are rarely found outside of the military culture (Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Sørensen, 2011; Verrips, 2006). Actions and attitudes of loyalty, duty and even self-sacrifice are manifested among military personnel (Bragin, 2010; Goldstein, 2001). Using theological terminology it could be said that the members of the group become sacred to one another and are even worth dying for (Lunde, 2009). During this process soldiers and officers learn to suppress their individual needs in favour of the requirements of the collective group (Ben-Ari, 1998; Hall, 2012a). Due to this strong military culture many researchers suggest that no one leaves active duty unchanged and that entry into the military quickly begins to change the individual's life and their perception of their self (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Cabrera, Figley, & Yarvis, 2012; Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2012; Devries, Hughes, Watson, & Moore, 2012; Hall, 2012b; Kümmel, 2011; Wertsch, 1991).

Boot camp, field exercises, mission training, combat, camaraderie, unit cohesion and operationalized values (i.e., loyalty, discipline, obedience, endurance) are all examples of military cultural phenomena which contextually design and shape military identity (Haaland 2009, 2011; Huntington, 1957; Janowitz, 1960; Kümmel, 2011; Mäkinen, 2011; Rosenberg, 1993; Shields, 2011; Spector-Mersel, 2012). Recently, some researchers have suggested that military identity is learned and performed. The important components of this military self-identity are competence and expertise in

professional skills, camaraderie and a fictive historical kinship with previous service members (Thornborrow & Brown, 2009; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011).

The transition and reintegration into civilian life has the potential to become a challenge for military personnel due to their strong learned military self-identity (Beder, 2012; Bragin, 2010; Bryan & Morrow, 2011; Edström, Lunde, & Haaland Matlary, 2009; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011; Moore, 2012; Tsai, Harpaz-Rotem, Pietrzak, & Southwick, 2012; Verey & Smith, 2012; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). However, little attention has been directed to exploring and describing the average service member's transition into civilian life, since most research focuses on service members with psychiatric diagnoses, such as Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI), or related symptoms.

Only a handful of researchers have focused on the average transition and these researchers share a common thread throughout their conclusions (Buell, 2010; Drops, 1979; Savion, 2009; Yanos, 2004). Self-identity issues and the reconstruction of identity are of concern for many service members throughout their transition into civilian life. None of the previous researchers have engaged in research from either a narrative approach or within a dialogical framework.

Narrative Shape: A Multiplicity of the Self

Through life narratives which have different content (i.e., moral, behaviour, theories), forms (i.e., written, oral) and channels of distribution (i.e., television, film, music, books, institutions, family) a certain construction of the self will form. This suggests that the self is built-up through cultural and subcultural narratives within society. Our self may be understood as a "society of the mind", consisting of narratives which fill the self with heterogeneity and tension. As complex as society is, the self is equally complex (Hermans, 2001).

Cultural and subcultural narratives will intertwine in the shaping of the self (Crossley, 2000; Ganzevoort, 2014; Mishler, 2004; Ricoeur, 1998; Sarbin, 1986; Scheibe, 1986). Therefore, cultural and subcultural narratives within a society speak through the personal narrative. This creates a self made up of a complex chorus of stories or voices, which could be presented as the multiplicity of the self. The mixture and disposition of narratives within the self may be of a variety which implies that the individual is the original author of its composition. In other words, cultural narratives speaking up in the self are always to some extent personal appropriations of narratives from society.

As a personal narrative shapes the self, this will give birth to a variety of I-positions of the self. Within narrative terminology an I-position is understood as a specific voice which creates a certain story of who I am. There are two types of I-

positions, those linked to the internal and those to the external domain of the self (Hermans, 2001, 2008; Hermans, Kempen, & Van Loon, 1992).

I-positions within the internal domain of the self are located inside of a person (i.e., I as ambitious, I as an enjoyer of life). I-positions within the external domain of the self are located outside of the person (i.e., my children, my work) but are really part of the self. Given the basic assumption of the extended self, the other is not outside of the self but rather an intrinsic part of it (Day & Jesus, 2013). “There is not only the actual other outside of the self, but also the imagined other who is entrenched as the other-in-the-self” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010: 7). The sum of these I-positions constitute the position repertoire of the multiplicity of the self.

