‘Undetermined exiles’: a phenomenological exploration of transition out of Army life.

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Abstract

What is it like for a soldier to leave the British Army? Can psychotherapy, and specifically existential psychotherapy, help in the transition process? These have become increasingly important questions since the Strategic Defence and Security Review (2010) set a government target of 7,000 British Army redundancies to be made by 2015. Psychological research with regards to the military is often pathological, focussing on trauma, employment or homelessness issues, rather than transition itself. In an attempt to address this gap, this thesis employs phenomenology to explore the transition experiences of eight former soldiers who left the British Army within the last ten years. Findings show that transition brings a sense of exile from the military and alienation in civilian life, leading to loss of the identity, belonging and certainty that military life provided. Participants were determined to make a success of transition but, without a clear identity, meaning or purpose in civilian life, struggled to apply this determination. This was the case for all the participants, regardless of their reasons for, and experiences of, leaving the Army. The more self-aware participants were of their losses and anxieties in transition, the more adaptable they were to civilian life and the better they could establish new meaning and purpose to channel their determination into. However, no participant identified as fully transitioned or believed they ever would be. Instead, transition was felt to be an ongoing process of grieving, adapting and evolving identity. This study introduces the term 'transitioner' to capture the process of being in between soldiers and civilians in transition while belonging to neither. Existential philosophy and psychotherapy can help to validate and empower transitioning soldiers to understand their place in transition and find new meaning and purpose in their civilian lives.

Statement of authorship

This dissertation was written by Ali Ross and has ethical clearance from the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling and the Psychology Department of Middlesex University for the Degree of Doctorate by Professional Studies in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling. This work is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated, and has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree. The author has no conflicts of interest to report.

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Glossary of terms

Armed Forces - Army, Navy and Air Force.

Civvies - Civilians.

Civvy Street - Civilian street.

EPP - Existential-Phenomenological Psychotherapy.

HP - Hermeneutic Phenomenology.

KCMHR - King's Centre for Military Health Research.

NCOs - Non-Commissioned Officers - military officers who have not earned a commission.

OEF - Operation Enduring Freedom - the U.S. government name for the war in Afghanistan from October 2001 – December 2014.

OIF	-	Operation Iraqi Freedom - the U.S. name government for the war in Iraq from March 2003 – December 2011.
Op HERRICK	-	The U.K. government name for the war in Afghanistan from October 2001 – December 2014.
Op TELIC	-	The U.K. government name for the war in Iraq from March 2003 – December 2011.
ORs	-	Other Ranks - in the British Army, Royal Marines, Royal Air Force, those personnel who are not commissioned officers, usually including non-commissioned officers (NCOs).
PTSD	-	Post-traumatic stress disorder.
Services personnel	-	Personnel serving in the military.
Service person	-	A person serving in the military.
Squaddie	-	British Army slang for a soldier.
Transitioner	-	An ex-service person.
Tour	-	Military deployment.
Veteran	-	An ex-service person.

1. Introduction

What is it like for a soldier to leave the British Army? Can existential psychotherapy help in the transition process? These two research questions form the core of this thesis.

I wanted to research this subject because, at the time of choosing my thesis topic, I had several friends who had recently left the British Army after serving in the Iraq and Afghanistan. I felt that their time in the military had changed them but could not articulate how. They had not obviously been traumatised by military life; they had jobs, were in relationships and generally seemed well-adjusted. Nothing seemed to account for the change I saw in them. I felt I needed to better understand this transition, or as, the Oxford English Dictionary (2016) defines it, this "passing or passage from one condition, action, or (rarely) place, to another."

This coincided with discussions I was having with fellow existential psychotherapy students about the overuse of diagnostic labels in Western mental healthcare, and how this was reflected in the media, particularly on military matters. In newspaper articles on military to civilian transition, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) was sometimes presented as the only contributing factor to a difficult transition. As my interest in military transition grew, I found this media narrative mirrored in my social and professional

circles. Similarly, when I told friends and colleagues that my thesis was on military transition, their assumption was my focus would be on PTSD. On reading existing research I found that transition was rarely addressed, instead focussing on trauma, employment and homelessness issues.

Contemporaneously, the Strategic Defence and Security Review (2010) set a government target of 7,000 British Army redundancies to be made by 2015. It was apparent that a significant number of recently deployed soldiers would suddenly be exiting the Army, with limited support or understanding of what transition would be like.

I perceived a need to deepen the narrative on transition in military scholarship so that psychotherapists and other support staff could be better informed about the potential needs of soldiers in transition. As an existential phenomenological psychotherapist, practicing with an attention on the description of experiences, I also wondered whether this therapeutic modality could be particularly useful for exiting soldiers to understand transition beyond the pathological narrative.

When looking into methodological options, I decided upon a phenomenological approach as it offered me the most consistent means of presenting the experience of military transition from my position as an existential psychotherapist. Phenomenological research views the researcher as inextricably intertwined with the data and the interpretations made from it

(Churchill, 2007). For this reason, phenomenological research must acknowledge and value the relational dynamics between participant and researcher and use it to deepen understandings (Finlay & Evans, 2009). Using this approach meant I could consider how the dynamics between me as a researcher and my participants might relate to dynamics between psychotherapists and their clients in transition.

Within phenomenological research, I opted for a Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) approach. HP is a method that champions the writing process as the conduit of experience as it was lived through by the researcher which can render the ordinary quite extraordinary when lifted up from our daily existence (Van Manen 2018). This matched my desire for a method that employed a writing style that could highlight the 'ordinary', everyday aspects of transition that nonetheless make the process challenging and worthy of more attention.

With the researcher being so influential in HP research, reflexivity is of central importance to show the "mess" of our project as researchers in a social world (Finlay, 2017). I have interspersed reflexivity throughout this thesis but will offer something of my professional background and personal history as an indication of my entry point into the subject of military transition and how that narrowed my scope of vision.

My closest personal experience of military life was from my time in the Army Combined Cadet Force (CCF) at school. As a sportsman, I enjoyed the physical,

skill, outdoor and survival aspects of the CCF but not the aspects associated with being trained to fight and kill. I left the CCF as these aspects became more prominent.

My family legacy in relation to the military is that my Finnish great-grandfather and grandfather were both outspoken pacifists in the Finnish Civil War and Winter War and my Scottish grandfather was a colour-sergeant in World War Two who trained countless recruits for the war and carried guilt about this for the rest of his life. War is not something I romanticise; I am drawn to the human cost and impact on communities more than anything else about it.

I carry this approach into the way that I train as a boxer and martial artist and spar with peers in order to improve my technique but have chosen not to formally fight in a bout because I do not want to risk harming another human being to that degree.

Demographically I am a private-school educated, first generation middle-class, mid-30-year-old, White Finnish/British dual national, heterosexual man and a psychotherapist in full-time employment who has never been employed by a military organisation.

I drew upon my experience as a psychotherapist to keep my attention as open as possible, recognising my lack of lived experience outside of my own demographics. However, I did find myself drawn to the experiences of men in the military, how hetero-normative expectations from and on men contributes to military culture and the role that class plays in the military hierarchy and then in civilian life in transition. I was conscious of my very limited experience of military life and wondered how my participants would view me because of this. Conversely, I was excited to see how my lack of experience would provide a freshness of curiosity that is less available to a seasoned military professional.

After this Introduction comes a Literature Review to assess and critique the current narrative on military to civilian transition in detail, which is then followed by a deconstruction of my research Methodology and Method before exploring my Findings from my interviews. I conclude with my Discussion and a focus on the implications this thesis has on clinical psychotherapeutic practice from an existential foundation.

Lastly, this study introduces a new term for ex-soldiers in transition as 'transitioners' and I will hereafter refer to them as such. This emerged from my need for a consistent term for my participants, knowing that referring to military veterans is problematic as Burdett et al. (2012) verify. Their study identifies that, while UK government policy defines a 'veteran' as someone who has served at least one day in the UK Armed Forces, only half of their

veteran participants considered themselves to be veterans when interviewed. This indicates that the official definition is not well used or endorsed by the veteran population. Other terms such as ‘service leaver’, ‘ex-serviceman’ and ‘ex-services personnel’ were no better subscribed to and Burdett et al. conclude:

> Definitions of identity are important to the person holding them, to governments in framing policy and resource provision, and to public attitudes with respect to social inclusion/exclusion. This article demonstrates that veteran identity is not congruent between these domains (Burdett et al. 2012, p. 7).

Given that no existing term captured a finding from my study that transition was an ongoing process, I coined this new term. It would have been inaccurate to use a term in the perfect tense such as ‘transitioned’ because it implies that the transition process is complete. Therefore, I use the term ‘transitioner’ to refer to the participants in this study all of who were still actively in transition.

2. Literature review

2.1 Introduction

When I embarked on this study in 2010 the literature relating to transition out of the British Armed Forces appeared scant. Since then, transition has received growing attention, particularly following the formation in 2012 of the Forces in Mind Trust. This award grants, commissions research and supports projects that seek long-term solutions to the challenges facing UK Armed Forces personnel in transition.

While there has been an increase in the number and range of studies on military transition, little attention has been paid to how soldiers actually experience transition, including its psychosocial dimensions. As Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg note:

> Whilst the possible adverse effects of transition to civilian life – including loss of status, financial difficulties and family readjustment – are now recognised, an understanding of the psychosocial mechanisms underpinning the process of transition has proved elusive (Bergman et al., 2014, p. 60).

For this reason, I expanded my literature search to include non-military transition and also aspects of military culture that could affect transition into civilian life. While my primary focus has been on research relating to the British Army, I have also referred to U.S. based studies in cases where they raised new issues or offered fresh insights.

The literature presented in this review was identified from a variety of sources including focused key word searches on academic databases, academic books and their bibliographies and recommended readings from various academics.

The key words used in the database searches included: military, transition, career, British Army, culture, stigma, media perceptions, effects of combat, trauma, training, joining the military, leaving the military, medical discharge, gender, masculinity, grief, bereavement, identity, and lifestyle. These key words were used in various combinations with each other. The databases used were Open ATHENS, Middlesex University, King's University and The British Library catalogue. The internet search engine Google and within it Google Scholar were also used with the same key words. Any literature found was then checked for any further relevant references. These searches were conducted throughout this research study between 2010 and 2017 with no defined time boundaries.

2.2 Literature on military culture

This section looks at how experiences in the military and culture within it impact on transition according to current literature.

2.2.1 Military structure and training

As the literature makes clear, the British military culture is strictly hierarchical, disciplined and regulated in order to achieve the collective purpose of war fighting. Career paths are linear, with clear targets to meet to progress through the ranks. This creates a clear sense of expectations, direction and order for its personnel, which strongly contrasts with civilian life on military exit and takes significant adjusting to for transitioners.

Military culture also offers a totalising, all-compassing environment. In their paper on military workplace culture, Redmond et al. (2015, p. 11) describe the military as “essentially a fully functioning community with doctors, bus drivers, police officers, and cooks, among others, so individuals have a variety of occupational opportunities available to them, many of which have an equivalent in the civilian workplace.”

This challenges the often-held stereotype by civilians that the military is comprised of ‘men barking orders with guns in war zones’, as one civilian employer put it in a recent report (Futures 4 Forces, 2015, p. 20). However,

that same report adds that these stereotypes are nonetheless realised on occasion. This is in part due to the fact that the military's primary function is war fighting and discipline and respect are paramount within it. It is hierarchical in structure with authority distinguished by a clear ranking system and junior ranks are expected to follow the orders of their seniors in all but the most exceptional of circumstances. In addition, the military has its own laws and authority is granted by law. So, failure to follow an order is likely to result in punishment up to and including time in military prison.

Wolpert (2000) discusses how the Army's special legal system and body of regulations give it extensive social control over its personnel. Individuals have nothing like the same control over their daily work or careers as civilians do. They do not apply for positions or interview for them. Much of the time they are ordered what to do, and when and where to do it. Nor can personnel quit their job easily: extrication is generally a complicated process controlled by senior ranks on their terms.

However, Redmond et al. (2015) highlight other facets of military organisational culture: trust, confidence and mutual respect between personnel:

> A subordinate must trust the lawfulness of orders received, support the mission, and be confident that the risk and sacrifice to accomplish the mission is necessary. Likewise a senior must trust their orders will be performed and be confident that all actions will be conducted in a way

> that keeps good order and discipline. The structure of seniors and subordinates forms a chain with each individual linked to one another. When trust and confidence is weak or broken, the chain is broken to the detriment of good order and discipline (Redmond et al. 2015, p. 13).

Military organisational structure facilitates and continually reinforces cohesiveness and trust among personnel. It helps to make the military a uniquely self-sufficient, independent community, one that differs greatly from civilian organisations.

The British Army operates on six core values: courage, discipline, respect, integrity, loyalty and selfless commitment. All Army personnel are expected to reflect these values in everything they do. Those leaving the Army therefore exit from a group with shared core values.

These shared values are clearly missed on Army exit. A large-scale report on perceptions of the military in Britain through the eyes of Service personnel, employers and the public by Ashcroft (2012) surveyed 9,106 British Armed Forces personnel, officers and other ranks, held 16 focus groups for serving British Armed Forces personnel, 5 groups for ex-services personnel who had left the British Armed Forces within 10 years and 6 groups of members from the general public in England. It found that the ethos and camaraderie of service life was what serving British Army personnel thought they would most miss at the end of their career. Respondents emphasised how Army core values

formed the foundation of military camaraderie, and that the resulting deep bonds could not exist outside in the civilian world.

Redmond et al. (2015) review general concepts regarding the structure and culture in both official U.S. military and other literature. The authours do not offer any information as to how they selected these articles, meaning reflexivity in their method is absent but they refer to a similar military culture among U.S. Armed Forces personnel, including the ‘warrior ethos’ described as:

> a mindset and group of values that all U.S. Armed Forces aim to instil in their members. The warrior ethos emphasizes placing the mission above all else, not accepting defeat, not ever quitting, and not ever leaving behind another American (Redmond et al. 2015, p. 14).

Values are reinforced by training, which is designed to turn civilians into meticulously punctual, clean, respectful and team-driven soldiers. Holmes (2003) argues that military basic training has two main functions: to instil the basic level of functional weapon handling and tactical awareness, and to inculcate the military ethos in recruits, so as to ensure that “the individual values which prevail in most civilian societies are replaced by the group spirit and group loyalties which underlie all military organisations” (Holmes, 2003, p. 36). Recruits who fail to show sufficient assimilation into this culture do

not complete basic training (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper, & Fossey, 2016).

Some studies liken basic training to an intentional culture shock designed to sever recruits from civilian culture and propel them into a military one. Thus, for Bergman et al. (2014, p. 60), "becoming a member of the Armed Forces is better represented by a model of culture shock, with reverse culture shock being experienced upon leaving." With reference to Pedersen's *The Five Stages of Culture Shock* (1994), Bergman et al. (2014) argue that new recruits soon feel disorientated and overwhelmed as they experience the loss of their previous civilian status. With time, however, recruits reintegrate themselves, particularly via established friendships, and begin to feel at home and 'like a solider'. Autonomy and interdependence are eventually felt by longer-serving soldiers whose identity harmonises with military culture and values; the military way of life has become what the soldier 'is', not what he 'does'. This also marks the point when soldiers may come to perceive civilians as 'other' to them.

2.2.2 Mental health stigma and accessing care

Military culture is in general stigmatising of mental ill health. This has implications for how readily military personnel may access care once they leave the Army. Once diagnosed with severe mental health problems, serving soldiers are put on restricted duties, cannot be promoted and may be found to be unfit for deployment until they recover (Coleman, Stevelink, Hatch, Denny,

& Greenberg, 2017). A number of studies (Coleman et al, 2017; Ashcroft, 2016; Rutherford, 2013) advocate the destigmatisation of mental ill health within the military, since soldiers are known to 'hide' their mental health issues from their peers and superiors in order to avoid these consequences. This also creates a legacy around mental health stigma for soldiers transitioning out of the Army, who may remain reluctant to access mental health support in civilian life.

In their systematic review Coleman et al. (2017) raise that the paucity of qualitative studies on stigma and barriers to help-seeking in the military limits their study and that after a rigorous quality assessment of relevant literature between 1980 and 2015, only eight studies were identified as worthy of inclusion. These eight studies amounted to a collective sample 1012 participants (five individual interviews, one individual interviews and focus groups and two focus groups). None of the analyses of these included any evidence of reflective practice in their original studies and there is an absence of reflexivity in the thematic synthesis of the review also, making the decisions behind the thematic coding, development of descriptive themes, generating of analytical themes and 'going beyond' the content of the original studies unclear.

Across the eight studies, five overarching themes were identified: (1) non-disclosure; (2) individual beliefs about mental health; (3) anticipated and personal experience of stigma; (4) career concerns; and (5) factors influencing

stigma; and that there was substantial evidence of a negative relationship between stigma and help seeking for mental health difficulties within the Armed Forces.

Non-disclosure involved individuals not recognising problems in themselves, understating or down-playing them, attempting to address them alone unless their situation became critical. This was driven by fear of stigmatisation from others. Beliefs about mental health were that they are a sign of weakness and unfitness for practice. Individuals believed that they would lose credibility and respect by disclosing to peers or extra-military professionals that they had mental health problems. Career concerns came from the consequences mentioned above. Factors influencing stigma included good psychological understanding of military life, strong leadership and knowing other individuals who had experienced and overcome mental health difficulties. The review does not include any factors around gender, which is perhaps because only one of the eight reviewed studies focussed on gender. Notably this lone study (Visco, 2009) found that women were more receptive to treatment seeking, which suggests that further investigation into factors around gender and help-seeking is needed.

These elements of military culture that inhibit accessing mental health support are echoed in several other studies. For Higate (2001, p. 454), "seeking assistance in times of need represents a major challenge to ex-servicemen

socialized into standing on their own two feet." Lorber and Garcia (2010) directly investigate stigma in the military and access to psychotherapy noting:

> Military training and culture promotes what the veterans call a "suck it up" attitude where emotions are disregarded. As a result...veterans often report that help-seeking feels to them like complaining, thus they may feel reluctant to initiate or sustain psychotherapy. We find it beneficial to normalize their discomfort in addressing psychological concerns and reframe "complaining" as reporting or describing (Lorber & Garcia, 2010, p. 299).

All 11 participants in a rare phenomenological study conducted by Brunger, Serrato and Ogden (2013, p. 93) reported that seeking help was viewed as a ''weakness'' in the military, whose culture worked actively to discourage ''vulnerability''

Fear et al. (2007) found excessive alcohol consumption to be more common in the UK Armed Forces than in the general population even after taking age and gender differences into account and the authors partly attribute this to the way in which alcohol is used as a coping strategy by soldiers in the absence of feeling able to access mental health support.

In Jake Wood's (2013) personal account of his transition, he describes the pride he took in his determination to fight through any pain he felt in training or on

exercise, outrunning and outlasting most of his peers. He typifies the 'get on with it' culture in the military, having endured severe psychological and physical stresses in training and championing the strength required to do so (Koeszegi, Zedlacher & Hudribusch, 2014). When Wood eventually sees a psychologist for therapy, it was his psychologist's kind, knowledgeable, perceptive, non-judgemental, validating, and personable style that helped him to challenge his self-critical, overly-harsh attitude towards himself. He feels 'correctly ascertained' by his psychologist which helps him to finally see himself as strong for enduring what he in Iraq rather than labelling himself as weak as he had done previously.

Jones, Campion, Keeling, and Greenberg (2016) investigated the association between cohesion, leadership, mental health stigmatisation and perceived barriers to care in UK military personnel. They found that leadership and cohesion were significantly associated with stigma and barriers to care with the fear of being viewed as weak and being treated differently by leaders the most frequently endorsed belief. Conversely, thinking less of a help-seeking team member and unawareness of potential help sources were least common. The authors conclude that mental health awareness and promoting the discussion of mental health matters, challenging perceptions of weakness and fears of being treated differently, should be at the centre of stigma and barriers to care reduction.

Finally, Forbes et al. (2013) conducted cross-sectional surveys on attitudes to mental illness in the 821 U.K. military personnel and 1,729 members of the general population. Levels of agreement with five statements about mental illness were compared and they found that, overall, attitudes toward mental illness are comparable in the general population in England and the U.K. military. The study is limited here in that it does not distinguish which aspects of mental health stigma in Britain impact both military and civilian cultures. More research on the subject would help to understand the perceptions of both civilian and military populations and the differences between them with regards to mental health stigma. The study does identify differences of the military holding more positive attitudes about the causes of mental illness and more negative attitudes about job rights of those with mental illness but in both cases, there is less than 10% difference with their civilian counterparts. The authours suggest this points to a need to destigmatise mental illness in the Army with current attitudes inhibiting both serving and ex-services personnel from accessing mental health support but this could equally be said for British civilian populations.