Even though the self is composed of multiple I-positions, unity is still a central concept. Unity is achieved through the composite self. Unity and continuity are articulated by attributing I, me or mine to positions, and even if they are contradictory, they belong to the self in the extended sense of the term (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

A Dialogical Self

The composite self operates as an agent promoting integration between decentralizing and centralizing movements of the self (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). This movement of the self could be understood as a dynamic process of positioning and counter-positioning between I-positions. When an internal or external I-position increases in density and heterogeneity, the composite self may act in the service of integration of diverse positions (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Such a process may be of a more or less dialogical character. The dialogical process between I-positions may be highly flexible and democratic, or bound under a dominant I-position, where monologue becomes the hallmark of the self. The capacity of a dialogical self is directly linked to our society (Hermans & Dimaggio, 2007). If society does not harbour, approve and stimulate dialogue, this will have a corresponding impact on the capacity of the dialogical self, since our self is heavily influenced by society.

The dialogue of the self may be conducted between two internal I-positions (i.e. I as responsible agrees with I as ambitious), between internal and external or extended I-positions (i.e. I as ambitious disagree with colleagues at work) or between two external I-positions (i.e. the way my colleagues got into a conflict shaped the way I communicate with my colleagues).

A person may have the capacity to assume a meta-position (or meta-cognitive activity), which enables the self to leave specific I-positions and to take a bird’s-eye perspective and consider different positions simultaneously (Hermans, 2013; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). From a meta-position one can “take a broader array of specific I-positions into account and have an important executive function in the process

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of decision making” (Hermans, 2013: 86). The ability to take a meta-position facilitates the continuity, coherence and organization of the self from a spatial view.

As new situations in life are encountered, the self may require reorganization or innovation. “In the case of a transition, the self is confronted with a new, unfamiliar or even threatening situation that requires an adaption or reorganization of the self” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010: 239). This may be made possible through promoter-positions, which are innovators of the self par excellence. Promoter-positions produce and organize different I-positions on a temporal level in order to allow innovation of the self as a whole. Real, remembered, anticipated or imaginary significant others may function as promoters, and promoters may be located within the internal and/or external domain (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010).

As life is lived, the dialogical process may experience friction at some point, as the conflicting I-positions clash due to divergent desires and needs. Such a situation may radically decrease or even disconnect the dialogical process. However, the development of a third position may bridge such divergence or conflicts. A third position has the potential to unify two conflicting positions without denying or removing their differences (Buitelaar, 2014). Such a development may result in a powerful third position which derives psychological energy from two dominant I-positions, as well as reactivating the dialogical capacity within the individual.

The dialogical self also has the potential to engage a coalition of positions, which may work together to cooperate and support each other. Depending on a specific life event and its impact on the dialogical self, a coalition may form and cooperatively act due to the desires, motives and interests of these I-positions. Such a coalition may become dominant and could potentially decrease the capacity for dialogue, or it could promote innovation of the self due to the necessity of addressing change.

Method

Eric is one of the twenty informants within an on-going Ph.D. project which started during the summer of 2013. The working name of the project, which reflects the overall research purpose, is *Existential and religious dimensions in identity reconstruction among Swedish military personnel during the process of becoming civilians*. The design of the project is longitudinal, employing a qualitative and narrative approach. Every informant is supposed to be interviewed annually over three years, as they leave active duty to become civilians.

The Informant

Eric (who goes by another name in real life) volunteered through a snowball sampling method and was informed about the study by a letter of information (Noy, 2008). This letter was distributed by email and Eric had to complete a response letter and return it by email. This also served as the informed consent agreement. In the

response letter the participant had to suggest a time and place to conduct the interviews. Some of the narrated accounts, as well as Eric's real name, have been left out or slightly altered in this article to protect the participant's anonymity.

Interview Methodology

The interview conducted with Eric was based on a semi-structured design in order to cover topics relevant to the research purpose (Kvale, 2007; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; van den Brand, Hermans, Scherer-Rath, & Verschuren, 2014). The questions were designed to open up topics and allow the informant to construct answers in ways that he found meaningful (Bruner, 1990; Riessman, 1993; Webster & Mertova, 2007). The questions were formulated as open questions and the interview started with the question: "If you think a while, in what way would you describe your life or service as a soldier and military technician?" Through this approach the informant was encouraged to tell his own story in his own way (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Crossley, 2000). The topics covered were: Military Story, Story of Transition, Relationships, Identity, and Existential Concerns.

In addition to the fact that I conducted the interview as a researcher with a stated research purpose, the informant also knew that I am a former military officer. This implies that I have an inside as well as an outside perspective. In the eyes of the informant I am a person who has served and transitioned into civilian life, and this commonality made it easy to communicate. We share a common military background and established a sense of basic trust throughout the interview (Mishler, 1986, 2004).

Transcribing

In transcribing, the spoken word has been transferred into written text, as this gives an authentic sense of the interview. However, the transcription process can potentially make it more difficult for the reader to understand and interpret Eric's answers. To respect the dignity of the informant and preserve clarity extended voice sounds such as "ah" or "eh" and instances when the informant repetitively repeated himself have been condensed into just one expression.

Analytical Methodology

A narrative approach is a productive and qualitative lens used when narrowing in on empirical issues of identity in lived life (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2002). The process of narrative analysis is an inductive inquiry and the methodological principle is built around the interview. A complete transcript was made and used in close re-listening and re-reading evaluations paralleled with narrative analysis through sub-questions.

The narrative approach is influenced by the work of McAdams (1988, 1997, 2013) and others. Narrative and story are used interchangeably. The dialogical framework can enrich and provide narrative analysis with an elaborated theory of the

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self, which makes interpretation of the analysis more subtle (Hermans, 2008). From here on the purpose is to present the analytical methodology.

Every story told is a self-representation; therefore, personal narratives are identity claims (McAdams, 2013; Mishler, 1986). “We express, display, make claims for who we are – and who we would like to be – in the stories we tell and how we tell them” (Mishler, 2004: 19). Narrative identity is especially attuned to I-positions of the self and involves the ways a person narrates who s/he is. I suggest that the empirical story of who I am is a mirror of the theoretical idea of a dialogical self. Depending on audience, time, place and situation due to a dialogical self in action, a particular I-position may narrate and perform a particular narrated identity of the individual (Crites, 1986; Mancuso, 1986; McAdams, 1988; Sarbin, 1986). During a particular situation the multiplicity of the self may narrate parallel and poly-vocal accounts of who I am (Hermans, 2013; Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). This implies that a personal narrative told by a dialogical and multiple self is multi-layered with numerous plotlines (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; McAdams, 1997, 2013; Mishler, 2004; Riessman, 1993). The challenge of many I-positions of the self is narratively solved through the distinction between character and story. “The many are the main characters; the one is the story within which the characters are given form, function, and voice” (McAdams, 1997: 118). This implies that within the multiplicity of the self I-positions give voice to different characters of the individual who become united through a personal narrative. The personal narrative, which consists of many characters or I-positions, is the empirical composite term of the theoretical idea of a dialogical self.

In this manner, both internal I-positions and external I-positions create multiple plotlines and characters with different desires and needs in the story of who I am. These I-positions may be closely intertwined and dialogical, or they may be in opposition and conflict and thus impair the dialogue. The sum of these internal and external I-positions is a position-repertoire presented in a multi-layered story of who I am.

Results

Eric, 26 yrs. Navy

He is trained as a military technician and is a sergeant (Other Ranks 5) attached to the operative field. He has participated in several types of international military missions in a variety of geographical areas on sea and land. The interview was conducted three months after he had left active duty. Eric still performs minor educational tasks for the Swedish Armed Forces. He has devoted almost five years of his life to the service of the Swedish Armed Forces. The interview took place in November 2013, and by that time he had begun civilian studies at a University. The interview lasted one hour, 41 minutes and 46 seconds. Eric selected a café for the interview in the centre of a big Swedish city.