The study also compared attitudes between genders, finding that females showed more positive attitudes towards mental illness in both military and non-military populations, suggesting that stigma in some way relates to masculinity, which we will explore further in the following section.

2.2.3 Gender and masculinity

A further dimension of military culture relevant to soldiers' experience of transition is its profoundly masculine character. The British Army contains a low percentage of women in its ranks. Rutherford and Berman (2014) found that as of 1 July 2014 females accounted for 8.3% of other ranks in the British Army. The military hierarchy remains profoundly dominated by men, with many career paths still closed to women (Atherton, 2009).

Military culture is also heavily gendered. Higate observes that:

> hegemonic military-masculine gender ideology gravitates around heterosexual but misogynistic practice grounded in the rugged warrior ideal. The centrality of these ideologies tends to transcend the diversity of military life, setting standards for both servicemen and women, from clerks to infantrymen (Higate, 2001, p. 448).

The literature suggests that, irrespective of their sex, soldiers aspire to traditionally masculine values. These are the kind of trained, socialised values that the therapist Natalie Rogers (1980) referred to as the 'hero myth', wherein men are culturally expected to be competitive, success-seeking hunters (Rogers, 1980, p. 138). There is no place for emotional sensitivity, softness or anything nurturing, as these are values for women to uphold. Koeszegi et al. describe how this manifests in:

> formal and informal tests on masculine values like assertiveness and coolness, where failure is equalled with femininity, soldiers have to prove that they are not women. Symbolic manifestations like punishment rituals, e.g., the assignment of lowly ''feminine'' jobs (kitchen duties and sweeping) or frequent use of curse words, like ''faggot'' or ''girls,'' to subordinate recruits demonstrate the informal gender order in military institutions. Expressions of exaggerated masculinity concomitant with dehumanization and sexual objectification of women, known as hypermasculine behaviour, assure that no ''real'' man is labelled gay (Koeszegi et al., 2014, p. 230).

The strength of the sense of manliness and brotherhood in the military is exemplified by Higate's finding that:

> Reasons given for fragmentation of partnerships with spouses or partners frequently touched on the desire to rekindle camaraderie with other men; here continuity with the military life is closely linked with homosociability and military masculine-gendered identity (Higate, 2001, p. 453).

It is argued (for example Brooks, 2005) that in the 1990s, when more female soldiers were entering the U.S. military, male soldiers felt that their masculinity was under threat. The cultural pressure for men to supress their emotions increased as part of fulfilling the 'masculine role' and emotional sensitivity was more greatly seen as a weakness and a threat particularly in a

combat situation when ‘the job’ needed to be completed. The phrases to “soldier on” and “take it like a man” gained greater gravitas as a means of minimising emotions that could damage morale. Altogether a greater feminine presence was perceived as a threat to the very function of the military.

In a study by Woodhead, Wessely, Jones, Fear and Hatch (2012) the impact of exposure to combat during deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on mental health was compared by gender using data from a sample of 432 women and 4554 men in the UK Armed Forces. The findings suggest that, although gender differences in mental health exist, the impact of deployment on mental health is similar between men and women. While the measures were narrow and exclusively pathological, it is valuable to note that, according to these criteria, gender has minimal bearing on post-deployment mental health.

Collectively the literature on gender and masculinity in the military suggests that the military is so heavily gendered in its hypermasculinity that, regardless of the sex of personnel, traditional masculine values are revered, and traditional feminine ones are admonished. This raises the possibility that transitioners may tend to dismiss any manifestation of ‘femininity’ in themselves or others as evidence of weakness, and even a threat to survival. This could impact their intimate and professional relationships as well as their relationships to themselves, creating yet another barrier to caring for themselves and being cared for by others.

2.2.4 Military perceptions of civilians

As military personnel approach the end of their careers, their attention is drawn to the civilians they are about to be among. Although studies are scarce on military perceptions of civilians, the limited findings to date suggest that soldiers perceive civilians as naïve, self-centred and misunderstanding of military life (Ashcroft, 2012; Walker, 2013).

In Ashcroft's (2012) report *The military in Britain – through the eyes of Service personnel, employers and the public*, he found that service personnel thought the public understood very little about what the Armed Forces actually did. More than two-thirds of soldiers interviewed believed that the public were quite badly or very badly informed about day-to-day life in the Forces. In many cases the first thing civilians wanted to know was whether a soldier had killed anyone.

With regards to employment, many thought that employers would know very little about the services and would think former personnel would be institutionalised, or otherwise difficult to work with, would need to follow orders and be unable to think for themselves. In this instance, these were more than just beliefs, with some current and former personnel from the cohort having experienced this in civilian employment (Ashcroft, 2012, p. 41).

Ashcroft's (2012) research remains the most comprehensive study on military perceptions of civilians, pointing to a need for more research into this area. His study suggests a tendency on the part of veterans to enter civilian life with little expectation of being understood or supported. It should also be noted that civilian perceptions of the military are equally limited, with the same paper (Ashcroft, 2012) being the most prominent study on the subject. More research is required to determine how accurately civilians perceive serving and ex-military personnel and how much this understanding, or lack of, impacts on transitioners. Ashcroft (2012, p. 17) reports that the majority of his public cohort readily admitted their ignorance with 62% saying they knew "not very much" or "very little" about what a member of the Forces did on a day-to-day basis, which means that transitioners are likely to be misunderstood by civilians if these findings are representative.

2.2.5 Literature on military culture: Summary

According to current literature, military structure and training contrast so much from civilian working life and culture that soldiers can experience a kind of culture shock on Army exit. Attitudes towards help-seeking combined with the culture of masculinity in the military make accessing support a challenge and potential reflection of individual weakness. Soldiers expect to be misunderstood by civilians on leaving the military, making transition seem a disorientating and isolating process.

2.3 Literature on transitioning out of the military

In this section, I begin by looking at the literature relating to the ways in which battlefield deployment may impact the process of transitioning out of the Army. I then explore the existing literature on transition itself.

2.3.1 Literature on military deployment, combat and post-deployment for soldiers

The primary function of an Army is war fighting, and, while the link between combat experiences and transition should not be overstated, as Bergman et al (2014, p. 61) remind us, "…many veterans who have never experienced combat have nonetheless faced difficulties when moving back into a civilian environment", most deployed troops are significantly affected by their deployment and a brief review of the impact of deployment on transition is warranted.

From a representative sample of 4554 male UK Armed Forces personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, one survey found that 3800 or 85.7% thought themselves in danger of being killed or seriously injured during their deployment (Woodhead et al., 2012).

The study has limitations in that it only focuses on three measures of experience; 'risk to self', 'trauma to others' and 'appraisal of deployment';

and three post-deployment symptoms; post-traumatic stress disorder, symptoms of common mental disorder and hazardous alcohol use. Under these measures asymptomatic personnel could go unaccounted for, but the numbers remain telling. The study shows that most deployed soldiers are likely to be confronted with their mortality in ways that few civilians ever will be. There is value, then, in understanding the impact of deployment experiences on military personnel in post-deployment and how this effects their transition to civilian life.

Post-deployment symptoms have been linked to substance misuse in British troops:

> Traditionally alcohol has been used by the military to cope with the intense stress of battle but also as a way of mediating the transition from the heightened experience of combat to routine safety (Jones & Fear, 2011).

The same paper adds that while alcohol consumption on Tour is regulated and personnel in forward units were dry, a study of 941 UK service personnel deployed to Iraq found that after three years, alcohol consumption and binge drinking of post-deployment soldiers increased over time and that the rise was greatest in those individuals who thought that they might be killed or who experienced hostility from Iraqi civilians (Hooper et al., 2008).

Some studies highlight how soldiers with low-level or even no combat exposure face difficulties during and after service. One massive research study by the Vietnam Era Research Project of the Center for Policy Research conducted 3-5 hours semi-structured interviews of 1, 320, asking over 100 questions in each, some of which enquired into stress exposure among war zone-deployed veterans. One of the key findings in this study was that, of the participants who presented with stress symptoms, 27% had experienced heavy combat exposure, 31% medium exposure, 33% low exposure and 9% no exposure. Therefore 9% of Vietnam veterans who presented with stress symptoms were stressed for reasons unrelated to combat (Egendorf, Kadushin, Laufer, Rothbart, & Sloan 1981).

Iversen et al (2005) surveyed 318 vulnerable ex-service personnel. Of the 44% that were assessed as psychologically vulnerable, 27.2% were diagnosed with depression and only 4.8% with PTSD. However, the authors argue that depression and PTSD have overlapping elements and one can lead to the other. More recently, Jones and Wessely (2011) also found alcohol disorders and depression to be more prevalent than PTSD among British soldiers, with delayed onset of PTSD not a common problem. Unwin, Hotopf, Hull, Ismail, David, & Wessely (2002, cited in Jones and Wessely, 2011) found that 97% of ‘unwell’ Gulf War veterans did not fulfil the criteria for PTSD on standardised interviews.

In an initial assessment of the adjustment needs of transitioners and their families, Rutherford (2010) found that it was difficult to gain an understanding of transition needs beyond the trauma narrative because most research was primarily focussed on trauma hypotheses. Significantly, trauma is the focus of the only military-related study I have located which uses phenomenological methodology (Kroch, 2009).

A recent paper investigates the relationship between combat experiences of British Army personnel and marine commandos and PTSD (Osório, Jones, Robbins, Wessely, & Greenberg, 2017). The team discovered that soldiers who were exposed to violent combat, proximity to death and injury, and to landmine/IED attacks, were not as frequently associated with PTSD symptoms as they estimated they would be. The study was a secondary analysis of data derived from combat exposure data and a PTSD checklist collected immediately post-deployment, with followed-up measures collected four to six months later. The authors are transparent that the use of questionnaires containing personally identifiable information likely influenced levels of symptom reporting and that 34.9% of participants did not follow up at the 4-6-month second data collection stage. I would add that 4-6 months post-deployment is still soon after deployment and it would be interesting to understand how the same participants felt at a later stage post-deployment. Nonetheless, the paper discovered that violent combat was linked with re-experiencing and numbing symptoms, experiences of proximal wounding or death were associated with re-experiencing and anxious-arousal symptoms, while encountering explosive devices were related with anxious-arousal

symptoms. Soldiers who have experienced combat could also struggle with heightened anxiety, flashbacks and hyperarousal post-deployment.

A unique qualitative study of 30 British male veterans from WWII to Operation TELIC in Iraq introduces the impact that moral evaluations towards deployment in conflicts has on post-deployment wellbeing. The study found that veterans' moral evaluations related to their sense of justification of their actions in the specific conflict. "Veterans able to justify the need for deployment reported positive descriptions and benefits of having served". They stress the importance of the moral dimension, suggesting that, "even an individual with the best-developed coping strategies will find it hard to adjust to their view of themselves as a perpetrator of unnecessary or even immoral acts." (Burnell, Boyce, & Hunt, 2010, p. 41).

This retrospective thematic analysis has limitations in that moral evaluations were not part of the original enquiry and were therefore not explored in great dept in the interviews, neither do the authors offer any reflexivity in the study meaning we do not know how some excerpts were chosen over others. However, the interview data provides valuable insight into the importance of morality for soldiers and, particularly relevant to my research, the study identifies the moral conflict in Operatin TELIC veterans due to the questionable legality of the war.

2.3.2 Leaving the military

Approximately 21, 000 people left the UK Regular Forces each year between 2010-2014, 13, 500 of whom were regular British Army personnel (Rutherford and Berman, 2014). Personnel leave because they have reached the maximum time they can serve or are otherwise retired, made redundant, are medically discharged either for physical or mental health reasons or if they chose to end their military careers due to a change in life direction and priorities.

McNeil and Giffen (1967), refer to 'Military Retirement' as unique from other kinds of civilian retirement. This is because enlisted personnel typically retire at around forty years of age, when in most other industries an individual is reaching peak performance. At this age people often have a family to provide for and have not amassed enough savings to live off so financial pressures are often greater. They also refer to 'role confusion' that can follow directly as the soldier retires. The individual has gone from having a clearly defined role, a role that both the role player and society have reached an agreement over, into 'role confusion' marked by feelings of anxiety and uncertainty from not knowing what is expected of him and this can frequently be felt as a loss of status. Further depression and anxiety can follow which, according to them, are the most common symptoms of military retirement, manifested in irritability, loss of interest, lack of energy, increased alcoholic intake and reduced efficiency. This is a dated study, and exclusively about retiring soldiers while my cohort will be too young to have been eligible for retirement,

but characteristics of this military retirement could apply to any transitioning soldier.

A more recent US research note Rahbek-Clemmensen et al. (2012) discusses the 'civil–military gap'. The research note features no method and offers only minimal reflexivity in the form of author biographies, making it unclear how the reviewed literature, ranging from 1960-2008, was selected. The concept of the civil-military gap is a useful one for my purposes, however, distinguishing the gap between military personnel and civilians that grows during a soldier's career by virtue of the differences between the two cultures. The authors identify four types of civil-military gap represented in scholarship: cultural, demographic, policy preference, and institutional. These gaps all take time to bridge on a soldier's exit from the military.

The cultural gap refers to how the attitudes and values of civilian and military populations differ. The demographic gap refers to whether the military represents the US population in its partisan and socioeconomic makeup, recognising how the military draws on narrow segments of society to fill its ranks so they assume that sharp demographic differences may distinguish civilian from military populations. The policy preference gap is where military personnel and civilians agree or disagree about a range of public policy issues. The institutional gap concerns the relationship between the military and civilian institutions such as the media, the courts, and the education system, and whether they can be characterised in terms of harmony or conflict.

Brooks and Greenberg (2017) present another potential cultural gap in their systematic narrative literature review of non-deployment factors affecting psychological wellbeing in military personnel. They identify the key contributors to job satisfaction in the non-operational aspects of a military career as good leadership, cohesiveness with colleagues and sense of belonging. The authors therefore suggest that the absence of these factors in civilian work settings contributes to a harder transition.

Ashcroft (2012) reports that the main risk factor associated with leaving the military is personnel being underprepared for their transition but that this is counter-balanced by the training opportunities, healthcare provision and welfare support offered by within military. He argues that, if a soldier has a problem, it is not a matter of providing more support but instead improving awareness of and access to the support that is already available. He believes:

> There is no substitute for planning and preparation, not just in the weeks and months before leaving the Forces but over the long term. Those who start to think about their next job or home, how they will budget and other practicalities only weeks before their departure are not surprisingly more likely to have problems (Ashcroft, 2012, p. 13).

Organising practicalities before military exit will undoubtedly mean there is less to organise post-service and will provide some basic certainty and safety,

but other scholars have identified issues around leaving the military that good preparation cannot solve.

For example, a Forces in Mind Trust report investigates the problems faced by transitioners who identify so heavily with the military that they have not been able to acknowledge that their careers will come to an end:

> They do not view their Service career as a "*time-limited episode*". At best, their service career is likely to be a fixed number of years within their working lives; but even the initial fixed period for which they enlist may be cut unexpectedly short (for example, due to redundancy or medical discharge, amongst a number of other reasons). This group of Service leavers in particular find it difficult to transition as they have given little thought or preparation to life as a civilian (Forces in Mind Trust, 2014, p. 5).

The relatively early stage of life that soldiers exit the Army means that they often need to find a new career but struggle with culture shock, anxieties about the uncertainty of their role and loss of status in civilian life. Good preparation helps with the logistical changes in transition like finding work, a place to live and with tangible issues like arranging medical care and welfare but is less effective in contending with the intangible changes like losses of confidence and certainty.

A US-based qualitative study of student veterans transitioning from the U.S. military to civilian life and to a midsized, public university develops this stage progression of culture shock (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Their framework analysis of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eleven student veterans highlighted how different the unstructured, often solitary nature of university life was to the military's collective approach to completing tasks, and its conformity, regulation and controlled scheduling. The student veterans were aware that the responsibilities and level of competence they had acquired as soldiers was not being recognised in civilian life. Combat experience brought with it a certain level of maturity, one which their fellow students did not share. In addition, the new friendships they made with fellow students did not compare with the degree of social cohesion they had experienced within combat units, where they had trusted each other with their lives.

2.3.3 Pathology and military transition

There is a glut of academic military research on the effects of killing, deployment, substance abuse, PTSD, and associated pathologies. The majority of the material on transition also tends to have a pathological focus (Banwell, Greenberg, Smith, Jones, & Fertout, 2015; Osório et al., 2017; Murphy, Palmer, & Ashwick, 2017; Forces in Mind Trust Final Report, 2015).

The most extensive piece of relevant research I found on military to civilian transition was a two-phased project conducted by the Institute of Medicine in America (Rutherford, 2010, 2013). From an appointed committee of 16 experts

with ranges of expertise in sociology, psychiatry, rehabilitation, neurology, economics, epidemiology, survey research, health policy and management, a review of over 1, 000 relevant articles on adjustment issues of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan was carried out to identify the needs of serving and former military personnel when they returned home to their families. The committee also held town hall meetings around the United States to hear directly from people in their transition. The review identified needs in education, rehabilitation, employment training, mental health services, and other physical health services and advised on government and veterans associations on service needs based on their findings in their subsequent assessment published in 2013.

These reviews are wide ranging and offer a valuable foundation. However, there are some significant limitations in the studies which the committee acknowledged. Firstly, the committee encountered problems in that many of the reviewed articles focussed on the Vietnam War rather than the recent Iraq or Afghanistan conflicts rendering the uniqueness of these different conflicts under-accounted for. For example, there have been a smaller number of troops in the active component of the military than in past conflicts, meaning that Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom personnel have been on more repeat tours than ever before to meet the demands of an extended conflict and these soldiers are older, often with families and older children. The committee also raised concerns over the unreliability of the outcome measures used in these studies; including retrospective self-reporting; and the lack of independent authorship, raising questions about the accuracy of

respondents' self-reports, particularly regarding sensitive issues. Other sources were basic demographics on active-duty personnel and reports on trauma, traumatic injury and treatment and the effects of deployment-related stress so the breadth of narrative was not provided for in the literature.

Nonetheless they did identify stigma as a key factor in preventing personnel from seeking care for mental health or substance-abuse problems. They also identified significant needs beyond physical and mental health problems, which in turn impact on their families such as domestic violence, parenting and financial issues. They go into some detail here:

> Some of the challenges are transitioning in and out of the civilian workforce, readjusting to partners who have assumed new roles during the separation period, readjusting to children who have matured and may resent additional oversight, re-establishing bonds with spouses and children... (Rutherford, 2010, p. 13).

They also identified the fact that proportionally less personnel have been killed or wounded in the recent Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts due to improved protective equipment, so soldiers survive traumas more often, suicides have increased in these conflicts, deployments and relocations are frequent in the military, domestic violence is higher in military couples than civilian couples, and that it is unclear whether alcohol problems differ between military and civilian populations.

Ultimately Rutherford's key findings three years later are that:

- Many veterans return from deployment relatively unscathed by their experience, but others return from deployment with a multitude of complex health outcomes that present life-long challenges and hinder readjustment.
- Not all veterans who need treatment receive it despite the offering of evidence-based treatments by the health systems, because systemwide challenges exist.
- Military families often endure the adverse consequences of deployments, for example, health effects, family violence, and economic burdens.
- Unemployment and underemployment are acute problems for military veterans.
- Published data on the effects of deployment on military communities are sparse (Rutherford, 2013, p. 3).

For all the committee's resources, the findings are relatively limited in scope because of the narrow pool of available literature. For example, the uncertainty and anxieties generated by transition are unaccounted for in their report.

Similar problems of narrowness apply in British military transition scholarship. The majority of studies have been conducted by the King's Centre for Military Health Research and are, therefore, works with a pathological focus.

Ashcroft's (2014) *Veteran's Transition Review* contains the findings from eight focus groups and eighteen individual interviews of Service Leavers, and staff at Forces charities between January and April 2013. In addition, the review team commissioned a survey of local authorities involving an informal "audit" of 100 local authority websites and a telephone survey of 48 local authorities concerning provision for former Service personnel in their housing and homelessness strategy.

The review offers the most up to date data on my research demographic of any piece in this literature review and exists, "to establish whether the actual health needs of our Service Leavers are met in the most appropriate manner" (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 51). It highlights certain aspects of transition that particularly affect ex-Army personnel but only limited insight into the human experience of transition. The research tends to inform us about who is most vulnerable in transition and what can happen to these transitioners, but little is divulged as to what transition is like to live through:

> A veteran's health depends on a combination of factors including genetic, childhood experiences, pre-Service lifestyle, Service life and post-Service influences and these are perhaps not always recognised or readily acknowledged' (Ashcroft, 2014, p. 97).