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Military story

Eric grew up close to a Swedish regiment. In his younger years he participated in the youth activities offered by the Swedish Armed Forces. The military instructors inspired him, and he believes that was of great significance in his decision to choose a professional military path as he grew older. Eric completed his conscription when he was twenty years old as a military technician in the Navy. He was highly motivated, efficient, never said “no” to assignments and always met deadlines. He received high grades and recommendations, as he completed his conscription.

I remember when I left my military service, or my conscription I got incredibly good grades. I got Yes, 9, 9 [Eric is silent for a while] and that was the first time in, I don't think anyone previously got that from the, eh, technical officer which we had. It was a huge budget cut that year. There was no great ambition, but, I was evaluated after reaching a much higher personal quality, or that is, I got great evaluation and recommendations, based on my service, eh, and my technical officer, who was the most competent of the ship I had worked with, was, eh, was so incredibly satisfied. It was such an amazing feeling, that is, a confirmation that you had done something great, something more than expected. That was fantastic, that is, in the early days of service.

Soon he completed his first mission. Eric grew very comfortable with and accustomed to the military system and how it works. He easily took command in the military context, made decisions and led by example. He liked the structure. Soon he participated in a second mission. Eric was employed by the Armed Forces from mission to mission. In between missions he worked at other military assignments. Eric's military career progressed throughout the missions and he attained position related ranks, which were not possible to receive at home in the regular system as Other Ranks (1-6). Eric views his military service as incredibly instructive, challenging and developmental from a personal and professional perspective. He believes that he could not have achieved such a degree of development elsewhere. He is proud of what he has achieved. He especially remembers the heavy workload in Afghanistan, working with great military colleagues and a difficult break up with his girlfriend.

We broke up during my second tour and it, that crisis was actually rather big [Eric says with an emotional tone] how it happened and no matter how you try you can't save it. The more you talk the worse it gets, you just get into a conflict. I was sad and upset. I had to hide it inside me, to put it into the box in order to function on duty. I had to continue the mission. They asked me if I wanted to go home but I said “No, I don't want to go home”.

Without Eric's sister he would not have made it through his deployment to Afghanistan.

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Without my sister, I would have never made it through Afghanistan, of that I'm sure [Eric says this with an emotional tone]. She, she hasn't actually known very much of what I was doing or everything that has happened, but she has been a strong rock in. Most of all, most of all when I returned.

In total Eric completed three missions on land and sea with operative technical assignments, including two tours in Afghanistan. Eric thinks that working for the Swedish Armed Forces is the best job in the world but you have the worst employer too.

To work in the Swedish Armed Forces is the best job in the world, but it's the worst employer in the world. I have banged my head against the wall so many times, against the organization, because they can't handle, that is, they can't handle employees.

During his last tour in Afghanistan Eric decided to leave the Armed Forces when the mission was completed due to a situation with the employer.

A new colleague suddenly earned 5,000 more than me. We had the same position, we had about the same competence but he was a specialist officer. They said that the Armed Forces had paid for his education. However, the Armed Forces had paid for mine as well and had decided that I had the competence to do the job. When I argued with the employer they didn't listen, I just, I didn't want to do this anymore, the non-understanding from that commander.

Still military service is very meaningful to Eric, because it matters and it has an existential impact. He has seldom felt that what he does has had such a major value for him as when he worked for the Armed Forces. That is an important reason why he had continued serving.

There are few times when I feel that I have done something as important as when I work in the Armed Forces because it means something, it matters what I do. Even if I eat or sleep, it has a purpose, it is something bigger than me. I just don't do it for myself, I do it for the Swedish nation, for the Afghans we are trying to help. It needs to mean something that has been important and it is important to why I continue.

In his essence Eric thinks he is a military member and his military identity is strong. To stop serving in the Armed Forces is linked to a major personal conflict for Eric. It is hard to stop serving in the military since it is such a big part of who he is.

It's a lot about self-image too, "Eric the soldier" or like I am a soldier in the broader sense of my person in some way, and it is difficult to cut it off too, it's difficult to stop and to say "but I will not do this anymore".

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But he does not consider re-employment as a soldier in the regular system because he has attained too high of a rank during missions and does not want to return to the lower echelons. Eric contemplates trying to become a reserve officer.