From the review's eighteen individual interviews it would have been valuable to hear more about what it is like to change careers, to relocate, to operate

within civilian culture. Indeed, the more intangible, existential anxieties in transition are not accounted for by the majority of military researchers.

Herman and Yarwood (2014) summarise how existing scholarship has tended to emphasise the mental and physical issues faced by ex-forces personnel and their families including homelessness, suicide, physical incapacity, domestic violence, crime and incarceration, substance abuse and mental illness. While these issues are important, they argue that it is also important to recognise that most people leaving the Services regard themselves as physically and mentally well. Most do not enter retirement but embark on a second career and undergo significant cultural, social and spatial changes in their lives. They conclude: “There is a need for more nuanced and holistic understandings of post-military lives that takes account of all these changes” (Herman & Yarwood, 2014, p. 42).

2.3.4 ‘Successful’ transition

Another tendency that coincides with the pathological focus in the scholarship is the assumption that certain transitions are ‘successful’ or ‘good’, if certain criteria are met such as being housed, married and employed, and are not explored any further. Researchers instead invest their efforts into ‘vulnerable’ populations such as the homeless and unemployed. One such example that investigates ‘successful’ transition is a King’s Centre for Military Health Research article on British veterans leaving the Armed Forces (Iversen et al., 2005). It reports that the majority of service leavers ‘do well’ after leaving

with wellness referring to the results of a combined GHQ questionnaire screening for physical and mental health, a 'PTSR tool' that screens for post-traumatic stress symptoms and the researchers two other generated variables: 'employment' and 'education'.

The article does concede how, 'little is known about the factors associated with leaving the Armed Forces, or what predicts subsequent employment success for veterans. It is likely that there is a complex interaction of adverse social outcomes and mental health status in this group.' (Iversen et al., 2005, p. 175) However, the complexities are not revealed in this paper due to their narrow criteria of education, employment, physical and mental wellness amounting to success.

Other scholars have challenged this 'success' approach to understanding military transition as obscuring of the subtleties in military to civilian transition:

> These research findings tend to be presented in an unbalanced way…drawing attention from the majority of service leavers who are deemed "successful" through their development of civilian careers and ultimate integration into mainstream society. (Higate, 2001, p. 445)

A Forces in Mind Trust report (2014) argues that basing ‘good transition’ on statistics that identify the number who secure employment, for example, is an incomplete picture because employment does not indicate whether the employment is meaningful or satisfying to the employee. What if the employee found their job unfulfilling? Is their transition still successful? The report recognises that employment is generally an indicator of better social integration and health compared to that which might be found amongst unemployed people, but that depth and breadth of indicators are required to better understand what makes for a good transition. The report calls for further qualitative data on transition, such as the stability and purpose that come from being part of a cohesive and fulfilling social network that are currently under-researched.

Another report (Future Horizons Final Report, 2013) concurs that most academic work to date has focused on the mental health needs and substance misuse amongst the veteran population and that there is very limited literature focused on the social needs of veterans, apart from work on unemployment and homelessness.

A recent paper on cultural competence in military to civilian transition has started to fill this gap:

> 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 characterized 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 (Cooper et al, 2016, p. 8).

This points to an important tension in transition: that definitions of success in military and civilian cultures differ. For example, as we have seen in the military culture section above, the military values collective achievement over individual achievement which is not necessarily the case in civilian life. Therefore, what a civilian might praise in an ex-service person's individual success may not be valued to the same extent by the ex-service person themselves.

Higate (2001, pp. 445-447) encourages us to, "move away from the crude dichotomy between those who are alleged to succeed in civilian life and their antithesis, the stereotyped homeless ex-squaddie," and to search for unifying themes that capture all ex-services personnel instead. He also suggests that there is a tendency for understandings of the effects of military service on ex-servicemen to be either that they are wholly unaffected in transition or that they, "are considered as somewhat hapless former 'squaddies' who are unable to create non-military identities," with the expansion beyond 'these unsophisticated and stereotypical understandings' as the challenge for future research into military transition.

Herman and Yarwood (2014) have done exactly this in their paper on 'successful' transitions and they found that soldiers are, 'more than just passive beings, who are shaped or changed by military training, but are agents with complex identities.' They explore transition through the experiences of the interviewed transitioners, learning about their sense of personal and professional identity change and their bereavement over their former military identities. In doing so have they found criteria that apply to all transitioning soldiers, rather than just the 'succeeding' or 'failing' ones.

The question of what makes a good transition remains unanswered, and a combination of more quantitative and qualitative data is needed on the subject. Quantitative study is needed to isolate areas of interest for further transition research, while qualitative research can focus on cohorts who have more to teach us about the experience of transition.

2.3.5 Transition literature: Summary

Current literature on military transition is limited for my purposes as a psychotherapist looking to understand what Army exit is like to live through. Military scholarship is most often pathologically focussed with transition featuring as a secondary aspect of service veterans research, and post-deployment symptoms and socio-economic measurements taking primary importance. There are increasing calls in scholarship for more qualitative, in-depth study into the complexities of transition so that the experience can be understood in much more detail.

2.4 Existentialism, psychotherapy and transition

As an existential psychotherapist researching military transition, I was drawn to literature that connected concepts mentioned in current literature with existentialism and transition, specifically around home and identity.

2.4.1 Transitioning homes

Military life is transient (Bellino, 1970) with numerous, sometimes sudden moves, protracted separation from one's family and sporadic exposures to the civilian community. This presents personnel and their families with significant psychological challenges but also engenders a culture of resilience among them (Redmond et al., 2015). Multiple moves mean spouses and children become skilled in setting up a house and making new friends, but they often identify as the community "outsiders". For the soldiers themselves, being at home may be a welcome change, but the retiree may also feel like a stranger who has intruded on someone else's established routine (Wolpert, 2000). Ashcroft (2014) points to how vulnerable and alienating transition can be particularly for soldiers who joined straight from school and the family home having had no need to become familiar with such fundamental 'life skills' as paying Council Tax and utility bills. It is thus challenging for transitioning soldiers and their families who struggle to 'settle' in one place after leaving the military.

Many soldiers have become so accustomed to their military way of being that they prefer to be out on tour with their 'Army buddies' rather than living with their partner in the domestic setting. For other returning veterans, homelessness offers a kind of continuation of the nomadic lifestyle that their previous military existence offered them and that some chose homelessness over having a fixed residence. These men valued the freedom and romance of life 'on the open road' over anything a normative civilian existence had to offer (Higate, 2000). Higate (2001) also challenges the use of 're' in 'resettlement' and the implication that soldiers were settled prior to enlistment when perhaps they were not. He suggests that transitioners who saw the military as a route out of an unsettled home may find it even harder to 'settle' than those who did not.

This notion of settlement in transition is investigated in Herman and Yarwood's (2014) paper in which they explore the geographies of veterans' post-military lives. They draw upon interviews conducted in 2012 with 27 former service personnel (22 men, 5 women, 8 from the Army, 16 Royal Navy and 3 Royal Air Force) living in and around the city of Plymouth, UK. While the geographical locality limits the findings by the fact Plymouth is an area populated by multiple British military training centres and bases and is therefore attractive to veterans wanting to remain geographically close to their former careers, their findings offer useful insight into soldiers looking to settle post-service. They found settlement to be an "on-going spatial process" with ex-services personnel blurring the boundaries between military and civilian life.

These blurred spaces meant that veterans often did not have one, fixed place that felt like home nor one that could be separated from their military pasts. This is exemplified by the Royal Navy personnel in the study. Spending most of their careers off-shore, Royal Navy personnel were more likely to have bought an off-base property during service, meaning that they already had well integrated social life with their civilian communities before they left the military. In contrast, Army and RAF personnel, with postings to different national and international bases across their careers, tended to socialise and associate more strongly within their bases and not in the local community.

The transience of Army life is also observed by Wolpert (2000) who argues that it favours identification with the military culture and personnel over one's own individuality and connection with the local community. In the Army, transience is the consistency and, as a result, friendships are often made primarily within the base community with fellows who are familiar with this transience, rather than local civilians who are more attached to local life. This may explain why many retirees settle near military installations to maintain that identity with that group culture.

In Herman and Yarwood's (2014) paper, transitioners often compensated for their lack of local connection by creating tangible links with a place through their children's school, by joining civilian sports clubs, societies or churches on Army exit, but not feeling that they ever fully belonged to their civilian community.

Psychotherapist R. K. Papadopoulos (2002) offers some interesting insight into the issues of soldiers finding a home. He reminds us that Homer's Odyssey is comprised of twenty-four books but that the warrior Odysseus already returns home to Ithaca in Book thirteen. Papadopoulos argues that Odysseus' greatest test actually comes when he arrives back in Ithaca rather than it being the Trojan war or escaping any of the monsters he encountered on his journey home. 'Homer makes this point very clearly in so far as it takes another odyssey for Odysseus to re-establish himself in his own home' (2002, p. 14).

Higgins (2013) concurs, calling the Odyssey an account of 'the war of homecoming'. We may tend to remember his encounters with witches, nymphs and cyclopes but:

> …the essence of the story is that of a veteran combatant who, after a long absence, must find his way back into a household he finds threatened by outside forces and dangerously altered…The *Odyssey* invites us to ask: can soldiers ever, truly, return home? Will they "recognise" their family, and vice versa? Can they survive not just the war itself, but the war's aftermath? Will they, in some dread way, bring the war home with them? The *Odyssey* says: you thought it was tough getting through the war. Now, see if you can get through the *nostos* – the homecoming (Higgins, 2013).

These issues of isolation, alienation and uncertainty find a parallel in existential philosophy, though only very few scholars have directly made the link between them to date:

> [Loss of the home] creates a disturbance...which is closer to what has been referred to as "ontological insecurity", "existential anxiety" ... The shared themes of these conditions are a deep sense of a gap, a fissure, a hole, an absence, a lack of confidence in one's own existence and consequently in "reading life" which leads to a particular kind of frozenness (Papadopoulos, 2002, p. 18).

Heidegger's (1962) *'Dasein'*, or 'Being-in-the-world' sees us all as 'thrown' into the world as human beings. We do not choose to be born who and where we are but nonetheless, we find ourselves 'here'. Once we realise where we are, we can make fresh sense of who we are and decide how to be. This applies throughout our lives and we keep encountering and losing sight of our 'thrownness' as we go about our everyday living. To Heidegger, everyday living is an inauthentic way of being as we lose our sense of individuality among the conformity with others: 'the They'.

> Being-in was defined as "residing alongside...", "Being-familiar with..." This character of Being-in was then brought to view more concretely through the everyday publicness of the "they", which brings tranquillized

> self-assurance- 'Being-at-home', with all its obviousness-in-to the average everydayness of Dasein (Heidegger, 1962, p. 233).

Soldiers thus could be said to forgo some of their individuality to become 'the They', a mass of familiarity, security and certainty at home in the military. However, in military transition a soldier is thrown into their individuality awakened out of their 'Theyness' by the anxiety of not knowing who or where they are. For the returning soldier, as was the case for Odysseus, this is all the harder as the place they are thrown into looks like home but may no longer feel like home. Heidegger referred to this particular state of being as *Unheimlich* or 'uncanny':

> In anxiety one feels 'uncanny'. Here the peculiar indefiniteness of that which Dasein finds itself alongside in anxiety, comes proximally to expression: the "nothing and nowhere". But here "uncanniness" also means "not-being-at-home" [das Nicht-zuhause-sein] (Heidegger, 1962, p. 233).

In Heideggarrian terms, service leavers experience a loss of who and where they are and in this new 'nothing and nowhere' because who and where they thought they were is no longer valid. In their subsequent anxiety they begin to re-work who they are in-the-world with new 'others'. In this way their 'thrownness' wakes them up to their new freedom and choice to create a new

identity. As Hayes (2007) describes in her paper *(Be)coming Home: An Existential Perspective on Migration, Settlement and the Meanings of Home*:

> In Dasein's "thrownness", we feel at home living amidst "the They", absorbed in the roles, expectations, relationships and habits which are familiar to us. It is only in the experience of Angst, the recognition of freedom and individuality, that the world appears "uncanny" and Dasein experiences "not-being-at-home" (Hayes, 2007, p. 4).

Psychotherapist Greg Madison's (2009) concept of the voluntary 'existential migrant' similarly considers how migration challenges one's identity and sense of self, having been provoked into re-evaluation by the anxiety associated with not belonging:

> Not knowing where to locate can be very unsettling and confusing because it carries the implication of a not knowing who one is. The constant question 'where should I be?' can interrupt the task of piecing together a self that feels contiguous, leading to a crisis of identity[...] (Madison, 2009, p. 45).

While Madison is not referring directly to soldiers in his work, the loss of role, place and identity has a similar impact on service leavers, as evidenced by Atherton (2009) when he explores how masculine identities and military bodies

in the British Army are domesticated and transformed by the transition upon re-entry into civilian life:

> Upon discharge, men are re-domesticated within diverse contexts, corporeal and emotional as well as familial, and so a reworking of their masculine identity takes place. For some, the home becomes a place where they perform a traditional, patriarchal role as provider/protector. For some, it is a site of emotional security for the individual to perform a repertoire of 'new,' even unexpected behaviours that allows them to re-imagine their sense of selfhood. For some, the home is a site of negotiation, worry and suppression, as they work to care for others while eradicating 'weakness' within themselves. And for others, the home is akin to a prison, an assemblage of physical and symbolic reminders of the trauma they have undergone while in service. (Atherton, 2009, p. 834)

Thus, transitioning home instigates a transition in identity.

2.4.2 Transitioning identities

The premise of Higate's (2001), *Theorizing Continuity: From Military to Civilian Life* is that, "an unknown, but perhaps significant, number of ex-service personnel experience tensions between tenacious military identity and post-discharge 'resettlement' within the civilian environment" (2001, p. 443).

Herman and Yarwood (2014) assert that while it is recognised how the Armed Forces change the identities of civilians when they become soldiers, less is known about what happens when soldiers become civilians, with even the most basic of data on the numbers of UK veterans and their status being unaccounted for. Woodward and Jenkings (2011) suggest that much research on military identities has focused on key sociological concepts such as race, class and gender, and that this specific frame may have skewed the prevalence of these concepts in sociological understanding of individual military identities. Instead their study researched military identity without focussing on these concepts and none of the above demographics emerged as substantial elements in their interviewee's sense of military identity. The military identities that resulted were distilled into three themes: professional skill, competence and expertise as a trained military operative; the significance of camaraderie amongst soldiers; and the personal participation in events of national or global significance. Collectively this was summarised as, "what soldiers do, rather than around what they might be conceptualized as being" (Woodward & Jenkings, 2011, p. 253). We can therefore conceive that soldiers feel the absence of what they once did as an aspect of their post-military identity.

This absence of identity is certainly present in studies on military retirement and provides a useful perspective on identity in military transition. While UK soldiers can only retire after twenty-two years, putting this demographic outside of my study range, the differences between military retirement and other career retirement are revealing about the context into which soldiers transition on exit from the military. Firstly, military retirement is a midlife

transition and it has been suggested (Walker, 2013) that terming it retirement is misleading as it is rarely a retirement to leisure. Most often military pensions are often not enough for service leavers to live on, particularly if they have a family, so it is more appropriate to think of it as a second career.

With this career change comes changes in an individual's role both in work and personal life. It may also be the time when the retiree's spouse pursues a career and many family roles change (Wolpert, 2000). The ranking hierarchy and structure goes and with it the status of rank in both family and working life. Wolpert (2000) terms this 'role transition' and presents it as a mixed blessing. The military retiree leaves a role in a culture that has been a dominant factor in his or her life for at least 20 years, which comes with a sense of loss but it also comes with the freedom of leaving a culture that is highly regulated in almost all aspects of life. Individuals can choose where to live for the first time and start creating individualised identities for themselves, typified by the fact that they no longer need to wear the uniform.

This raises a key point with regards to transitioning military identity and how much individuals seek to distinguish themselves from their military past in their new civilian life. In her *Changing Step*, Ruth Jolly (1996) finds that her sample of 62 ex-service people can be organised into two groups: "those who have fostered new identities through civilian occupations, and others, unable to shrug off the legacy of their previous status, forever seeing themselves as ex-service people" (Jolly, 1996, p 446). Soldiers from junior ranks in particular

tended to settle in uniformed civilian services and security industries, seemingly seeking similar roles to their military ones.

Similarly, Higate (2001) points to two reports from 1996 which concluded that around 75 percent of service leavers across the Armed Forces were in careers that pointed to, “employment continuity within what could be termed ‘masculinized’ institutions” (2001, p. 452). Here, Higate also suggests that choosing a life of homelessness could be a continuity with military life too with ex-service homeless individuals and those who secure paid employment sharing a surprising degree of military residue. Both require a tenacity that is endemic in military masculine gender ideology (Higate, 2001, p. 453).

Redmond et al. (2015) argue that personnel can be distinguished between those whose military and personal lives greatly overlap and those who see the military as their occupation, a means-to-an-end, with their main focus outside of the military. The implication is that those who heavily identify with the military are more likely to seek out career continuity and remain largely aligned to military values after Army exit.

Brunger et al. (2013) argue that this need for continuity masks the threat that civilian life represents to a transitioner’s identity and prevents ex-service personnel from transiting successfully into civilian life. It perpetuates an ex-services identity rather than reinstating a new identity with a non-military focus, leaving individuals stunted: “the transition from military to civilian life

is representative of a shift in identity, whereby ex-service personnel must accept identity loss and the inevitable need for change therein" (Brunger et al., 2013, p. 95).

Via the eleven interviews in their study, Brunger et al. (2013) illustrate the losses in transition of financial security, emotional security (resulting from a reduction in social interaction), community, collective purpose and unified bond with fellow soldiers, loss of social skills, loss of mental health and:

> perhaps the most significant ''loss'' as experienced by all participants upon their return to civilian life was to their self-identity. Each described the difficulty in parting with their distinctiveness as represented through the symbolic act of handing over their military ID card, just as it had been ''born'' with the donning of the uniform when they first signed their allegiance (Brunger et al, 2013, p. 92).

Here we see the strength of a phenomenological study, in the case IPA, languaging the experience of transitioners as they lose their identity on Army exit. The study offers no objective truth but does offer evocative vignettes that show what it is like for a soldier to live through transition.

In providing such evocative insight, their study shows how military transition aligns with Jean-Paul Sartre's (2003) concept of 'bad faith' wherein people

have lost sight of themselves as free to choose their being, having over-identified with their role in the world. Soldiers can somewhat lose their individuality in their careers by over-identifying with the military collective, meaning they no longer know what they want for themselves when they leave.

In his *Existentialism is a Humanism*, Sartre (2007) presents how Existentialism undoes bad faith and gives rise to the freedom to live as one chooses:

> In other words there is no determinism – man is free, man is freedom. If… God does not exist, we will encounter no values or orders that can legitimize our conduct. Thus, we have neither behind us, nor before us, in the luminous realm of values, any means of justification or excuse. We are left alone and without excuse. That is what I mean when I say that man is condemned to be free: condemned, because he did not create himself, yet nonetheless free, because once cast into the world, he is responsible for everything he does (Sartre, 2007,p. 29).

For similar reasons Brunger et al. (2013) suggest that any pre-exit preparation from the military should place identity as of paramount importance. They found that transition had three perspectives:

> Characteristics of a military life; loss as experienced upon return to civilian life; and the attempt to bridge the gap between these two lives. Transcending these themes was the notion of identity, illustrating that the

> transition from military to civilian life can be viewed as a shift in sense of self from soldier to civilian (Brunger et al, 2013, p. 86).

One of their implications for practice is that, “If there was increased opportunity for ex-service personnel to move (if desired) into similar masculinised institutions, this would enable the transferral of key skills and help to bridge the gap between military and civilian life” (Brunger et al., 2013, p. 97). A more recent study suggests that the contrary is true, that in fact the further from military life the occupation, the more likelihood an individual will reinvent their identity (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017). A factor contributing to the findings Brunger et al. (2013) is that participants were recruited through a supported housing project that provides secure, short-term accommodation to those service leavers and veterans who are struggling to locate more permanent housing and employment, so the participants were already experiencing some degree of difficulty with their transition. Perhaps a wider pool of participants with different transition experiences would have resulted in more varied findings.