Well, you look at it like this, "would I like to continue to work for the Armed Forces?" I would probably like to have the possibility or something like that, it is such a big part of me that, "Do I dare to let it go like that?" It is because of that most of all [Eric says this with an emotional tone]. "Do I want to become a reserve officer?" I don't know if I wanna become that. "Do I wanna become a tactical officer?" Not in a million years, not in a million years.

He still serves once in a while for the Armed Forces as a military instructor. To team up with military comrades during exercises is very important and gives Eric a sense of purpose and community. He values the experience of camaraderie and assignments highly. A key aspect of military service is Eric's colleagues, whom he viewed as some of the most positive elements of his service.

I had such fantastic comrades, great comrades, most of them and that is incredibly good. Yes, actually, I am still in contact with them today, we talk on the phone every week, or like have, we help each other to build floors or whatever. We live rather close and have lunch or dinner together and we have a very natural continued relationship then. We lived so close all through missions and it creates some kind of, well, very close bond or relation. That is incredibly positive.

Story of Transition

When Eric returned from his third mission, his last tour to Afghanistan, he left active duty very quickly. It took him many months to obtain his normal state of mind and redirect his mission alertness into a civilian life-situation. His sister was like a rock when he came home. She forced him to unpack his suitcase.

She, when I came home she forced me to unpack my suitcase. I had lived out of a suitcase for over a year, it, perhaps only washed some clothing but never completely unpacked it. You never become settled, you live out of the suitcase. She forced me to unpack the suitcase, eh, it was tough, it, was mentally really tough to do it. I barely could. She, it was almost like she did it.

Her support has continued through the transition, which has not yet concluded.

She has, she has supported me and encouraged me, and she has also questioned me, "but you, are you really going once more now on another trip?" Or like that, yes, that is, she has been important, really important. She has also had courage to ask the question, "How do you feel?" It's not everybody who asks questions like that.

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Eric and his brother, who currently serves in the military, have a good relationship, but Eric would like the relationship to be of a civilian instead of a military character.

We're almost more colleagues than brothers, it is so difficult. I would rather see him as my brother, but it is hard to go back to the everyday relationships that I would like. I don't wanna talk about my job with my brother but we almost always end up there. Can't we just talk about something else, emotions or something?

There is a dichotomy between civilian and military relationships. Although Eric has close civilian friends too, it matters if you have served in the armed forces or not.

It can take quite long before I, eh, before I tell a civilian person that I was in the military. Many people know that I used to be in the military and then they ask about this and that. But I'm trying to keep the military part of me as small as possible, I don't want them to know the military part of me in that way, because it becomes a different relationship then. Eh, I also like to avoid the question "have you killed anyone?", eh, because, even if the answer is "No", it is, it is the third question I get, you know, and I can't stand it. Eh, but it also becomes, it becomes threadbare like that because the further out you get the less relation, or like if you haven't been in the military so it is like Ah [Eric makes an emotional expression with his voice] in some way it is a sort of lowest, I don't know, personal security test, like that, if you, have you been in the military you have in some way reached the absolutely lowest demand to get, to get information about some things.

Currently Eric has a three-year-plan of what to do now that he has left the military. He plans to finish his studies, to get an academic degree and to pursue a job. Eric is dedicated to his studies and is taking a large course load. He wants to complete his education quickly. His non-military counterparts have come much further in their civilian lives than Eric. This is one of the reasons for his accelerated pace. Additionally, Eric perceives himself as much older than his biological age due to his military service. Finally, Eric is accustomed to such a strenuous workload. In order to manage his personal and social life and make time for studying, friends, military assignments, travel and the future, Eric systematically plans and schedules his activities. Eric is an efficient planner but he has difficulty finding motivation for his studies. Eric fails to see the purpose of his studies, because he is already tested and knows that he can perform well under extreme pressure. It seems that none of his military experience and competence counts in the civilian context, and this frustrates Eric. Sometimes when studying in groups Eric takes command and this can lead to conflict.