Using a mixed methods hermeneutic and pragmatic qualitative approach, Walker (2013) researches those who found military exit problematic alongside those for whom exit seemed an effortless transition ‘in order to push the boundaries’ of British Army identity constructions. While this is an appropriate methodology to discuss the identity construct of transitioners, a

sample size of 18 participants is too big to provide the depth of description needed to better understand transition experiences.

From the 18 interviews with exiting Army personnel interviewed, Walker discerns, “at least a twofold process of identity construction/reconstruction for the leavers who, during the preexit period, need to answer the question: ‘who or what will I be after leaving the Army?’ which implies a second and related process in the form of renewed attentiveness to questions of ‘who or what have I become?’ Invariably, this involves a personal construction about the kinds of soldier they think themselves to be set against anticipated civilian lives” (2013, pp. 289-290).

Walker’s (2013) findings thus feature the ways in which his interviewees defined their military careers and how much they felt professionally, personally and morally aligned to the military. Their sense of their past military identity helps them to shape their future. As Frankl (2008) says, “having been is the surest kind of being.” However, their future remained an intimidating one, as one infantry officer with 16 years’ experience recognising how uneasily translated his professional skills would be in the civilian labour market conceded, ‘‘it’s terrifying—it’s a leap of faith—a leap into the complete unknown…” (Walker, 2013, p. 291).

What binds these empirical and philosophical studies together is the way in which transitioning military identity is in tension between a soldier’s past,

their present and their future. It seems that an appreciation of one's chronology is critical to a transitioner's changing identity.

In their literature review on how the term 'transition' has been used in health literature, Kralik, Visentin and Van Loon (2006) reveal a split in the scholarship between those who view transition as a linear, often three stage process of "ending, then a beginning, and an important empty or fallow time in between" (Bridges, 2004, p. 17), and those who view transition as a non-linear, ongoing process. Ultimately Kralik et al. (2006, pp. 320-325) find the latter perspective better encapsulates military transition, concluding that "transition is an intricate and convoluted process with forward and backward movement" and that the "reconstruction of a valued sense of self-identity is essential to transition." This is a literature review from a physical health journal with a broad scope and only including papers between 1994-2004 so it does not speak to the specifics of military transition but the temporal parallels between the findings and that of military specific papers is apparent.

Further, it resonates with Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death* (2008) wherein a human being is conceived of as not yet a self but is in the 'process of becoming'. Kierkegaard states that we are tasked to become ourselves once we discover that we are a synthesis of what we necessarily are and what we could possibly be. Being conscious about the process of becoming is the 'sickness unto death' or the despair of living as synthesis. The reason that the sickness is unto death is this process of despairing over what we are not yet

only ends in death. Yet it is not that we as humans are condemned to being in a constant state of despair but rather that despair presents us with an opportunity to live a more self-affirmed life. Existentially, if a transitioner is in despair this is a sign that to some extent he is engaging with life, rather than becoming lost in 'the they' or indeed is in 'bad faith'.

Kralik et al. (2006) reference a theory suggesting that people may undergo more than one transition at any given time. In the case of this thesis, a soldier is undergoing career, identity, familial and geographical transitions all at once. If this is the case and transition is a linear process, then tracking the multiple transitions and the different points in their trajectory would nonetheless feel as if it was as non-linear process. Kralik et al. also relay the view that identity transition can only occur if the person is aware of the changes that are taking place within and around them (Chick & Meleis, 1986), as is the case in Sartre's (2003) bad faith. This becomes an even harder task if a soldier is to engage with multiple transitions and these subtleties in transition are scarcely discussed in military scholarship.

2.4.3 Existentialism, psychotherapy and transition: Summary

Military scholarship on transition acknowledges that settling into civilian life is challenging for the exiting soldier. There is debate whether soldiers who settle near to their former military locality and who maintain similar working and personal roles to those they held in the military are settling or not.

Intertwined with this is the debate whether soldiers who retain aspects of their former military identities have settled or are stuck in the past. In the absence of in-depth, qualitative research, existential concepts offer some insight into how transition may affect a soldier's sense of home and identity, but more qualitative research is needed to qualify whether these concepts apply to military transition.

2.5 Literature Review Summary

There is an absence of in-depth, experiential data across the topics of this literature review. Qualitative research on transition is sparse and on military transition more so. As a psychotherapist wanting to understand the experience of military transition from an exiting soldier's perspective, I have little to draw understanding from. My research aims to address the absence that this review exposes. By exploring what is it like for a soldier to leave the British Army and whether existential psychotherapy can help in the transition process, this research can better understand how the legacy of the military affects transitioning soldiers, what there is to transition beyond pathology, how transitioning soldiers identify and how they feel among civilians.

The scholarship on military transition and grief reflects the dominant Western attitude to loss in that it is mostly not talked about, however this comes at a cost. Transition is clearly a process of loss and change and the lack of grief, bereavement and loss in the transition narrative means that notions of identity, finitude, freedom and responsibility, isolation and meaning changes in military

to civilian transition are largely absent in scholarship. In turn, this may be obscuring opportunities to help transitioners grow into their new civilian lives.

3. Methodology and Method

3.1 Methodology

This section explains how I chose Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) as my research method and why it best meets my aim as an existential psychotherapist researching experiences of military to civilian transition.

3.1.1 Limitations of quantitative research for psychotherapy

Quantitative research does not produce the detail of experience that a psychotherapist would need to understand what it is like to transition out of the military. This is best displayed in empirical quantitative research and what is obscured by its, ‘systematic collection and classification of observations’ (Willig, 2001, p. 3).

Considering one empirical study into transition, Vigoda-Gadot, Baruch and Grimland (2010) measured how successful Israeli military retirees found their second career post-military exit. The research team classified key factors that contributing to success including how well a soldier had prepared for retirement, how much their work conflicted with family priorities and how committed they were to their new organisation. They also measured factors based on these classifications such as career satisfaction, life satisfaction, number of jobs and tenure in new job. These factors and measures were then

scaled and collated into questionnaires. For example, life satisfaction was measured by a 1-5 scale (from highly disagree to highly agree) with a sample item as “In most ways, my life is close to my ideal” (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010, p. 388).

One illustrative finding from this study was that there was a direct positive relationship between military retirees who prepared well for military retirement and retires who felt they had career and life satisfaction. We can thus suppose that under-prepared exiting soldiers will struggle more in transition. However, the narrative detail behind their subsequent career and life dissatisfaction is absent and this is detail that is difficult to measure.

When attempting to measure intangible, complex or ambiguous aspects of existence that escape easy observation and classification such as thoughts and emotions, both empiricism and positivism more broadly do not produce the richness of data required.

Positivist methodologies attempt to be objective and to minimise the influence of the researcher as much as possible, as the following statement attests:

> A positivist epistemology implies that the goal of research is to produce objective knowledge; that is, understanding that is impartial and unbiased,

> based on a view from 'the outside', without personal involvement or vested interests on the part of the researcher (Willig, 2001, p. 3).

As I want to engage in a dialogue with transitioners and to enquire more deeply into their experience of transition, I will inevitably affect their responses as they will know they are talking to a psychotherapist and academic researcher rather than their friend, employer or housing officer. While qualitative research is well-suited to any study on objectively observable data, it will not account sufficiently for the inter-subjectivity between me and my participants, nor will it sufficiently account for the intangible experiences in transition so I need to look beyond qualitative methodology in this research.

3.1.2 Qualitative methodology

On reading Linda Finlay's (2011) description of qualitative research it was clear that this methodology would more deeply facilitate the depiction of military to civilian transition that I needed for this project. She says of qualitative research that it:

> illuminates the less tangible meanings and intricacies of our social world... aims to be inductive and exploratory, typically asking 'what' and how', and posing questions related to description and understanding... explores the textured meanings and subjective interpretations of a fluid, uncertain world... [and] acknowledges the relationship between participants, researchers and the world (Finlay, 2011, pp. 8-9).

Thus, qualitative research exposes a depth of personal meaning that quantitative, objective research cannot. By explaining this in greater detail in the next section we will see how Finlay's claims about qualitative research are put into practice.

3.1.3 Phenomenology and phenomenological research

Phenomenology proposes that knowledge can only be momentarily encountered between the perceiver of a phenomenon and the subject or object that is being perceived. As soon as we reflect on this encounter, we are no longer experiencing it and the knowledge from our perception is confined to the past. Phenomenological knowledge cannot be captured in any exact way because it is always shifting and inherently intangible. Just because we knew something just then does not mean it remains true now. A key figure in phenomenology Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2002) states:

> since…we are in the world, since indeed our reflections are carried out in the temporal flux on the which we are trying to seize…there is no thought which embraces all our thought. The philosopher…is a perpetual beginner, which means that he takes for granted nothings that men, learned or otherwise, believe they know (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p, xv).

The relationship between perceiver and perceived is fundamental to phenomenology, best captured by what existential-phenomenologist Martin Buber (1958) calls 'I-Thou' relating. I-Thou relating describes a connection

in-between people that is all encompassing and totally immersive. The relating beings supersede their individuality in the intensity of an experience and cease to relate as separate subjects, becoming instead an inter-subjective whole. I-Thou cannot be deconstructed into component subjects nor orchestrated by bringing components together. I-Thou instead happens when beings are open and willing enough to connect with each other and share a reality:

> The relation to the Thou is direct. No system of ideas, no foreknowledge, and no fancy intervene between I and Thou. The memory itself is transformed, as it plunges out of its isolation into the unity of the whole. No aim, no lust, and no anticipation intervene between I and Thou. Desire itself is transformed as it plunges out of its dream into the appearance. Every means is an obstacle. Only when every means has collapsed does the meeting come about. (Buber, 1958, p. 17)

Barnett (2009) explains how this relates to the relationship between psychotherapy supervisor and supervisee, but the concept can extend to any relationship, including interviewer and interviewee in this research:

> For Buber, truth and authenticity arise in the interhuman realm when people show themselves and communicate without putting up a façade or barriers, and genuinely give of themselves. This stance requires a willingness on the part of both supervisors and supervisees

> to take the risk of opening themselves to one another and of being changed by the encounter (Barnett, 2009, p. 58).

Indeed, a strength of phenomenological research is that it requires the researcher to personally engage with the data and in doing so bridges the ‘chasm between practice and research’ in research psychology (Finlay, 2011, p. 3). Phenomenology is directly opposite to positivism in this way. Positivism seeks to separate us from the measurable world whereas phenomenology reads some aspects of existence as inherently inseparable from ourselves:

> Phenomenology wants us to relinquish our conditions to bring together the polarities of mind-body, self-other, individual-social, feelings-thoughts, body-soul, nature-nurture, mental-physical, subject-object. The hyphen signifies intertwining rather than separation: the world does not exist ‘out there’ separate from our perceptions, rather it is part of us and us of it (Finlay, 2011, p. 21).

Positivists rightly challenge how phenomenological research does not produce objective knowledge about the world by this process but, as we have seen in the empirical study above, some phenomena escape such objectification. In the absence of objective truth, phenomenology offers an alternative, as Max van Manen (1990) clarifies:

> phenomenology does not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world, but rather it offers us the possibility of plausible insights that bring us in more direct contact with the world (van Manen, 1990, p. 9).

I then had to choose the best phenomenological research methodology for my project.

3.1.4 Descriptive and interpretive methodologies

There are two broad methodologies in phenomenological psychology research; descriptivism and interpretivism; based on the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger respectively (Finlay, 2011, p. 87).

Descriptivists champion Husserl's process of rigorously iterative reduction of descriptions as the means of arriving at the essence of a phenomenon. Landridge (2007, pp. 105-106) details the noting that the researcher most often presents participants with the research question and asks them to write descriptions of their experience of the phenomena being investigated. The descriptions are collected, and this is followed by a structured process of analysis where the text is systematically coded for units of meaning before moving on to assess their psychological meaning. Langdridge cites Giorgi, one of the most prominent descriptivists, who believes that, 'unified meaning can

be teased out and described precisely as it presents itself' (Giorgi, 1992, p. 123, cited in Langdridge, 2007).

In employing this rigorous system, decriptivism is seen as more scientific than artistic in its methodological intentions, focusing on the phenomenon itself and attempting to disentangle it from the describer as much as possible (Robson, 2002; Finlay, 2011). This is best shown in the descriptivist application of Husserl's 'epoché' or 'bracketing' when analysing data. Bracketing is the practice of keeping:

> more of an open mind about the person...so that your subsequent conclusions would be based more upon your immediate unbiased experience of the person rather than upon prior assumptions and expectations (Spinelli, 2005, p. 20).

Bracketing, then, is chiefly employed to distinguish and hold our idiosyncratic assumptions away from the data. While this contributes to a rigorous research system, particularly suited to researching evidence-based practice (Finlay, 2011, p. 105), it is limiting when researching intangible phenomena. If a description does not present itself in the data, it will be treated as an assumption and will not survive the system of reduction. Consequently, when a phenomenon is implicit rather than explicit in the data, it cannot survive the reduction and will be unaccounted for.

When reduction fails to account for a phenomenon, another approach is needed. As the phenomenologist and interpretivist, Merleau-Ponty, (1962, p. xv) said, “The most important lesson which the reduction teaches us is the impossibility of a complete reduction.” Interpretive methodologies have a different application to descriptivism, being designed specifically to account for the intangible, with interpretation being, “necessary because phenomenology is concerned with meanings which are often implicit or hidden” (Finlay, 2011, p. 111).

In interpretivism meaning is unique to the perceiver of a phenomenon, making any description by them an interpretation of the essence. My experience as the researcher becomes the conduit through which meaning is made. Merleau-Ponty’s (1962) *Phenomenology of Perception* focuses on the relationship between the perceiver and the perceived and gets to the very heart of the interpretivist position:

> I am the absolute source, my existence does not stem from my antecedents, from my physical and social environment; instead it moves out towards and sustains them, for I alone bring into being for myself (and therefore in being in the only sense that the word can have for me) the tradition which I elect to carry on, or the horizon whose distance from me would be abolished–since that distance is not one of its properties–if I were not there to scan it with my gaze (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. ix).

In interpretivism my gaze as a researcher is a creative force to be harnessed. This creativity has made interpretivism appeal to more artistic researchers than the systematically scientific methodology of descriptivism. “It is the artful rendering of science which hermeneutic phenomenologists are drawn towards” (Finlay, 2011, p. 109).

Interpretive phenomenology also invites engagement with the readers of research, recognising them as another absolute source, with their own gaze. By presenting the individuality of my interpretation, I welcome the reader to check their own biases and use them to make their own interpretations from their unique perspective. The descriptivist by contrast researches with the belief that we would all come to the same conclusion if only the correct unified meaning could be teased out and so does not value the influence of the researcher or the reader.

This consideration of the reader raises another important difference between interpretivism and descriptivism, which van Manen (1990) distinguishes. He suggests that descriptivist reduction tempts readers to overlook the research process and head straight to the conclusion. One can read the question and the result of the reduction in the conclusion and feel as if the crux has been captured in this ‘bookended’ reading. van Manen challenges this way of both researching and reading when he says:

> As in poetry, it is inappropriate to ask for a conclusion or a summary of a phenomenological study. To summarize a poem in order to present the result would destroy the result because the poem itself is the result. The poem is the thing (van Manen, 1990, p. 13).

Interpretivist research celebrates the artistry of writing as a means of engaging the reader. van Manen (2003, p. 237) writes of ‘addressive moments’, “when a text suddenly ‘speaks’ to us in a manner that validates our experience, when it conveys a life understanding that stirs our sensibilities, when it pulls the strings of unity of our being”.

They are an extension of phenomenology itself and, if executed well, bring experiences to life through the reading of them:

> The phenomenologist does not present the reader with a conclusive argument or with a determinate set of ideas, essences, or insights. Instead, he or she aims to be allusive by orientating the reader reflectively to that region of lived experience where the phenomenon dwells in recognizable form. More strongly put, the reader must become possessed by the allusive power of text – taken, touched, overcome by the addressive effect of its reflective engagement with lived experience (van Manen, 2003, p. 238).

The way that interpretivism provides a means of describing the intangible in transition, combined with its acknowledgement of my personal influence as the

researcher and the quality of engagement with the experience of transition that it can execute makes it a more applicable phenomenological approach to my research than descriptivism. The next section details which method of interpretivist phenomenology I chose and why.

3.1.5 Interpretive Phenomenology

Here I am going to present my choice of a more general version of Hermeneutic Phenomenology (HP) over two other interpretivist modes; Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Template Analysis (TA).

While these approaches have far more similarities than differences between them, it was the combination of a greater license for creativity, analytical freedom and the celebration of the researcher as a writer that helped me choose HP over the other two styles.

IPA remains the most widely used interpretive methods in psychotherapy, with researchers having the option of following a step-by-step guided method of analysis as suggested by its founder Jonathan Smith (Smith, Flower, & Larkin 2009). Interviews are most often semi-structured, meaning that the researcher has the intention of asking a certain set of open-ended questions in the interview where appropriate. Analysis involves scrutinising the interview transcripts for themes via a structured, labour-intensive four stage method. Firstly, the transcript is read and re-read with the intention of capturing the

meaning of the text. Comments and summaries are made in the left-hand column in order to distinguish section meanings. Secondly emerging themes are noted in the right-hand column. Initial notes are expanded upon, perhaps connecting them to theoretically relevant concerns. Thirdly the themes are listed on a separate sheet of paper in chronological order and the researcher considers common links between these themes. This is a process of separating out, clustering, re-ordering, refining and distinguishing the importance of the themes. Lastly the resulting themes are coherently ordered, named and connected to relevant points in the text using quotes. If certain themes do not connect back to the text, they may be dropped at this stage. When moving onto the next transcript, the researcher can either start anew or use the previous table of themes to guide then next analysis (Langdridge, 2007, pp. 107-111).

If this structure is followed too rigidly and without working from the phenomenological research goal of depicting lived experience, IPA can suffer from becoming overly cognitive, even Cartesian in that the researcher becomes split from the interpretation, only following the process This was critical to my choosing HP over IPA. Willig (2001, p. 65) argues that poorly crafted IPA studies that focus on cognition become incompatible with phenomenology, over-looking pre-cognitive experience like hunches and mood that are on the fringes of consciousness and are central to phenomenology precisely because they are inarticulate and unfocused.

In his rebuttal rejoinder to Jonathan Smith (2009) on the meaning and method of his IPA method, van Manen goes further by asserting that IPA is not phenomenological when it focuses on reflective text analysis and that, "the program of IPA does not resemble any of the phenomenologies that are to be found in the primary literature, tradition, and movements of phenomenology" (van Manen, 2018, p. 13). He argues that phenomenology is concerned with primal, pre-reflective or lived experience, trying to access, "the originary meaning of experiences as we live them before we have put words to them or for which we have not words yet" (van Manen, 2018, p. 9), and that makes IPA, with its structured focus on reflective experience, insufficiently phenomenological.

Finlay (2011) too sees this problem in some IPA studies, emphasising the need for researchers to look beyond reflective cognitions to the less tangible, less conscious aspects of the analysed experience or else the study may cease to be a phenomenological one:

> Novice researchers need to avoid the pitfall of treating IPA like straight-forward, mechanical qualitative thematic analysis uncoupled from phenomenological theory. Such an approach can result in reductionist analysis of one aspect, thereby missing the opportunity to describe meanings and experience more holistically. Often, novice researchers focus overly on cognitions and sense-making at the expense, for example, of exploring embodied experience. Without a holistic focus on lived

> experience, the study is probably best considered phenomenologically inspired rather than phenomenology per se (Finlay, 2011, p. 146).

Finlay draws our attention to the fact that Smith himself (Smith et al., 2009) says that, in practical terms, IPA is not a prescriptive approach and that he urges researchers to be creative and flexible rather than slavishly following the ‘method’ (Finlay, 2011, p. 141).

TA was developed after IPA and offers a different starting point in an otherwise very similar approach. The major difference in TA is that it may, although need not, start with a predetermined list of themes. Themes may come from previous research or the theoretical concerns of the analyst. The template is a shifting one, changing as it becomes informed with the new data emerging in the course of the study. As the themes either change or are reinforced, the texts are coded and organised between themes that existed *a priori* (before the analysis) and those that emerge *a posteriori* (during). The transcripts are coded to reflect and distinguish the themes that emerged a priori and a posteriori. Those studies that do not employ predetermined templates, “are almost indistinguishable from IPA studies” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 125).

Creating a template has the potential to cloud my perception of military to civilian transition before I begin the data collection. As van Manen says:

> If one examines existing human science texts at the very outset then it may be more difficult to suspend one's interpretive understanding of the phenomenon. It is sound practice to attempt to address the phenomenological meaning of a phenomenon on one's own first (van Manen, 1990, p. 76).