But can't we just decide that someone takes the lead now and lead like that "do that, do that, do that, and then we do that like that" [Eric is giving orders with

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body and voice] eh, and everybody will be very satisfied if it works, but, but they still become a little bit like “now he is being very dominant or almost totalitarian”, eh, and it might cause a conflict.

Much of the study assignments seem unimportant, and Eric often exposes himself to last-minute pressure to force himself to complete his assignments on time. This is unusual for him and creates much personal frustration. Parts of him almost try to resist the civilian path, as Eric has difficulties in finding motivation to proceed.

But now, actually I was thinking the other day like that “Do I want to succeed with my papers now in social science, do I?” I don’t know. “Do I wanna fail?” Is it that, is it why I don’t commit myself, that is, is that what I am doing, is it some kind of rebellion against myself, or what is it that I am doing, and there is probably such an idea like that, what. “What is the driving force?”

There is an internal conflict which Eric harbours relating to where he would like to be right now. He would like to be done with his studies and have a job. Eric would also like to find a girlfriend and start a family. He has forsaken this aspect of life due to his years of military service. Yet another part of him would just like to leave everything and go to Chamonix for six months or so, just to party and be an irresponsible bartender. However, the dominant part of him will not let such purposeless action happen. Eric has difficulties letting himself have fun.

I perhaps have to just let myself just have fun, that is, then it becomes harder instead, that is, why am I doing this, because I think it’s fun but because I think it’s fun, perhaps it isn’t a good enough reason for me to do it. Like go to the Alps and do a season, that is.

Eric still has a huge personal conflict about whether to return to the Armed Forces or not. It is difficult for Eric to sever his relationship with the Armed Forces, because he perceives himself as a military professional. Part of him wants to complete a new application for another mission, but the other part of him seems to rebel against such plans.

The civilian rebellion is that I, that I fail to complete the application. Eh, I don’t send a personal letter because I, eh, I, I want to fail, I don’t want to go. So that is my civilian, “Me,” I don’t wanna go maybe then or I understand that I shouldn’t. I was away for too long, and now I need to be home at least as long as I’ve been away before going again, or that is, if I shall go again. Yes, so it, it is, it is eh, I can imagine.

The transition to becoming a civilian is a struggle for Eric, as he is afraid of losing his military identity and who he is. He does not know in what form he would like to continue the military path. For Eric decisions concerning his military future expend large amounts of psychological energy.

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Fear of losing an identity I believe in to a certain extent. The other day, we walked by a big police intervention, and when you are wearing the uniform, you are, that is, even the meeting, even if we wouldn't have had anything to do professionally, it would be so in any case, it would have been another meeting; the silent nod, or just the recognition. That disappears when you are a civilian. You are, then you are just one of the crowd, perhaps. As a member of the military, you stand out of the crowd, or when you wear the uniform like that, I represent something, or I, why do I do, why, who are you like that? While the group identity perhaps, is rather strong in the uniform or when you are in the military, in your military me, even at home.

The Self in the Military Story

In his early years Eric started to develop a military I-position, and throughout his conscription and military service it grew into a firm and dominant I-position of the self. Until now, everything that has happened in his life has been a long and progressive career path which has supported his story as a motivated, selfless and efficient military technician with fine recommendations. Eric is proud of who he is and narrates his military service as very meaningful. He uses this military story as a meaning-making device to understand who he is, what he is and where he is (Polkinghorne, 1988). Eric's military story creates a meaningful pattern of interpretation of events and coherent life experiences in the eyes of the self as a military technician (Bragin, 2010; Ganzevoort, 1993). This indicates that the military story of who I am has developed into a strong internal I-position of the self (i.e., I as a competent, efficient and motivated military technician). Eric's military story is directed to a military audience, and it is plausible to suggest that his account of camaraderie seeks the affirmation, love and acceptance of the military community. Who Eric perceives himself to be is deeply rooted in the military community. This implies that Eric's military story intertwines a tight internal and external military I-position of the self.

The military story is poly-vocal and multi-layered. There is the story of the sister who helped him endure Afghanistan. This is an important and powerful statement, which implies that Eric has an I-position as a brother. The I-position of a brother is older than the I-position as a member of the military community. Another I-position, that of the former boyfriend, also turns up in Eric's military story due to recollections about the difficult break up with his girlfriend.