Furthermore, Dermot Moran talks of 'folk wisdom', or information which enables us to generate questions, in my case, what I unearth in Chapter 2, but he issues a warning about this too:

> As Heidegger is aware, this average understanding is necessary to enable the act of questioning to take place in the first instance, but it also can disable the question, prevent it from adequately rendering an answer because the preconceptions can distort or conceal the answer completely (Moran, 2000, p. 236).

HP avoids both this potentially disabling distortion in TA, and the potentially stifling method of analysis in IPA. In HP, there is a reluctance to formalise the method, with researchers preferring to let methods emerge uniquely in the context of the phenomenon being investigated (Langdridge, 2007, p. 109). With even less of a formal method than in IPA and TA, HP researchers can adjust their analysis according to the mood of their subjects and to suit the phenomena being investigated. Langdridge (2007, p. 114) says that HP studies as more likely to involve the use of creative writing to bring a topic to life, making HP

the most conducive method of depicting addressive moments when compared to IPA and TA.

Furthermore, interviews are predominantly unstructured, offering greater flexibility and the opportunity for interviewers to “contribute more of their own views” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 123). The utilisation of unstructured interviews in HP is partly a consequence of the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans Georg Gadamer that underpins the method, holding the belief that “understanding is necessarily a dialogue” (Lawn, 2006, p. 57). Langdridge says of unstructured interviews:

> The interview is very likely to be conversational in style, and this is arguably the major advantage of unstructured interviews over semi-structured interviews. If the participant becomes engaged in conversation very naturally, then there is the very real possibility of rapport and, with this, more open and honest responses along with greater riches (Langdridge, 2007, p. 68).

Unstructured interviews are difficult to execute as they balance natural conversation with a research agenda and quality data is reliant on good engagement with the participant. However, unstructured interviews create the best opportunity for creativity, spontaneity and presence, qualities that I aim to facilitate in my psychotherapy sessions, making HP the closest method to psychotherapeutic work, which this research is trying to inform.

As HP is largely founded on Gadamer's hermeneutics, further exploration of his philosophy is warranted.

3.1.6 Hermeneutics and Gadamer

Chris Lawn (2006) tells us how 'Hermeneutics' has become an overused and misconstrued term, often being used synonymously with interpretation. While the word hermeneutic does derive from the Ancient Greek word *hermeneuein* meaning to interpret, this is not interpretation as we know it today. 'For the Greeks, interpretation was the elucidation and explication of elusive sacred messages and signs' (Lawn, 2006, p. 45). Consider the Ancient Greek messenger god Hermes whose role it was to make the way of the gods known to mortals or the Christian Angel Gabriel delivering the word of God to the Virgin Mary. These messengers did much more than carry messages. They found a way to make the will of all-knowing deities understandable to humans who had a far narrower, more limited view of the world. They are more akin to translators in the same way that skilful therapists translate the processes of their client's psyche for them.

In keeping with this understanding of interpretation, 17th century Protestant theologians wishing to devise a more systematic, less allegorical way of understanding scripture developed *hermeneutica*, or the 'art' of interpretation

with its own procedures and techniques. The key point to note about this development is that:

> hermeneutic strategies only came into play when the biblical text seemed opaque and resisted easy translation and explanation. Understanding was taken to be the rule rather than the exception and thus hermenutical strategies only became necessary when the text lapsed into mysteriousness or became incomprehensible and the pitfalls of misunderstanding were evident. (Lawn, 2006, p.45)

This is the subtlety in the meaning of hermeneutic interpretation. Inherent in the description is the recognition that the concept is irreducible and translation impossible. This builds a foundation upon which Gadamer's hermeneutic of human understanding can be introduced. Gadamer believes that:

> The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human lived lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion (Gadamer, 2004, p. 303).

For Gadamer (2004), human life defies fixed, absolute reduction. We are always in motion and so elude the capture of a viewer. This applies equally to

the participants in my research. As their lives change, they lose and get new jobs, have a child, learn of the death of a former colleague to name but a few possibilities, their experience of military to civilian transition alters too.

Gadamer (2004) suggests a means by which we can discover that which cannot be fixed into one place for observation and recording. We can use our initial and inevitable misunderstanding of each other to guide us away from our own narrow viewpoint towards a more expansive, enlightened horizon. He achieves this through an appreciation of individual prejudice, history and tradition. This is the context in which Gadamer's hermeneutics thrive.

According to Gadamer, all we have when we enter into dialogue with another is our position, our horizon, that we arrived at via our past experience, our personal history and inherited cultural tradition, which he terms our 'historically effected consciousness':

> we are always already affected by history. It determines in advance both what seems to us worth inquiring about and what will appear as an object of investigation, and we more or less forget half of what is really there – in fact, we miss the whole truth of the phenomenon – when we take its immediate appearance as the whole truth (Gadame, 2004, p. 300).

At the point of meeting another we are ignorant of and a mystery to each other and misunderstanding will be rife, initially at least. If I am going to discover something about the other, I need to first share with them what I can see from my viewpoint, my tradition and ask questions of them as I see them from my position. We start from a prejudiced position that is informed by our personal historically effected consciousness. However, while prejudice is unavoidable, we can employ it wisely by always remembering that it is just a pre-judgement and one that will be better informed by being open to the encounter with the other. Now we stand a chance of seeing beyond the immediate appearance of a phenomenon. As Moran says:

> We cannot eliminate prejudice, but we can make it visible and thus make it work for us... For Gadamer our 'prejudices' do not constitute a wilful blindness which prevents us from grapsing the truth; rather they are the platform from which we launch our very attempt at understanding (Moran 2000, p. 278).

Prejudice of personal history, tradition and culture spark off the process of expanding one's narrow horizon by adjusting to the experience of the other, providing a better informed, contemporary horizon:

> In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering

> the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past…old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other. (Gadamer, 2004, p. 305)

In this research, my 'prejudices' will simultaneously guide me to the questions I ask of my participants and reveal the curiosity I have about military transition from my horizon. In their answering, the participants will both provide me with a glimpse of the world from their horizon and expand the panorama of my horizon too. Heidegger (1962 p. 28) said that it is the 'relatedness backward or forward' in dialogue that advances understanding, and this is what Gadamer (2004) harnesses in his 'fusion of horizons'. The fusion is an eternal aspiration; it never can be fully achieved or finally completed (Lawn, 2006, p. 66) but for Gadamer, hermeneutics lies in the tension between the inherent limitations of our horizons, our finite vision, and the potential to continually pursue the expansion of our horizons in order to improve understanding. The pursuit is in the sharing of my horizon with another's in dialogue with the aim of reaching beyond our prejudices to a greater understanding than I could ever have achieved on my own:

> Transposing ourselves consists neither in the empathy of one individual for another nor in subordinating another person to our own standards; rather it always involves rising to a higher universality that overcomes not only our own particularity but also that of the other. The concept of

> "horizon" suggests itself because it expresses the superior breadth of vision that the person who is trying to understand must have (Gadamer, 2004, p. 304).

It is a challenging and vulnerable-making practice. Moran tells us:

> For Gadamer, the desire to seek understanding or even to speak one's mind, always involves a desire to be understood by the other, and risking of one's assumptions. (Moran, 2000, p. 270).

One must be humble in order to interpret hermeneutically and be prepared to be changed in the process of it. Herein lies a major distinction in Gadamer's (2004) hermeneutics. It is more than a technique: it must be lived. The insight gained is one that the researcher, participants and readers live through because they have engaged with it directly. Gadamer's hermeneutics cannot generate new objective knowledge but the quality of insight discovered in the process has the capacity to change the outlook of anyone who has engaged with it.

Moran (2000, p. 266) argues that Gadamer's (2004) real claim is that scientific truth is not the whole truth and that practical understanding cannot be completely enumerated in the manner of technical or theoretical understanding. Moran even suggests that the title 'Truth and Method', 'should have been 'Truth Against Method', since Gadamer saw it as "heightening the tension between truth and method"' (Gadamer, 2004, p. 555, cited in Moran, p. 265).

This tension is crucial to understanding Gadamer (2004). In writing his text, he was advocating for a world where science and method no longer held the monopoly over truth; that there is truth to be found beyond the realms of science and method and that blindly following method only serves to obscure our path to the truth. No scientific, methodological or theoretical deconstruction of military to civilian transition can encapsulate what it is like to drive out of the barracks for the last time. However, if one engages in a hermeneutic dialogue with a transitioner about the experience of handing over his identity card at the gate, then the phenomenon of Army exit might become more accessible to the outside observer.

Now we can explore how Gadamer's hermeneutics are employed in HP with the understanding that a Gadamerian method must be lived, not just implemented.

3.1.7 Max van Manen's Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Max van Manen summarises his methodology of phenomenological research as follows:

> The methodology of phenomenology is such that it posits an approach toward research that aims at being presuppositionless; in other words, this is a methodology that tries to ward off any tendency toward constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts that would rule-govern the research project (van Manen, 1990, p. 29).

It is, “more a carefully cultivated thoughtfulness than a technique” (van Manen, 1990, p. 131) that values Gadamer’s (2004) pursuit of truth over method via responsible engagement with phenomena and the ‘superior vision’ that Gadamer alludes to in his meaning of ‘horizon’.

With his philosophical position established, van Manen clarifies that Hermeneutic phenomenology (HP) is nonetheless a method:

> Hermeneutic phenomenology is a method of abstemious reflection on the basic structures of the lived experience of human existence. The term method refers to the way or attitude of approaching a phenomenon. Abstemious means that reflecting on experience aims to abstain from theoretical, polemical, suppositional, and emotional intoxications. Hermeneutic means that reflecting on experience must aim for discursive language and sensitive interpretive devices that make phenomenological analysis, explication, and description possible and intelligible (van Manen, 2014, location 733).

He emphasises the need for abstinence because one’s reflection of an experience is always retrospective and therefore removed from the experience making it vulnerable to outside influence. He explains:

> If one tries to reflect on one’s anger while being angry, one finds that the anger has already changed or dissipated. Thus, phenomenological

> reflection is not introspective but retrospective. Reflection on lived experience is always recollective; it is reflection on experience that is already passed or lived through (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

By abstaining from the theory, controversy, supposition, emotion (i.e. applying the phenomenological attitude) that can taint one's reflection about an experience, responsible interpretation can happen. This is an ongoing process, as discussed in the section on Gadamer, because our 'horizon' is changing constantly, altering perception and our subsequent reflections (van Manen, 1990, p. 59). This also extends to the writing process because van Manen sees writing as an inherently reflexive activity that:

> involves the totality of our physical and mental being. To write means to write myself, not in a narcissistic sense but in a deep collective sense (van Manen, 1990, p. 132).

This, therefore, is what van Manen focuses on most of all in his HP: the process of writing phenomenologically. HP research is "fundamentally a writing activity" in which I describe the lived experience of being in dialogue with transitioners, offering "plausible insights that bring us direct contact with the world" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7-9). In his *Writing in the Dark* he explains:

> Writing is not just externalising internal knowledge, rather it is the very act of making contact with the things of our world. In this sense to do research is to write (van Manaen, 2003, p. 237).

The writing in HP research is inspired by the experiences of conducting the research and from the interviews most of all. For van Manen, channelling Gadamer, researching is an experiencing act:

> Doing phenomenology means to start with lived experience, with how something appears or gives itself to us. Eventually it requires that we understand the various aspects and practices of the epoché and the reduction proper. But phenomenology is best begun in the living of our ordinary life (van Manen, 2014, location 881).

It is a writing experience from our experience, which is why van Manen (2014) calls HP, 'a Phenomenology of Phenomenology'. For the same reason he calls the way of reading phenomenological writing a 'collecting of the "data" of other people's experiences', allowing us to become more experienced ourselves' (van Manen, 1990, p. 62). This also introduces a stylistic element encouraged by van Manen of the researcher writing as 'I' or 'we' in HP:

> In actual phenomenological descriptions one often notices that the author uses the "I" form or the "we" form. This is done not only to enhance the evocative value of a truth experience expressed in this way, but also to

> show that the author recognizes both that one's own experiences are the possible experiences of others and also that the experiences of others are the possible experiences of oneself. Phenomenology always addresses any phenomenon as a possible human experience (van Manen, 1990, pp. 57-58).

There is one more point on why van Manen so celebrates the writing process. He quotes Dienske's suggestion that:

> when we experience the unspeakable or ineffable in life, it may be that what remains beyond one person's linguistic competence may nevertheless be put into words by another person (Dienske, 1987, cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 113).

In this way, van Manen affords HP researchers the license to employ hermeneutics when interviewees may have struggled with articulating their experience. He invites the 'hermeneutics of suspicion' or looking at what is behind the expression rather than just taking everything with face value, making for more nuanced and perceptive piece of research. van Manen (1990: 39) suggests:

> A good description that constitutes the essence of something is construed so that the structure of a lived experience is revealed to us in such a

> fashion that we are now able to grasp the nature and significance of this experience in a hitherto unseen way…(van Manen, 1990, p. 39).

Marion Steel in her paper *Daring to Play: Art, Life, Therapy* (2015) quotes the artist Paul Klee who said, “art does not repeat the visible, rather it renders visible.” She uses this as a springboard to highlight how art has become undervalued in a world dominated by science, evidence and fact:

> In this declaration, Klee was challenging the idea long dominant in western thinking since Plato, that relegated art’s status to purely that of representation, a copy of something existing, and declaring, in contrast, that art could call into being something otherwise unseen (Steel, 2015, p. 217).

Lawn concurs:

> Art is not an innocent diversion and amusement but a crucial point of access to fundamental truths about the world and what it is to be human. (Lawn, 2006, p. 87).

Similarly van Manen’s (1990) HP is creative because it is born out of an acknowledgment that some things are mysterious and defy straightforward explanation and yet a touch of artistry can render the otherwise invisible

visible. HP research can be artful whilst being human science, with van Manen distinguishing HP writing from artistic writing:

> The differences between literary narrative or poetry on the one hand, and phenomenology on the other hand, is that literature or poetry (although based on life) leaves the themes implicit, and focuses on plot or particular incident, whereas phenomenology attempts to systematically develop a certain narrative that explicates themes while remaining true to the universal quality or essence of a certain type of experience (van Manen 1990, p. 97).

Thus, my writing in this study should explicitly describe the lived experience of transitioners so that it is clear how I came to distinguish my themes of military to civilian transition. Nonetheless, as with a piece of art, powerful phenomenological research has the potential to profoundly affect the reader and this is something that van Manen expects from HP research:

> The researcher/writer must “pull” the reader into the question in such a way that the reader cannot help but wonder about the nature of the phenomenon in the way that the human scientist does. One might say that a phenomenological questioning teaches the reader to wonder, to question deeply the very thing that is being questioned by the question (van Manen, 1990, p. 44).

The engaging quality of HP engages the reader and has the potential to inspire action:

> To become more thoughtfully or attentively aware of aspects of human life which hitherto were merely glossed over or taken-for-granted will more likely bring us to the edge of speaking up, speaking out, or decisively acting in social situations that ask for such action (van Manen, 1990, p. 154).

This speaks of the way in which HP cannot simply be done; it has to be lived, both by the researcher and the readers. van Manen draws on an analogy distinguishing those who study and criticise poetry from poets. For van Manen, HP researchers are the poets not the critics (van Manen, 2014, location, 691).

With HP research being alive with the individuals conducting and encountering it, I need now clarify how I theorised reflexivity in my research. This is also an opportunity to show how this reflexivity compliments my existential psychotherapeutic focus.

3.1.8 Reflexivity methodology

Reflexivity in research is the way in which researchers examine and deconstruct how their research knowledge is created. The extent to which this is attended to is dependent on the epistemological and methodological position

of the researcher. Given the central position that reflexivity holds in phenomenological research, it is, ‘not enough simply to acknowledge and be aware of one’s own pre-understandings and to somehow bracket these. The process is more complicated, paradoxical and layered. It is a state of constant striving (Finlay, 2008, p. 17).

Reflexivity in phenomenological research, then, is a demanding, ongoing process that should not be, “forgotten as if the confessional abdicates responsibility” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 61). It aims to show the ‘mess’ of our project as researchers in a social world (Finlay, 2017). The mess in HP most notably occurs between researcher and participant in the interviews. As I strive to fuse horizons with a participant, using my considered prejudice to do so, I push the exploration in a different direction. This is not a linear travelling from A to B but an open, curious navigating from A to Wherever-we-feel-most-drawn-to.

This non-linear, non-dualist approach in phenomenological research is mitigated by regularly reflexively evaluating how a researcher’s, ‘background, assumptions, positioning, behaviour, and subjectivity might impact on the research process and vice versa’ (Finlay, 2017, p. 120).

The openness and empathy that is required to engage with phenomena in phenomenological research, in tension with the reflexive awareness of the researcher in a mutual, embodied intersubjective world (Finlay, 2014), is

delicate and requires artfulness to execute. Langdridge warns us of the pitfalls of overusing reflexivity:

I think there is a danger in reflexive infinite regression, with a shift in focus from the topic of interest to a rather excessive interest in the accounting procedures of academic discourse itself (Langdridge, 2007, p. 60).

Finlay (2008) describes the tension between phenomenological reduction, bracketing (epoché) and reflexivity as a dance, capturing how easy it is to misstep in the process and that it requires a certain grace.

This equally applies to analysis, given that I not only have to live my interviews, but also my interpretations of the phenomenon and my writings of it in HP research:

The researcher steps away from initial pre-understandings to gain sufficient distance from which to critically and reflexively interrogate them. As new thoughts and insights begin to challenge these pre-understandings, the researcher makes interpretative revisions and the ground is re-covered. And the “dance” steps being once more… … (Finlay, 2008, p. 17).

Reflexivity applies to existential psychotherapeutic practice in the same way as it does to phenomenological research. Ernesto Spinelli (a professor of existential psychotherapy who prefers to identify as a phenomenological psychotherapist) asserts that, when practicing existential psychotherapy, the therapist must:

maintain the awareness of the wide range of existential possibilities available to their clients and have the integrity (not to say humility) to allow their clients to arrive at their own decisions and make their owns choices about how to live their lives. This, in turn, requires therapists to have a substantial degree of self-knowledge so that they are more aware of the biases and assumptions in their own lives in order to be better able to bracket them (Spinelli, 2005, p. 152).

The requirement of self-knowledge for the purposes of reflexivity as an existential psychotherapist is a major contributing factor to why psychotherapists are required to have had years of their own therapy before they can obtain accreditation.

The application of reflexivity in HP research is, therefore, well suited to my research ends of engaging with transitioners to understand them better from a psychotherapeutic point of view. The practice of reflexivity in HP research also compliments my existing skills as a practising existential psychotherapist. For example, in my psychotherapy practice I regularly share with my clients

recently gained insights from theory, poetry, prose and film that speak of psychotherapeutic practice. I strive to remain aware of how I am steering my clients' sessions towards this learning and do not do so as a matter of course but rather when I feel it meets something in their experience, helping them to understand themselves better.

Psychotherapy sessions are ongoing, giving both myself and my clients multiple opportunities to reflect on occasions that I as the therapist have taken our narrative in a certain direction. A key difference in this academic study is that the interviews are a one-time event, giving the interviewees no such opportunity. This made me cautious not to steer interviews towards recent insights, however pertinent, particularly in sensitive contexts.

In Jack's interview, for example, he talked about not trusting civilians since his Army exit, "Especially now". I heard this as an indirect reference to the highly publicised murder of Royal Fusilier Lee Rigby who had been killed days before our interview. British civilians Michael Adebolajo and Michael Adebowale had run Rigby over with a car, then stabbed and hacked him to death before attempting to behead him. Adebolajo and Adebowale told passers-by that they had killed a soldier to avenge the killing of Muslims by the British Armed Forces.

As Jack finished his sentence, I felt the weight of his words, his growing fear and unease as he uttered them and judged that referencing Lee Rigby risked

unnecessarily upsetting him more than he already was. It did not feel the sensitive or responsible decision to pursue my line of thinking. I chose instead to simply acknowledge Jack's statement and he moved onto talking about protecting his family and keeping himself healthy in order to do so.

Decisions such as this meant that certain moments that I found evocative in my interviews were not elaborated on and therefore could not be accounted for in my Findings. They remain unvalidated and exist as my speculations with us no closer to a fusion of horizons.

3.1.9 Criticisms of Hermeneutic Phenomenology

In his introduction to a text on writing HP research, van Manen summarises the difficulty of producing something that is heuristic, or conducive to understanding:

> The following chapters are exercises in writing. They are examples of phenomenological reflections. The main heuristic challenge of phenomenological inquiry is this writing – entering and traversing the space of the text, of darkness, where one dwells alone. These writings do not yield absolute truths, or objective observation. The writer at best gains an occasional glimpse of the meaning of human existence (van Manen, 2003, p. 7).