In sum, Eric's multiplicity of the self provides us with a multi-layered but limited composition of sub stories connected to old I-positions capable of dialogue in the military story. The self is integrated and centralized due to the military story and the one main character or core position is the military one. This I-position is promoted by military friends, the sister and the military brother. There appears to be a personal conflict with the military organization due to how they treat their military personnel,

including Eric, which prompted him to leave active duty after the third deployment. The fact that Eric lost the relationship with his former girlfriend as he served for the Armed Forces also plays into this conflict. However, leaving the Armed Forces was not final, and Eric still serves once in a while under his own terms as a military instructor, when it suits him.

The Self in the Story of Transition

As Eric transitions to civilian life his I-position as a brother in the civilian context has grown firmer due to the support he has received from his sister. She has guided him through the difficult first phase of the transition and onwards. During the transition Eric prefers to have his relationship with his brother in the military become and remain a non-military relationship, which reveals the desire and need of Eric's I-position as a brother in the civilian context. Still, Eric's military I-position overrules his position as a brother and takes over the interaction with the military brother. When this happens Eric becomes unhappy. During the transition Eric's self has extended into a new academic setting, which provides him with an I-position as a student. However, his internal military I-position (e.g., I as a competent, efficient and motivated military technician) seems to be the dominant voice in this new civilian context of studies. From a narrative perspective, Eric has not yet created a meaningful pattern of interpretation of events and coherent life experiences in the eyes of the self as a student. This implies that there is a dialogical disjuncture between the dominant military I-position and the I-position as a student who does not necessarily want to be efficient, disciplined and motivated. There is an asymmetrical struggle and multi-level conflict between the student and the military position, as the strong military I-position attempts to carry over central properties of its identity (i.e., competence, efficiency, motivation, heavy workload and discipline to get a degree fast) to the new position as a student (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010). Within the self, I as a student seems to lack the space and freedom to create its own identity without the heavy influence of the military I-position. The need to shape a very personal story or narrative identity as a student clashes with the desires of motivation, discipline and efficiency connected to Eric's military position. The self seems confused and unable to make dialogical space for the student position to grow and develop on its own. Instead it is invaded by the properties of the military I-position, and when the military I-position rules the study situation it might create conflicts within the study group. This creates confusion of the self, as Eric notices that the military properties of identity seem non-productive for a student.

Additionally, there exists another new I-position of a rebel, and there are good reasons to nuance the rebel position. The experience of rebellion may be interpreted as a metaphor for the movement of positioning and counter-positioning due to the dynamics of the clash of old and new I-positions during the transition of the self. But it may also indicate that new position(s) of the self, with other desires, are under development, as new voices are narrated in the story of the transition. First, the rebel in the context of

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studies may be a counter-positioning of the actual military I-position in an attempt to contribute to a failure of the civilian path in favour of enrolling once again for military service. Second, the rebel in the context of studies may also be a counter-positioning of the student in an attempt to interfere with the military properties of efficiency, discipline and motivation in order to prepare the downfall of the military I-position and in the process create space for the development of a new and more genuine I position as a student. Third, due to failed applications for enrolling once more, there may be a matter of counter-positioning of the brother in the civilian context in support of promoters, as the sister, who questions his attempts to go, and/or the rest of the civilian complex of I-positions. Fourth, the rebel which wants to drop everything and go to the Alps and be an irresponsible bartender may in fact be a new position with new desires. Independently of the number of rebel position(s) and/or the metaphors of the movement of positioning and counter-positioning, these experiences accelerate the confusion of the self and impair the dialogue.

In sum, Eric's multiplicity of the self provides us with a multi-layered and much wider composition of sub stories connected to old and new I-positions of the self in the transitional narrative. As the military core position is changed and undermined, the position repertoire as a whole is affected. The self seems disintegrated and decentralized, due to the story of transition, and there are many conflicting characters struggling for space and voice. Eric is confused and concerned because of the reactions he experiences in the transition compared to what he expects from his self.