HP is a vague research method that emphasises the role of the often-solo researcher, offers no guarantees that this position of authority will be wielded responsibly and results in no objective knowledge or fact. While these elements expose HP to criticism, they are all fundamental to HP research.

The lack of conclusive, absolute truth in HP research draws criticism from positivists due to the fundamental epistemological differences between the two. This is not something to resolve but to appreciate. Moran clarifies how a Gadamerian methodology clashes with those seeking out objective truth:

> Gadamer wants to get beyond the preoccupation with 'method' in much of contemporary philosophy (he is, undoubtedly, thinking of the logical positivists and their successors, but also of Husserlian phenomenology) and to recognise that there is an understanding of truth which, as he says, is "beyond the methodological self-consciousness of the human sciences" (Moran, 2000, p. 266).

HP is a research method that openly acknowledges it will neither produce objective truth nor will it reach its conclusions via a formalised method, which is a subject of criticism in many dogmatic IPA forums (see for example http://www.ipa.bbk.ac.uk/discussion-group). In the absence of a formal, objective structure, critics challenge Gadamer's advocating of mutual agreement as a means of validating interpretations and his choice not to explain

when an interpretation is a misinterpretation. Moran presents the potential consequence of such suspect validation:

> …a society which has convinced itself that the earth is flat may be a well-regulated harmonious society with full agreement; unfortunately it simply does not have knowledge, a point Habermas has made forcibly against Gadamer (Moran, 2000, p. 286).

It is useful to consider the problems that mutual agreement and misinterpretation present separately.

Darren Langdridge reads Gadamer's hermeneutics as overly mutual and susceptible to the narrow horizon of the person they are in dialogue with. He uses Paul Ricouer's employment of the hermeneutics of suspicion to cement his criticism:

> …unlike Gadamer, Ricouer does not simply believe that [understanding a proposed world] entails capturing meaning at 'face-value'. Ricouer believes that empathy and suspicion are both necessary means for the appropriation of meaning. We need to understand the text both at 'face-value', as you might expect in any phenomenological encounter, and also through the use of a hermeneutic, or method of interpretation, which enables us to see beyond this surface meaning to hidden meanings beyond (Langdridge, 2007, p. 49).

Langdridge argues that Gadamer recognises a hermeneutics of empathy but not of suspicion and this “emphasis on consensus and mutual agreement for understanding is thought to be fundamentally flawed” (Langdridge, 2007, p. 51).

While it is true that Gadamer does not refer directly to a hermeneutics of suspicion, he does advise against taking a phenomenon’s “immediate appearance as the whole truth”, as mentioned above (Gadamer, 2004, p. 9), and there are other sections in his text which show how he encourages us to look beyond the face value in dialogue, for example when he details reflecting on a conversation:

> In a conversation, when we have discovered the other person’s standpoint and horizon, his ideas become intelligible without our necessarily having to agree with him; so also when someone thinks historically, he comes to understand the meaning of what has been handed down without necessarily agreeing with it or seeing it himself (Gadamer, 2004, p. 302).

He clearly states that it is possible to understand someone without having to agree with them. Neither does a horizon represent the limits of a researcher’s perception. Consider this way of having a horizon that Gadamer describes:

> ‘To have a “horizon” means not being limited to what is nearby but being able to see beyond it. A person who has an horizon knows the relative significance of everything within this horizon, whether it is near or far, great or small. Similarly, working out the hermenutical situation means acquiring the right horizon of inquiry for the questions evoked by the encounter with tradition (Gadamer, 2004, pp. 301-302).

For an experienced researcher, a horizon presents a range of possible directions and, by scanning it thoughtfully, they can plot a sensible course towards an area of interest and discover what lies beyond their current limits. This counters the argument that understanding in Gadamer’s world is limited to mutual agreement and consent.

Gadamer (2004) also sees value in misinterpretation. He wants to understand what inspires the explorer’s choice of direction even if they have misread the map or the compass. Returning to Habermas’ flat earth challenge above, Gadamer would be interested in the historical, political, religious traditions that led to the Inquisition’s rejection of Galileo’s science, his arrest and eventual, posthumous recognition, not whether or not the Earth was indeed flat. As Moran tells us:

> He [Gadamer] is clearly more concerned with the phenomenological description of what takes place in the effort to gain understanding, and in recognising the historical ebb and flow of understanding, than with judging the correctness of any particular interpretation. Thus he readily

> acknowledges that misinterpretation has as much to teach as genuine interpretation (Moran, 2000, p. 284).

So Gadamer is disinvested in the pursuit of knowledge that Habermas is criticising him for. van Manen agrees:

> From a phenomenological point of view, we are less interested in factual status of particular instances: whether something actually happened, how often it tends to happen, or how the occurrence of an experience is related to the prevalence of other conditions or events (van Manen, 1990, p. 10).

In valuing misinterpretation, Gadamer (2004) exposes that there worth in understanding the scientific and societal conviction that the Earth was flat and that, as it would reveal more about living in the time of Galileo.

Both 'is the earth flat?' and 'why did people think the earth was flat in 17th century' are valid questions. The power of the criticism of mutual agreement rests on what the research aims are. In my case, I am interested in understanding what is behind the belief of transitioners that civilian employers think that they only know how to take orders and cannot think for themselves, regardless of what civilian employers actually think. This makes Gadamer's approach more suitable to my research aims.

Gadamer is adamant not to distinguish between an interpretation and a misinterpretation because to do so would be to go against his philosophical position. van Manen confirms:

> Some phenomenological projects would emphasize or engage some methods over others. The problem is, however, that none of these methodical dimensions of phenomenological inquiry can be reduced to procedural schemes or series of steps that would lead to insightful phenomenological studies. Some of such schemes are periodically proposed in the qualitative research literature, but they fail for the simple reason that, as Gadamer points out, there is no method to human truths (van Manen, 2014, location 827).

Furthermore, the gaps in Gadamer's method leave room for expression in readers and writers of his hermeneutic style:

> This opposition to assertion contributes to the sense of vagueness evident in his writings, a vagueness he acknowledges is part of his dialogical style, and which he credits with allowing ideas to awaken in the readers (Moran, 2000, p. 285).

However, interpretation does need a regulator because, as Langdridge points out:

> there are dangers in misrepresenting the people and communities being studied and construing a subject or topic that reflects your own position (as an outsider), such that those being studied no longer recognize themselves or the communities to which they belong. This danger is particularly pertinent when employing hermeneutics of suspicion (Langdridge, 2007, p. 60).

In Gadamer's philosophy that regulator comes in the form of authority because Gadamer believes that genuine authority is not based on obedience:

> …but on an act of acknowledgement and knowledge - the knowledge, namely that the other is superior to oneself in judgement and insight and that for this reason his judgement takes precedence - i.e. it has priority over one's own (Gadamer, 2004, p. 281).

For the purposes of my research, the authority of my interpretation rests on the transitioners feeling validated and understood by them in the interviews and by readers of my research finding my interpretations apt in depicting transition. Lawn (2006: 37) understands Gadamer's claim that the genuine authority of the teacher, or any person in possession of real authority:

> is not by virtue of the investment of social power but in the ability to open up questions and make certain matters seem crucial, important and worthy

> of consideration (because they take us to the heart of what we are, within our limited cultural horizons) (Lawn, 2006, p.37).

Eventually interpretivists need to be authoritative or else they become stuck. Consider the dilemma that van Manen presents us with:

> I am reminded of Hegel who once wrote that in naming the things of his world, Adam actually annihilated them. In the act of naming we cannot help but kill the things that we name. And so, while trying to become sensitive to subtleties and complexities of our lived life, writers of phenomenological texts, may turn themselves unwittingly into butchers – killers of life (van Manen, 2003, p. 238).

If interpretivists are so focussed on avoiding 'butchering' the phenomena they are trying to depict, they will not make an interpretation and we are no closer to understanding the lived experience. Gadamer's (2004) interpretation of authority soothes this anxiety because, if our perspective speaks of the phenomenon, he believes it breathes new life into it rather than kills it. With this in mind, van Manen writes:

> The words are not the thing. And yet, it is to our words, language, that we must apply all our phenomenological skill and talents, because it is in and through the words that the shining through (the invisible) becomes visible (van Manen, 1990, p. 130).

By making a distinction between understanding and agreement, showing that there is insight beyond one's immediate horizon and that this can be reached accountably from the authority gained from presenting something recognisably insightful about a phenomenon, we can acquire knowledge.

This also challenges a criticism of Gadamer (2004) and HP that there is an over-emphasis on the researcher because an interpretation only qualifies if it stands up to the test of insight. Langdridge discussing a lack of transparency and reflexiveness in interpretive research in general says:

> The principal error that may occur is in understanding appropriation as a form of subjectivism in which we witness the projection of the analyst's subjectivity on to the text. This is where the world view of the analyst dominates that of the text through their active projection of their way of being-in-the-world on to the text (Langdridge, 2007, p. 50).

A strength of both Gadamer's (2004) and, therefore, van Manen's (1990, 2003, 2014, 2018) philosophies is that the tradition or subjectivity from which the perceiver is perceiving must be made transparent in order to understand their point of entry into an experience, their horizon. This helps the reader to distinguish how much I have allowed my perspective to dominate my interpretation of the phenomena and how much I have been receptive to having my perspective changed in encountering the phenomena.

Altogether there is a response to every criticism presented here but HP research remains vulnerable to these criticisms if a study is not sufficiently reflexive, responsible or insightful. I recognise that no method is beyond criticism, but that HP research has responses to the key criticisms of it and best facilitates my research aims of understanding the experience of military to civilian transition.

3.2 Method

This section details how I actually used HP in my research, how I designed my interviews, what my participation criteria were, how I obtained ethical approval for this study, how I recruited my participants, what the participant sample was, how I collected my data and, finally, how I analysed it. It should be noted here that I progressed through my method chronologically and did not skip ahead to another part of my research until I had completed the previous stage. This meant that I started transcribing my interviews once I had finished all recordings and I waited until after I had finished every transcription before beginning the analysis. The costs and benefits of this will be appraised in the Critical evaluation of my Discussion.

3.2.1 Interview design

In keeping with HP theory my interviews were unstructured, allowing for a natural feel and flowing dialogue. As Gadamer suggests:

> We say that we "conduct" a conversation, but the more genuine a conversation is, the less its conduct lies within the will of either partner. Thus a genuine conversation is never the one we wanted to conduct (Gadamer, 2004, p. 385).

I wanted the flexibility that unstructured interviews offered, meaning I could adjust the pace and tone of each interview to make them as comfortable and respectful as possible for the participants. This was particularly important to me given the potential for sensitive subjects to arise over the course of the interviews.

I did have an agenda to frame the interviews around the topic of transition so I discussed the kind of questions that might be useful to ask with my supervisor before I started my first interview. However, I was clear to make my questioning open such that it encouraged freedom of movement around the term transition, much in the same way as a therapist asks open-ended questions.

After my pilot interview I adjusted my introductory tone from questions like, 'What does transition mean to you?', which I realised was too vague and encouraging of more analytical, less experiential interaction, to more open introductions such as, 'Where would you start in describing your transition?'

Each interview lasted approximately one hour. This was informed both by my experience in therapy that intense conversations become hard to sustain after an hour and by pragmatism as the solo researcher needing to keep my data to a manageable quantity.

I found this unstructured approach a very natural one to adopt and believe it resulted in rich data with participants frequently commenting on how valuable the interviews had been for them.

3.2.2 Participation criteria

I wanted the demographics of my research participants to be as homogenous a group as possible to give the best chance of a commonality of experience, helping me to discern themes in military transition. Langdridge (2007, p. 58) confirms that phenomenological studies most often seek out homogeny for this reason.

Participation criteria were as follows:

- Male
- 20-40 years old
- Served in the British Army
- Served as Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) or Other Ranks (ORs)
- Exited the Army within the last ten years
- Currently live in Britain

I focussed on men for pragmatic reasons, as the majority of military personnel are men, and this gave me a greater chance of finding participants. I did not include race as a criterion because found no data suggesting that race had a significant impact on transition and, by not specifying the race of my participants, my research could expose this as a gap in military scholarship if it transpired to be a factor for the participants.

To determine the age group of my participants I looked at factors that pointed to difficulty in transition. Studies suggest (for example Rutherford et. al., 2010, 2013; Ashcroft, 2014; Atherton, 2013) that soldiers who have recently returned experience the greatest adjustment difficulties. To catch recently returned veterans within this age bracket, I made the upper age limit of my participants forty years of age given that the maximum length of active service is twenty-two years after a soldier's eighteenth birthday. For the lower limit of my age range, one study in particular (Iversen et al., 2009) finds that soldiers who left the Army under the age of twenty-five years old were at increased risk of suicide in the first 2 years after discharge. Given that a solider can join the Army at eighteen, capping 20 as the youngest age accounts for this. This means that 18-19-year-old transitioners are less unaccounted for, though a soldier discharged at 19 who had been out of the Army for a year would be eligible and, as Naphan and Elliott (2015) argue, soldiers who have served less than a year have had less time being absorbed in military culture and, therefore, have less to adjust to on their return to civilian life. Rutherford et. al. (2010, p. 81) suggest that younger families are more financially vulnerable and quotes another study's figures that 18–24 years old veterans had nearly double the

unemployment rate of those 25–34 years old (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009 cited in Rutherford et al., 2010, p. 81).

Conversely, some studies (e.g. Buckman et al., 2010) point to age or length of service contributing to greater vulnerability, warranting the inclusion of older ex-servicemen. The ages of 20-40 was thus the best range for homogeneity whilst including the more vulnerable demographic groups.

I chose to focus on the Army because most Armed Forces leavers are from the Army. For example, of 18,570 leavers in 2009/10, 61.2% left from the Army, 19.5% the Navy and 19.3% from the RAF (Forces in Mind Trust, 2014, p. 6). A recent UK Armed Forces Mental Health Report (Ministry of Defence, 2014, p. 1) found that for the 1, 345 personnel assessed for a new episode of care with a mental disorder during the period January – March 2013/14 rates for Royal Navy personnel were significantly lower than the Army and rates for Other ranks were significantly higher than for Officers. Army personnel therefore seemed the most vulnerable military cohort and specifically Other Ranks within the Army. Lower-ranked Army personnel were found to be the most apprehensive group about transition in another report (Ashcroft, 2012).

These findings informed my decision to focus on the experiences of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) and Other Ranks (ORs) as opposed to Commissioned Officers (COs). Lastly with regards to rank, I felt that NCOs

and ORs were particularly underrepresented in contemporary literature, warranting greater focus on them.

I decided not to include class as a criterion because I felt that rank acted as a substitute for it, was more military-centric and would not encounter the inevitable difficulties in distinguishing between classes of transitioners.

The decision to exclude ex-servicemen who have been out of military service for more than ten years comes from wanting to strike the best compromise between maintaining a contemporary geo-political climate between participants and allowing time for less conventional routes of transition back to civilian life. A similar geo-political climate is preserved as the last ten years will only involve the specific conflicts within that time-period, including the types of conflicts, warfare, weaponry and political context in particular. Ten years also allows reasonable room to include ex-servicemen who did not immediately return to civilian life in Britain after leaving the military. If I had kept the window to a more restricted period than ten years, I would have missed the experiences of ex-servicemen who did not immediately resettle in Britain post-service until years later.

I chose to focus on participants currently living in Britain to narrow the location of settlement. On a pragmatic level, being British-based made my participants easier to access, as they were in the same nation as me. It also

meant that participants would be transitioning into my home nation, giving me a better chance of understanding the culture they were transitioning into.

3.2.3 Ethical approval

Before I started recruiting participants, I obtained ethical approval to do so through Middlesex University. The process involved drafting a standard information sheet, consent form and debriefing letter for participants along with a resources document so that participants were fully informed as to why I was asking for their participation, how their participation will contribute to my research, that their recorded transcriptions will be anonymised and kept securely to preserve confidentiality, that they can withdraw their participation at any time, that they had a contact list of support services and that they could contact either myself, my supervisors or my institution if they had any concerns about my research at any time. All participant's names were also changed to pseudonyms. None withdrew from the study.

3.2.4 Recruitment

I recruited through advertising on ex-military services websites, social media, specifically LinkedIn, through contacts I made with other researchers and professionals in veterans' charities, specifically Civvy Street, Combat Stress and most of all through The Stoll Foundation whose premises I also used for my interviews.

I found recruitment a difficult process, taking me eighteen months to recruit eight interviewees due to a general reluctance in the cohort to be in a recorded interview and be part of a research project. The support of team members from The Stoll Foundation proved invaluable in vouching for me as an ethical researcher and to encourage interviewees to meet with me.

Having initially suggested a sample size of 8-12 participants, I chose to stop once I reached 8 as I felt I had reached saturation of the data at this point. I also did not want to further delay moving on to the transcription and analysis of my interviews and I was satisfied that I had already exceeded the lower benchmark of 6 participants for student phenomenological projects set by Langdridge (2007).

I did interview one marine but decided not to include his interview in order to preserve the homogony of participants from the Army.

3.2.5 Participant demographics

Of the 8 participants:

- 7 were aged 30-39. 1 was aged 20-29.
- 3 were White British, 3 Black African, 1 Asian British and 1 Black Caribbean.
- All were married to or in long-term relationships with women.

- 5 had children.
- 4 had been medically discharged from the Army, 3 to physical injury, 1 to mental ill-health. The other 4 elected to leave as Table 1 shows.
- All had been deployed on active military operations and been in combat zones. Tours of duty were to Iraq, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland and Kosovo as Table 2 shows.
- 6 were employed or in full-time education, 2 were looking for work but had had jobs since leaving the Army as Table 3 shows.

Table 1

Reasons for Leaving	**Physical Health Issues**	**Mental Health Issues**	**Resigned/ Voluntary Redundancy**	**Made Redundant**
John	✓			✓
Max			✓	
Aaron	✓	✓		✓
Rob			✓	
Ben			✓	
Jack			✓	
Luke	✓			✓
Pete	✓			✓

Table 2

Tours of Duty	**Iraq and/or Afghanistan**	**Other Conflict**
John	✓	✓
Max	✓	
Aaron		✓
Rob	✓	✓
Ben	✓	
Jack	✓	
Luke	✓	
Pete	✓	

Table 3

Employment Status	**Employed/Student**	**Unemployed**
John		✓
Max	✓	
Aaron	✓	
Rob	✓	
Ben	✓	
Jack	✓	
Luke		✓
Pete	✓	

3.2.6 Data collection

I carried out a full risk assessment of the Stoll Foundation premises where I conducted the interviews ensuring that I gave appropriate thought to risk and harm prevention for my participants and myself throughout the research.

Before each interview I noted any feelings that I thought might influence my questioning in my journal for the purposes of transparency and reflexivity. All interviews were conducted on site at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation in private rooms and recorded on a voice recorder.

I arrived early for the interviews in order to set the room up. If participants also arrived early, we used the time to establish a light rapport. I was aware not to discuss anything that might be valuable for the interview, so I tried to keep subject matter on very general topics. I decided to dress casually each time because I wanted to convey a relaxed, non-authoritative presence.

3.2.7 Data analysis

I analysed the data using Max van Manen's approach of six steps, which do not need to be followed in a particular order:

1. Turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
2. Investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualise it;
3. Reflecting on the essential themes which characterise the phenomenon;
4. Describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
5. Maintaining a strong and oriented [psychotherapeutic] relation to the phenomenon;
6. Balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (van Manen, 1990, pp. 30-31).

For the Pilot Study, I transcribed the interview over the course of three sittings, noting my mood in my research journal before each session, again, for the sake of transparency and reflexivity. I included pauses and stutters in my transcriptions in order to get as accurate an account of the transitioners' expression as possible. As I transcribed, I occasionally highlighted sections that stood out to me and noted some of the ideas that came to me. I was capturing van Manen's above referenced 'addressive moments'.

I highlighted very few sections, but these were the sections that stirred me most as I was transcribing. Due to the focus that was needed to accurately transcribe I became very familiar with the interview.

There were instances when I did not understand the military acronyms and references made by the transitioners and, when I had not asked for clarification or they had not explained them to me, I was able to research and discover what the references alluded to at this stage.

Next, and in accordance with van Manen's recommendation to, "check again the effect of the text several days after writing it," (van Manen, 2003, p. 238) in order to view the text with a fresh perspective, I noted my mood in my journal and listened to the text again, reading through my transcription as I went. I chose not to review my notes from the day before so as not to be influenced by them. I was going to read through the transcription first without simultaneously listening to it but then decided to listen as well as this met more with my desire to have as immersive an experience as possible on revisiting it. I enjoyed the flexibility that van Manen's 'guide' afforded me in this way. As I listened this second time I noted the timings of sections that I felt referenced transition and when I found something relevant, if there was any literature that I felt related to it, I made a note of this too.

After teasing out these sections, I revisited them both in text and audio format to try and group them into themes. I now had a list of approximately 100 words,

phrases and themes about the recording. Finally, I bracketed these words into four main, over-arching themes after considering what terms were most useful to summarise the described phenomena.

With four established themes, I reviewed my feelings about the whole recording and made note of them. Here I also noted elements that seemed valuable while not being obviously thematic and considered if these could be collated into the analysis.

The four pilot themes were:

i. Identity
ii. Ending
iii. Change
iv. Self-care

As I found this a successful process, I used it as a foundation for the analysis of my remaining interviews. As my analysis developed, I established a colour co-ordinated highlighting system. In my first reading I colour-highlighted moments of the interview that struck me emotionally, taking inspiration from van Manen:

> Making something of a text or a lived experience by interpreting meaning is more accurately a process of insightful invention,

> discovery or disclosure – grasping and formulating a thematic understanding is not a rule-bound process but a free act of "seeing" meaning (van Manen, 1990, p.79).

In the second reading I highlighted sections in a second colour that I felt were academically relevant even if they did not strike me emotionally. I also highlighted the most powerfully striking quotations from my participants in a third colour for ease of revisiting at the point of write up.

Once all the interviews had been highlighted and themed, I collated all the themes and sub-themes for each interview into one document. I wrote a sentence summarising how I saw the narrative of each interview so that I could see which themes pervaded across the interviews and could, again, consider the entire collection in their parts and whole.

Next, I pooled all the individual interview over-arching themes together to see how these could be distilled into global themes, which harvested 7 themes:

i. Military Bubble
ii. Loss
iii. Change
iv. Identity
v. Self-care

vi. Support

vii. Vulnerability

One month later I added one more theme ‘Uncertainty’ as, on reflection, it was an undercurrent in every interview, but this had not occurred to me until I had some space from the process of actively analysing the data.

Then came process of writing up my findings. In the early stages of writing I decide to remove ‘Support’ as a theme, realising that it was less a theme of transition itself and more a factor that impacts on how intensely the themes are experienced. I also changed ‘Vulnerability’ into ‘Power’, realising that both power and powerlessness influenced a transitioners’ sense of their vulnerability, which better encompassed the lived experience of transition. I changed ‘Self-care’ to ‘Determination’ when it became clear in the writing that even if a transitioner was not attuned to his self-care needs, he was determined to improve his life. Determination was universal in this thesis where self-care was not. Furthermore, some sub-themes became distinguishable in some on the denser themes.

The resulting 7 over-arching themes and sub-were what I submitted ahead of my VIVA and were as follows:

1. Military Bubble:

- Values
- Military Family
- Expectations
- Organisational Structure

2. Uncertainty

3. Loss

4. Change:

- Social Change
- Vocational Change

5. Power

6. Identity:

- Enduring military identity
- Changed men
- Redefining

7. Determination

During the VIVA it became clear that I had lost the lyricism within the experience of transition through the process of my analysis. These 7 theme headings were too broad and not evocative enough about what military transition was like to live through. I had lost sight of whether my analysis spoke to the existential sense of the phenomenon of military transition, as van Manen (2018) suggests one should in HP research. I dedicated a week to

‘dwelling’ in the most moving and pertinent elements of transition to reconnect with my experience of it before I had put language onto it (van Manen 2018; Finlay 2014). I discovered that I untapped my lyricism best when verbally discussing military transition where previously I had simply thought on it and written my thoughts down. I spoke to friends, family, psychotherapy peers and my new academic supervisor talking about which aspects of this research connected with me most. I then returned to my pre-VIVA findings and applied these aspects to them. Finally, I settled on three themes on military to civilian transition:

1. Departure - Exiles not refugees

2. Arrival - Aliens in a Lost World

3. Undetermined Determination

These themes are going to be discussed in detail in the next section.

4. Findings

4.1 Overview

This chapter reviews what I discovered about transitioning out of the Army from the interviews with the eight transitioners in this study. The first section provides a description and visual depiction of how military transition was experienced psychologically by the transitioners. This can be viewed as a template within which the themes of military transition occur. I then detail the three themes that emerged in my analysis of the interviews. They stand as representing an overall narrative of key temporal phases, namely:

1. **Departure: Into Exile**

2. **Arrival: Aliens in a Lost Home**

3. **Undetermined Determination**

It transpired that every theme was present in each interview. However, due to the nature of my unstructured interviews, themes were only explicitly referred to in certain interviews, meaning that the participants could not always be represented verbatim in a theme.

4.2 The psychological journey

The transitioners in this study were simultaneously looking back to the military past they had now exited, were contending with the civilian present they found themselves in and were looking ahead to an unknown future, unsure of who or where they were but being determined to advance. While this points to the temporality of military transition, I am not suggesting that there are definitive stages to transition, nor that it is a linear process. Indeed, it could be said that, once a transitioner starts the process of leaving the Army, he is eternally departing, arriving and seeking something to apply himself to. as Max says:

> Max: I think the key is in the little details. In a sense I think what makes your transition hard is not some massive, gigantic event that you've got to overcome or some really big obstacle, it's all the little details that sort of grind you down. It's the day-to-day.

However, the temporal reference points in transition do provide some structure onto which I could impose themes. Figure 1 visually displays the psychological processes in transition through three changes in status for transitioners from being fully engaged soldiers, to when they start to leave the Army and lastly once they have left it.

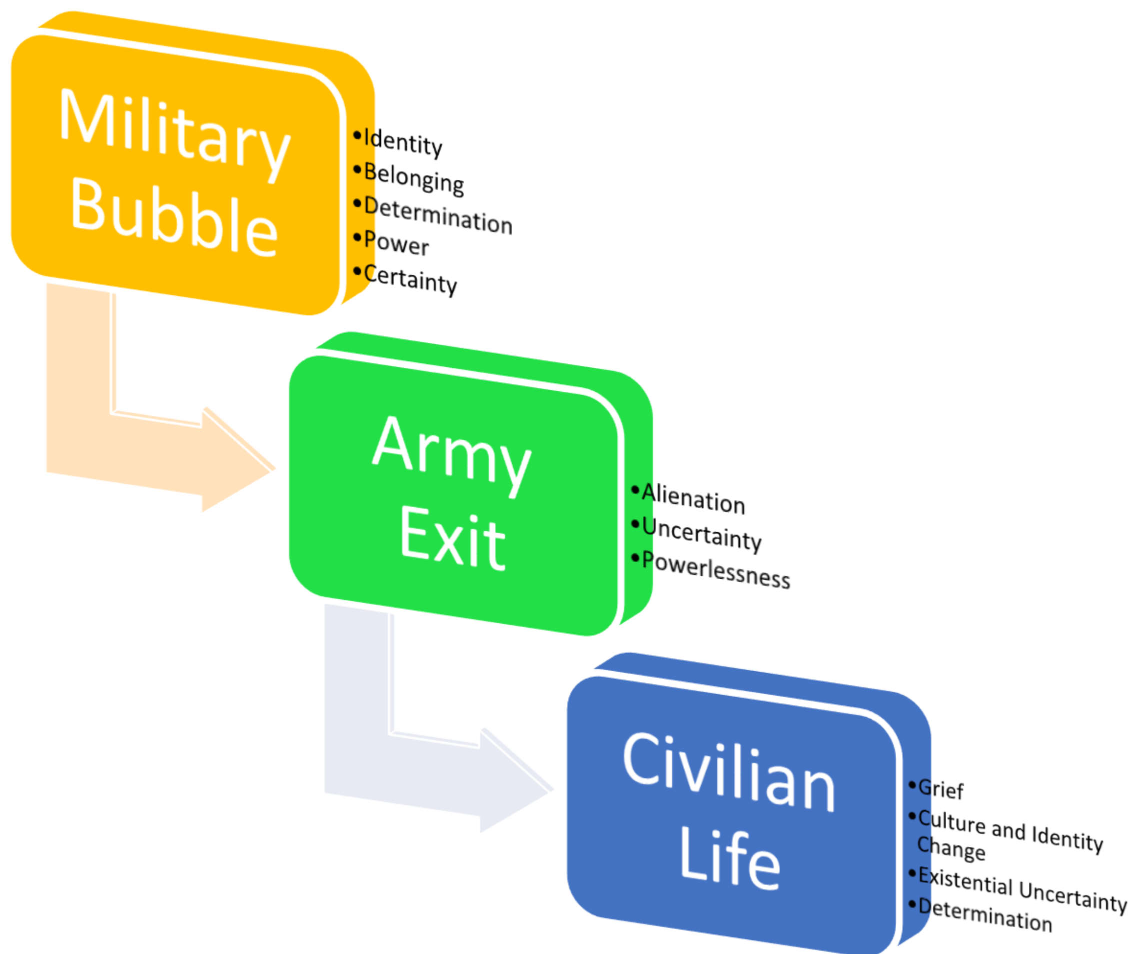
1. The journey starts with the transitioners still being in the Army. This is because military life, culture and values, or the 'military bubble' as one

transitioner called it, had a lasting influence on the transitioners long into their civilian lives. Whilst they were in the Army, the military bubble influenced transitioners' identity, dictating how much power they had, providing them with certainties of income, food, shelter, lifestyle and instilling within them a sense of belonging and a determination to achieve the high professional standards of the military.

2. Then at the point of either requesting or being told to leave the Army, transitioners start to experience loss of belonging as the bonds with their peers weaken, no longer sharing the same professional purpose. This throws them into uncertainty about themselves, their past, present and future. They feel the powerlessness of their position within the military system to influence how and when they exit the military. The power that they once had within the Army is no longer applicable and a general sense of impotence emerges.

3. When they finally exit the Army and enter civilian life they start to grieve for their former military lives. Their cultural environment has changed as has their identity and this brings forth existential uncertainty in themselves and their world. Their determination to succeed endures but now they are without the identity, belonging, power and certainty that enabled them to achieve in the Army. This shows how much is lost in transition.

Figure 1



4.3 Departure: Into Exile

This theme focuses on the transitioners' perspective on their Army past. In this study, it became clear that to exit the Army was also to be exiled from it regardless of the circumstances around the departure. Whether they chose to leave or not, whether they prepared for their departure or not the transitioners all looked back on their departure as sudden and definitive. They left behind the place and the people they belonged to, never to return.

> Aaron: It went so fast; I didn't even know what was happening until the day I had my ID card taken off me and taken out the camp. And it was only when I got home, and I couldn't go back on the Monday that it really hit me.

Understanding why exiting the Army feels like being exiled from it, first requires an appreciation of the central role a sense of belonging plays in Army life. Indeed, the current Army advertising slogan is, 'British Army: This is Belonging'. The Army is quick to instil a sense of togetherness amongst new recruits and this had a powerful impact on each transitioner's experience of belonging in the military.

> Ben: I started basic training and yeah, complete culture shock… it taught you not only to sort of look after yourself in a way but also look after everybody else and sort of play as a team.

Each transitioner referred to their ex-colleagues in the military using familial language, talking of the unconditional bond they felt between each other.

> Jack: The bond was so close especially with our platoon.
>
> John: We are all one family… they want us to be one and just look after each other.
>
> Pete: You've been through hell and back with this person so whatever happens, you never see the colour, you never see the weakness, you never see that dark side… you never see beyond what you see in him as a fighter or as a brother.

However, as soon as a transitioner announced their intentions to leave the Army or was told to leave, even while he was still in it, these bonds suddenly began to erode. The transitioner no longer shared a common project with his peers. Military training lost its application with no further fights to prepare for. Therefore, the point of knowing they were leaving marked a point of divergence between the transitioners and their military peers and this was experienced as a loss of connection. Max describes these last days of his Army career:

> Max: It's one of those things where it's a massive event in your life but no-one else cares about it... not necessarily that they didn't care because they didn't care about me but, you know, it's, like to me that's like a whole life shift but to them it's just like, 'Oh he's leaving.' From their perspective they don't care you're going, and they just want you to be there and to move on.

What proceeds is a gradual but palpable rupture between the transitioner and his military family to the extent that less than ten years post-service, John had totally lost connection with his former colleagues, finding himself isolated and alone:

> John: I don't remember when was the last time when someone just called me on my mobile phone from my friends. I don't know where they are, and I hope they are still alive 'cause I don't know where they are.

While being exiled was ubiquitous for the transitioners, the circumstances in which they exited the Army also changed their experience of this exile. When a transitioner chose to leave, it was a self-imposed exile, helping to mark their military career as over and time to move on.

> Rob: There was nothing left, you know, that he could say that would change my mind... promotion was nothing... I was satisfied. I wasn't

> leaving on bad terms. I wasn't, 'Right I'm fed up of the Army. I hate it. I can't stand it.' I was happy that I'd done what I wanted to.

The suddenness of the separation and subsequent sense of being in exile generated ambivalence among these transitioners. They had wanted separation from the Army *but not exile*. Shock and yearning imbued their sadness that their time in the military had come to an end. It was experienced more like a mutual break-up than an acrimonious split, making them occasionally yearn for their old life but ultimately knowing it was right to have left:

> Jack: Sometimes I would want to go back into the Army. I've looked into going back. And at the same time, it's the total opposite. I'd be like, 'Why you want to go back in there?'

However, discharged or redundant transitioners felt a different kind of ambivalence. Their exile was imposed, they were not ready to move on, feeling surplus to requirements, excised and abandoned.

> *Aaron: *laughs sardonically* So yeah, they [commanding officers] totally forgot about me. *Pausing, suddenly serious* Basically they cut the rip-chord and away I fell…*

Like a lover who has just been dumped, these transitioners were bitter, angry and mournful. At the same time, they yearned for the Army to take them back.

> Luke: I would love to sit down one and one the way I'm sitting with you and tell him, 'I think you need to get things straight. Because I felt like I've been used and dumped. That's it.'
>
> John: My first year I was quite upset when I saw anyone wearing military uniform... it brings all my memory back.
>
> Aaron: I'd still go back in a heartbeat...but yeah, I know I'll never go back, as much as I want to but, hey.

Either way, whether a transitioner felt dumped that the relationship ended by mutual consent, their subsequent exile from the Army was shocking, painful and isolating. These were the conditions within which all the transitioners left their barracks for the last time.

4.4 Arrival: Aliens in a Lost Home

Once exiled from the Army, the transitioners entered a civilian life that was previously known to them but now felt strangely distant. Before their Army careers, school, home and work life was normality. Now, on re-entry, it was like an alien planet: 'Civvy Street'. It soon emerged that their alienation was two-fold; not only had the world changed since their time in the Army but so

too had they. They were aliens to their former world and their former self; aliens in a lost home.

> Luke: It's just like me being an alien in an unknown ground.

This makes the alienation of military transition a very particular kind of alienation. Transitioners were not the 'legal alien' from Sting's *Englishman in New York* defiantly drinking tea instead of coffee; neither were they extra-terrestrials visiting from a distant planet; nor were they 'illegal aliens' the kind of which Donald Trump wants to keep out of America with his wall. None of these aliens would expect to quickly assimilate into their new world whereas the transitioners did:

> Max: I kind of expected, probably because, you know, I've done all this stuff in the military, passed these ridiculously hard courses, served in all these regiments, done my tour and I never really, you know, I had this view of myself as a competent good guy and so I never expected that I would struggle with, like, the little details of life after the military. And I think that's a real journey to even accept that you can't do it all.

Military transition was unexpectedly hard, and it was so for good reason. Transitioners had been civilians before their time in the Army, had spent their leave with civilian friends and family, watched the same films as civilians, listened to the same music, spoke the same fundamental language and yet,

despite all these familiarities, they still felt like aliens among civilians. In Rob's case, even going on a family meal became a frustrating, alienating event:

> Rob: We'd planned that we were going to go a Chinese buffet at like four o'clock... My dad said, 'Oh, the buffet don't open 'til after five, six o'clock.' ...Then I got in a bit of a mood, so I said, 'Right, I'll meet you at home.' You know, they didn't understand, you know, they're kind of flexible with their timings... if we've planned to do something, I like to follow the plan. And I think that's the difference between the Army culture where you plan to do something, and you try not deviate off that plan... But to just not know or just make it up as you go along... it's going to take me a while to adjust to that.

This made for an uncanny alienation indeed, most akin to the kind felt by the hobbit Frodo on his return home at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien, 1954). Tolkein penned this trilogy during and in the aftermath of the Second World War and Frodo's journey from the safety of the Shire, his home, through war and adventure and home again gives him the character arc of a soldier in transition. Madison (2009) discusses Frodo's return home in the saga by noting that, while the other hobbits can reintegrate into hobbit life, marry and settle down after the war, Frodo has seen too much, changed too much to be able to:

> Now, having experienced other lands for himself, and his subsequent loss of innocence, Frodo cannot adapt back to the genteel life of the

> Shire…[he] can no longer be at home 'at home'. (Madison, 2009, pp.182-183)

This not being at home 'at home' captures the uncanniness of transitioner alienation. Military life changed the transitioners so much that they felt alien to the civilian world that they originated from and now they were stuck there.

> Max: When you leave, you kind of realise there is no 'us' and 'them'… There is no, 'I'll go back to the real world.' This is the real world!… You know, I've got to deal with these idiots constantly now.

To better understand this uncanny alienation, we need to see how military life changed the transitioners. Firstly, the interviews in this study made clear how immersive the order, values and structure of daily Army life was for its soldiers. They knew where they belonged in the military system, what was expected of them and what direction their careers were going in. It was a reassuringly certain world and was felt to be in complete contrast to civilian life on Army exit:

> Max: There's so much uncertainty. In everyone who leaves, who I spoke to anyway, feels that uncertainty and a kind of foreboding because, I mean, whether you like the Army or not, whether you enjoyed service or not, you know, you have certain guarantees when you're there.

With the Army structure and values stripped away on exit, transitioners were left not knowing what was expected of them or how to behave in civilian life. With such limited understanding of civilian life, they could not even decide if they wanted to become a part of it.

> Pete: If you go to Rome, you do as the Romans do... But I find it really hard to deal with the idea of how [civilians] do things. But I would like to fit in. So that, that transition is what I find is very hard.

By the time Pete's Army career was ending, he felt so alien to civilians that he tried to teach himself fundamental ways of being a civilian again. He researched into as much non-military literature and culture as he could in his final weeks, feeling that, without this, he would neither understand nor be understood by civilians:

> Pete: I was reading everything, but I was reminding myself of the words that I can be able to read, write, be able to describe something or discuss something... But I also questioned myself, "How am I going to present myself...to somebody who doesn't understand my way of thinking or how I do things?"

Unfortunately, this was not only an issue for transitioners approaching Army exit. Several years after John had been out of the Army, he was yet to grasp the civilian way of life, still feeling alien:

> John: Right now, I'm just trying to come in terms with the people I'm associating with regularly… to understand where they are coming from.

Transitioners felt alienated long into their transitions, even when they appeared to be well-integrated with civilians. Ben, who had also been out of the Army for several years, was happily married, had a well-paid, challenging job, good workmates and altogether seemed well settled in civilian life, nonetheless felt a disconnect with his civilian peers. He attributed this to the absence of community in civilian life that so differs to the intrinsic togetherness of military life:

> Ben: There's a support structure [in the military], there's an understanding of what a community should be, and I think, not only as a community but as a country you've lost that now.

This perceived loss of community maintained a distance between transitioners and civilians, with transitioners expecting to be neglected by civilians and so keeping a safe distance from them. In this way, transitioner alienation was two-fold; they felt alienated from civilians and chose to alienate themselves from them:

> John: So, just like, if you don't want to care, then me too. Okay. That is it! Nobody talks to me. Umm I don't like making friends. Umm sometimes I can be out there without even… without really talking to anyone.

Their disillusionment with civilians had been cultivated during transitioners' time in the Army. The culture of togetherness in the military created an 'us' and 'them' dynamic between soldiers and civilians, wherein soldiers actively wanted to distinguish themselves from civilians:

> Rob: One of the terms I used to use when I was younger, my wife and me would go, 'Ah these stinking civvies.' And you'd, you know, you'd kind of categorise yourself and...try and have that barrier that you, we, we're something completely different.