Discussion

As Eric has begun the transition into civilian life, the story of who he is has become disrupted and has forced him to engage in a reformulation of a new and coherent story of who he is now: a civilian, student, brother, rebel, former service member and boyfriend. Eric's self is about to expand and rearrange itself, as new and old I-positions are met and set in dialogical motion. This is a challenge to his self, and the self is clearly affected by the situation. The dialogical capacity of the self has been impaired, as old and new I-positions are met in the transition with disparate desires and needs. As Eric reconstructs the story of who he is, several I-positions will struggle to make their voices heard. The transition to a civilian life has created decentralizing movements of the self, which need to be balanced and integrated. The dialogical self is currently trying to organize and negotiate the interaction and integration between these I-positions and the movements of the self. Sometimes Eric has the capacity to engage in meta-positioning and reflect on the different characters in the story, but frequently he loses his bird's-eye perspective, and this increases the friction and confusion between the multiple I-positions.

Due to the transition new I-positions with different desires are emerging, and there is the possibility of an interesting organizing movement in Eric's self. Several I-

positions may be capable of cooperation due to shared desires and motives. The civilian complex of I-positions (i.e., I as a brother, I as a student, I as a rebel towards enrolling, I who wants to go to the Alps to be an irresponsible bartender, I as a former boyfriend who wants to meet a new girlfriend and establish a family) may work as a powerful coalition in the process of becoming a civilian. These are all I-positions of the self which do not want to enrol and proceed on a military path. Their desires do not correspond to the military context and way of life. This conglomeration of civilian I-positions may in the first phase of the transition cause disintegration and decentralization within the self. From a narrative perspective, it seems evident that the military I-position is struggling for dominance in the terrain of the self during the transition. Against this military position the coalition of civilian I-positions which are supported by his sister, who acts as a promoter, are working towards another agenda. Looking further into the future the coalition may prove important during the innovation of the self as a whole. Still, there are several remnants of the military past which may support a development toward a military path (i.e., close interaction with former military operatives, sense of meaning and purpose, occasional service as an instructor). Likewise, new unknown civilian coalitions and/or promoters may appear along the transitional road and strengthen the civilian position (i.e., a new girlfriend, starting a family).

In the process of transition, in order to reduce confusion and improve dialogue and integration, we need to address one final dimension. The theme of dichotomy between the military sphere and the civilian sphere holds a specific status in Eric's narrative account. I suggest that this is a narrative reflection of a dialogical gap of the self, which Eric has to bridge, as he continues his transition into civilian life. One way of doing that and promoting integration and dialogue of the self is to avoid taking an extremely polarised either all-civilian or all-military position. What Eric may need is a third position, which can unify or connect the dichotomy between his civilian and military I-positions of the self without denying or removing their differences. From the narrative account such a position may seem difficult to discover at the moment. But since Eric sometimes works as a military instructor, I suggest that he already has an embryonic third position which has the potential to bridge the gap between the civilian and the military extremes. The challenge is to discern and then use this nascent third position to stress balance and to help unify and integrate the fragmented self during the transition. This position may bridge the civilian vs. military dichotomy and unite the military past with the civilian present, while keeping parts of his military I-position active within their proper context. I suggest that this would integrate the self and promote dialogue between competing I-positions and their desires. One way to cultivate this position is through a conscious narrative reconstruction of who he is: a civilian with several interactive I-positions, one of which preserves aspects of the military I-position as an active and valuable position within the new civilian story. Such a self-narrative

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would integrate a military past and civilian present, thus creating consistency between the past and present.

Conclusion

What can we finally say about the results from a narrative and dialogical case-study analysis like this? As a 26-year old Caucasian male with combat experience as a Swedish military technician within the operations field, Eric is part of a large Western group of young military men. The generalization of Eric's story rests on whether other military personnel in the same situation may recognize their own story in Eric's. Hopefully other military personnel may better understand their own self and the transitional experiences of the self through this article. Furthermore, Eric's story may give civilians some understanding of what military personnel, such as Eric and others, may experience when they re-enter civilian life. One final function of Eric's story and participation in the study is that it could increase Eric's own awareness of his self as he transitions into civilian life (Scherer-Rath, 2014).

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