Civilians were regarded as lesser than soldiers, as selfish and untrustworthy. These attitudes survived long into the transitions in this study, not least because the transitioners felt that civilians lived up to their reputation:

> Aaron: Civvy life, they don't really give a shit. If you can't cut it, they don't care. They'll drop you as quick as look at you...They don't really give a shit...They're all out for themselves so...*whispers* I hate it. *laughs sardonically*

Civilians were also experienced as being tactless or ignorant about military life, which discouraged transitioners from sharing stories about their time in the Army. This prevented them from being understood and, again, alienated them from civilians. Transitioners mentioned times when they attempted to talk

about military life but were met with crass replies that reaffirmed their disdain from civilians:

> Jack: It's really hard, you know? And you know I can't tell that to like normal people out there, you know? First thing they're going to ask you, 'Did you shoot anyone?'

Ben had lived outside of the Army for several years but remained deflated by his experience of civilians as narrow-minded and superficial. He alienated himself after being so uninspired by civilians, feeling that there was little that he wanted to integrate with.

> Ben: Let's enjoy the fact that people can go and earn hundreds of thousands of pounds and not even consider the young eighteen-year-old that's probably on about nineteen grand a year, probably as we speak now getting shot at umm and let's just tone it down a bit. The world's going a bit crazy.

Transitioners felt that their Army careers had matured them, teaching them discipline, respect and providing them with the perspective offered by confronting one's mortality in combat and from travelling around the world. While they were grateful for this maturity, on Army exit it served to alienate them from civilians of their own age and old friends who, they felt, had matured at a slower rate.

> Max: I think when you're in the military you have a life… like even at twenty I was significantly more mature than friends that I had at twenty-five, twenty-six. And so, I think if you come out as a younger guy it can be quite weird because when people interact with you, you come across as like, you know, you're this thirty-year-old man.

Lastly the civilian working world was experienced as inefficient, ill-disciplined, low quality and altogether a change for the worse. The transitioners felt that they could not take instruction from bosses that they did not find competent at their jobs. In the Army, higher ranking officers rise through the ranks and have performed the tasks they are now ordering their juniors to carry out. This breeds an intrinsic respect that flows both up and down the ranks. This was absent in transitioners' civilian working lives, meaning that they could not fully adjust to their new places of work. Nostalgia for military systems persisted and their sense of alienation deepened, feeling that civilian life continued to be second best to the Army.

> Luke: Ah… it's a massive gap to be honest… I wouldn't say people are not well disciplined because if I say that I'm bringing the… the military style of working into the civilian street because people are not really willing to do stuff. They don't really care.

Beyond the perception of civilians, it was a matter of fact that some of the transitioners felt deeply isolated and under-supported. When I interviewed

John he was jobless, felt ostracised by his congregation, was living apart from his family, had lost contact with his former military comrades and had considered suicide, 'because there's no point in living in the world that you feel rejected.' Indeed, he had become so alienated from everyone that our interview poignantly represented the first time in almost a decade that someone had taken an interest in his transition:

> John: Well this is the first time with me that somebody's listening to me wanting to listen to part of my story... I just wanted to say something about maybe how people are struggling err you know how they're going to cope with their life.

With civilians remaining largely unknown entities to the transitioners, some saw them not only as distant but as real threats to them and their families. Jack was the most vocal about this, referencing the murder of Royal Fusilier Lee Rigby by two civilians, which had happened just days before our interview:

> Jack: Especially like random civvies 'cause you don't know who they are. Especially now. You don't know who's what... I don't trust no-one. Like, when I'm out there I don't go to, what's it... like gigs or like when someone comes on stage, like yeah, I don't...it's too close. It's too packed. Can't have no eyes on.

Jack's words paint the new civilian world as a hostile alien one rather than an inviting, new frontier for exploration.

The final aspect of transitional alienation is the way in which transitioner's discovered that they had become aliens to their former selves, usually prompted by family members:

> Jack: I used to think, 'How am I not the same?'... But when I take my time ...I think I'm a changed man...Like, I get more emotional. And I get, how do you say, anxious? I'm in constant shitty mood swings man. Anyone who knows me, they know that I'm not that kind of person, you know? I used to be more open, chatty, everything but my son says I'm always moody; I used to be fun.

Having permanent distance from their military peers exposed how much they had changed from their old, civilian identities, like realising how drunk you are only when you talk to a sober person. The contrast between their old and new selves was shocking and disturbing. It exposed that they could not rely on themselves any longer as they had lost connection with who they had become. They were now aliens to themselves.

This was even more palpable for those who sustained chronic injuries during their Army careers. Their injuries became physical symbols of how the Army

had changed them, unable to rely on the bodies that had once been the main tool of their trade. Luke’s injury directly affected the physical closeness he could have with his family, and, combined with being medically discharged from the Army, out of work and living in a different country from his birth, his transition amounted to an almost complete loss of connection:

> Luke: And I feel like, ‘Well if I’m being outcasted from the world and I’ve been outcasted from my home, in my matrimonial home, I mean, how do you feel?’

The changes that came with civilian life contributed to transitioners feeling misunderstood, isolated and ultimately reluctant to integrate with civilians. Fears that civilians were ignorant about military life were often realised and this made transitioners doubt if they could ever again form new close relationships and find inspiring careers among civilians. In some cases, alienation was comprehensive in transition. Transitioners found themselves no longer at home among family, among soldiers or in themselves. They were surrounded by lost homes of their past and found themselves in a home that they did not want to belong to among civilians.

4.5 Undetermined Determination

> Pete: Now you are facing a different world out there. So you're asking yourself, "Where am I going to start?... What job am I going to do? What future do I have? What is important? What makes you who you are? What defines you?" 'Cause now the Army's not going to define who you are.

In this statement, Pete captures the mindset of transitioners at the point of Army exit, in their exile and alienation. They have lost the reference point that the Army once gave them and are searching for new direction in life. However, there was one legacy from the military that all the transitioners in this study drew upon in their confusion: a determination to succeed.

This theme title of 'undetermined determination' is an attempt to encompass the conflicting and opaque nature of this determination. Transitioners found themselves caught between a powerful sense of military determination and an equally powerful sense of disorientation. They were determined to succeed in civilian life but did not understand their environment, what they wanted in it or how to go about getting it. It was an ambiguous determination without anything to apply it to, hence, 'Undetermined Determination'.

This theme explores how determination was inherent in military culture, the benefits it brought the transitioners, the problems it caused and how they adapted it in their transitions.

All the transitioners keenly expressed their determination to make a success of their transitions in their interviews. They were determined to take responsibility to find goals in civilian life, to refuse to be overwhelmed by transition, to be self-sufficient and to change themselves for the better. To them, it was as if determination alone was all that was required to succeed in transition.

> Pete: You can do something however broken you are.

> Ben: If you push yourself, you can achieve anything you're inclined to.

There was undoubtable power in this determination and there were times that it provided vital drive to overcome their setbacks in transition:

> Luke: I don't want to see myself as being a victim of all these things. I want to see myself as the strong person that is in pursuit of success. Now we just keep going and get there. And this is just going to be our long story at the end of it.

John was close to defeat in his transition when I met him. He had recently quit another job after feeling disrespected by his colleagues and had decided to leave his church congregation after losing trust in them. He was in pain from his injuries sustained in military service, had problems with alcohol and he felt suicidal sometimes. Nonetheless, he spoke with grit that he would not let any of this stop him from achieving his goals in transition. In this sense, determination kept John alive.

> John: To be a champion is to believe in yourself when no-one does believe in you. So, no matter how it is, no matter how people behave… if I allow that kind of thing to bother me then I'm going to be a loser. But I'm not going to be a loser with this.

Determination also motivated transitioners to achieve and maintain high standards of work, whether they enjoyed it or not. This helped transitioners to find a sense of satisfaction even in uninspiring jobs that might otherwise have demotivated them. Rob did not enjoy his new job, was aware that he did not need to excel in it, that he could have opened his office later and slept in longer, but he was determined to impress upon his new colleagues, his boss and most of all himself that he still had professional integrity:

> Rob: …it would get to ten to six and I just couldn't do it. I'd have to open it up at six o'clock and it was just… It wasn't me not being able, not wanting to let go or it was just… I don't know whether it was out of habit

> but six o'clock, bang! It would be open. Even though it didn't need to be… You know I want the captain to think I was doing a decent job… and, umm, personally… it matters to you.

This presents determination as a valuable trait in transition. It is motivating, provides hope and ensures transitioners maintain the same high standards expected of them in their military careers. However, this is not the complete picture of transitioner determination because, without the direction and application that military life provided, transitioners found themselves rudderless and struggling.

> Aaron: The hardest thing to do is leave the Army… Some people get the help, some people are given the right directions. Not a lot of people have.

Before they could discover a new direction, the transitioners had to recognise that determination alone was not enough to makes a success of transition. Ironically, this recognition was inhibited by military expectations to uncomplainingly strive on in all circumstances, which the transitioners continued to conform to long after their Army exit. In the Army, to show any signs of faltering was unacceptable weakness, a threat to getting the job done and a threat to life.

> Jack: You can't [say that you don't want to soldier] because that's you showing weakness and that's one thing that the military hates: weakness. So you're paid to do your job out there so you just do your job.

Physical and emotional vulnerability were also unacceptable in the military amounting to nothing more than another problem to overcome. In Ben's case, he came to see physical sickness as an excuse to quit rather than something to accommodate:

> Ben: There's a big thing in the Army as well about always, if someone tries to avoid something because they're sick or they're not feeling well, it's always a case of, 'They're skiving.' No-one's ever ill in the Army. They're just skiving… And I'd find myself saying, 'Weak! What's the matter with you?'

The expectation amongst military personnel to maintain emotional control in all circumstances led to Jack judging a comrade who had been unshakeable throughout his Army career for having a 'meltdown' post-service:

> Jack: He's in shit state now, you know?… At first, I'd be like, 'Look at you! I used to look up to you! What the fuck's going on with you? Sort yourself out!'… 'You're a robot man!' You're meant to be, you know?

The consequence of these expectations was that transitioners were reluctant to ask for help from anyone, they were not emotionally aware to spot signs that they were struggling and, once they did, they judged themselves and kept it from others for of fear of being weak.

> Ben: I think the problem with it is it's the problem with the people that don't realise it's affecting them… it's one of those things that I think gets overlooked massively where, and I do it myself, you see it on the news an ex-soldier moaning because they're on benefits, they can't work because of PTSD and I sit there thinking, 'Man-up! Just get on with it.' But then you have to sort of sit back and go, 'Actually, you don't know what this guy has seen.'

The legacy of their military determination, then, inhibited transitioners from appreciating the difficulties in military-to-civilian transition and it took considerable time and perspective after Army exit to begin to recognise and accept they were experiencing emotional difficulties in transition:

> Max: I'm sure there's like billions of war stories of people, you know, being ridiculously calm, you know, taking the piss under all sorts of things. Umm, and actually getting yourself out of that mindset is a really, really hard thing to do. Because that's quite fundamental.

These expectations combined with another legacy from their military careers to do with the expectation that a soldier complete every job to the highest standard:

> Luke: In the Army you get pushed out of your limit to achieve all these things. You are disciplined. You know if you have given a timescale to do something you have to get them done at that timescale. If you have an appointment with someone, you're meant to get there early before that person comes. You're meant to present yourself to that person that, "I am not just another person you've been seeing; this is what I can offer. This is how special I could be."

Considered in the context of the losses of competency and power that come with military-to-civilian transition, every rejected job application, every setback in physical rehabilitation, every B in a university exam had the potential to indicate personal deficiency, weakness and failure for the transitioners:

> Max: You always have a high bar set for yourself, you know? No-one expects you just to do the average. So, in your own head, anything other than excellent is fail.

However, such was their determination not to fail that even when transitioners judged themselves as weak and struggling, they relentlessly strove on, trying

to make successes of their transition. Most of the transitioners named a determination to be independent rather than reliant on support from others, meaning that assistance was only sought out provided the transitioners could retain a sense of responsibility for their futures:

> Aaron: I didn't know where I was at first…And then, like I said, then you try to sort yourself out. So, you go to the council and I was actually advised by somebody in the council, 'Declare yourself homeless, you'll get a bedsit…' and I said, 'I don't want a bedsit. I don't want to be on the dole. I want to be working!'

The desire for independence made it harder for some to seek out help, equating help seeking and reliance on others with weakness, nonetheless, determination to get better overrode such self-judgements. Jack even sought the help of a therapist out of a determination to curb his drinking and aggression to keep his job and his relationship:

> Jack: I felt it embarrassing…I felt it like weakness you know? So…Like, well, it did… But… I want to be fixed, you know? And my aggression, my drinking man. Phew, I'm trying, I'm trying err, I tried like last week I saw my therapist she was like, umm, I need to write in a diary because it's… Because of my job now I'm trying like my hardest not to drink.

John named a similar determination to stop drinking for the sake of his life and his family:

> John: So what right now I have to do to myself is listen to the doctor's advice, try as much as possible and stay from alcohol because one, they are giving me, if I still keep drinking like the way I'm drinking, two years will never last me. I'll be dead before two years' time. So, these one of the things that just encourage me because the kids are too small so the only thing I have to do is try as much as possible to avoid alcohol entirely.

Seeking help like this paved the way for transitioners to accept that they needed more than determination in transition, that they needed to find a new direction. This was key for the transitioners to adapt to civilian life.

> Max: I kind of expected, probably because, you know, I've done all this stuff in the military, you know, passed these ridiculously hard courses, served in all these regiments, done my tour and I never really, you know, I had this view of myself as a competent good guy and so I never expected that I would struggle with, like, the little details of life after the military. And I think that's like, that's a real journey to even accept that you can't do it all.

With their former military purpose gone, they needed to find new meaning and purpose to apply their determination to. Connecting with civilian friends and

family who knew the transitioners before their military careers helped the them to remember who they were beyond their military influences. Now they were determined to improve their close relationships, to provide for their loved ones, which, in turn gave new meaning to achieving in civilian work environments.

> Jack: My missus… she's the reason I'm doing all this because she like, she's been saying I'm not the same from the time I came back.

> Rob: As soon as she was born, I went more into being family orientated and thinking, 'Right, I need to I strike a better balance now being at home.'

The transitioners thus started to redefine themselves, amalgamating their values from their pre-military life, with those they wanted to retain from the military and developing a new hybrid for the civilian future.

> Max: I kind of knew, like, what traits maybe needed to be phased out over time and, you know… I had a sort of little bit of a compass of how I needed to redevelop myself.

Discovering new values and purpose gave the transitioners something to apply their determination to, creating momentum to make the changes that they needed to adjust to their civilian environment.

4.6 Reflexivity

The interviews in this study were rich with intimate, moving accounts of transition, making the theme refining process academically and personally difficult. I felt an obligation to do justice to the experience of transition and was directly tasked to do so when Jack told me to, 'get this out there!' at the end of his interview. I made four attempts in total to find the right themes that sufficiently evoked the phenomenon. My penultimate attempt had eight themes, but they were generic and soulless. I had lost the heart of the study and had not followed through with the spirit of van Manen's (1990) empathic approach. I understood that I needed to do more to tap into the artistic, writerly dimension. I needed to be 'touched' to ensure I was being responsive to the phenomenon and capture something of its 'is-ness'. Phenomenological analysis does not seek to measure or emphasize the frequency of themes, nor does it explain, theorise or seek to engage higher levels of abstraction. The project, instead, is for rich description, backed by illustrative quotations, which evokes the phenomenon in immediate and potent ways. Languaging becomes "a focused act of discovering out of silence, sediments of meaning, nuance, and texture" (Finlay, 2013, p.186).

In my final effort, I returned to the moments in the interviews that spoke to me most to rediscover the lifeblood of transition and I discovered the narrative element.

When I thought of the moments that most viscerally moved me from the interviews, two stood out. First, the desperate way in which Luke spoke of the alienation he felt in his life, his words penetrating to my core: “I’m being outcasted from the world and I’ve been outcasted from my home, in my matrimonial home!” In that moment I felt stuck with him. I remember feeling planted in my body, unable to physically move, struck cold with the sadness of Luke’s words. I felt his loss, his powerless and in that moment, his determination was exposed as tragically lacking. It was painful to see a once outstanding soldier reduced to this powerlessness and he did not know how to get out of it.

Second was a moment from Aaron’s interview. He was speaking about how seeing other ex-soldiers at an annual military sporting event was the one time that he felt the belonging he used to have in the Army, “Like you’re a long-lost brother sort of thing.” Immediately after saying this he froze, hearing the words he had just spoken reverberate around the room, remaining silent for some twenty seconds. I felt my eyes start to well up with tears and I think I saw some in Aaron’s too. He then sipped his water, composed himself in another long silence, took some deep breaths and resumed the interview. These two moments were my inspiration for the final themes. Luke, Aaron and I had shared in two tangible experiences of transition that I felt it in my frozen body and my tearful eyes. These were proud but struggling individuals, grieving their exile and their alienation in transition.

Both examples highlight how narrowing these effecting moments were of my experience in the interviews. They provided me with insight into military transition, but, such was their power, that they clouded my awareness as to what else might have been present to Luke and Aaron, as if the drums were so loud that they drowned out the vocal. With Luke, I was so caught-up in trying to make sense of my sudden sadness that I was not able to ask for elaboration from him. This meant that any sense I made of his narrative happened internally in me and went without verification from Luke. Such strikingly powerful moments came at the cost of agreed meaning with my interviewees, with only my speculations left to work with.

The interviews stirred up many feelings in me. Before I focussed on transition as a subject, I had started this study from an academic question about what military life was like and wondered why someone would choose to commit to one. My military and ex-military friends maintained a certain distance from the details of their working lives when they socialised with me, so the interviews were my first, intimate encounters with ex-soldiers and I found myself feeling a mixture of compassion, respect, sadness and frustration for them. I felt compassion and sadness for them in being caught up in the storm that their exile, alienation and determination caused. Transition felt to me like a slow, ambivalent drifting away from military life without ever settling down and, because transition was not explicitly talked about, they were alone in it. I felt respect for their determination in response to the many challenges that transition presented, but I also felt frustration with transitioners for their perpetuating of the alienation in transition. While civilians were conforming

to the damning stereotype that the military projected onto them, I felt the transitioners were not doing enough to broaden their experience of civilians too.

I believe this viewpoint impacted on my study, not least in interviews where I felt transitioners were generalising about civilians. In some instances, I became overly focussed on their generalisations, as I perceived them, with an agenda to challenge and demystify their assumptions about civilians. By doing so, I took the interviews away from phenomenological description and risked becoming attacking, didactive or protective of the interviewees, effecting rapport and opportunity for greater understanding. This likely sullied the richness of data I obtained about military perceptions of civilians.

Ultimately, my internal struggle with this helped me to identify that I too was determinedly trying to make transition better, which, in turn helped me to appreciate how confusing, isolating and alienating transition is.

5. Discussion

5.1 Overview

This study found that transition was an ongoing process of grieving their former military world, adjusting to a clashing civilian culture, and destabilising existential uncertainty. Through this all, transitioners were determined to make a success of civilian life but were at a loss about how to do this. Transitioners who adapted most to civilian life were those who could locate themselves in the process of their transition, recognising that the military was in their past and that their future held unknown potential.

This chapter begins with a summary of what my findings contribute to military scholarship before considering the professional relevance and recommendations for further research in psychotherapeutic practice with transitioners. In the final sections I highlight the strengths and limitations of my research in the Critical evaluation in which I also consider what I would have done differently in this research with the benefit of hindsight in. I finish with a Deeper Reflexive Discussion.

5.2 Value of the findings

This section discusses how my findings compare with the existing scholarship on military transition and what my findings reveal about military transition that the current scholarship has yet to. I did not find the concept of 'exile' being used as a metaphor for military transition anywhere in military scholarship, making this a new perspective on leaving the military. I have used the concepts of 'exile in alienation' and 'inherited military determination' as a foundation to build upon what already exists in scholarship.

5.2.1 Willingness to adapt

My findings show how formative military life and values were imbued in the identities of the transitioners and how this identity survived long after Army exit. Retaining their military identities helped transitioners to feel a connection to something, even if this was the military past they were now exiled from. With military life being poorly understood by civilians and military values not transferring easily in civilian life, the transitioners slowly realised that they had to redefine themselves in order to adapt to their new setting:

> Aaron: ...I'm an Ex-squaddie. And then some of them ask, 'what's that?' *chuckles* ...Especially the young guns that don't know what 'squaddie' is. Some don't know what squaddie is and I have to explain, 'Oh I used to be in the Army.'

The extent to which a transitioner was able to amalgamate their military past and their civilian present seemed to correlate with how well-integrated transitioners were with civilians. My Literature Review identified a debate among military scholars on role continuity and whether undertaking quasi-military roles in civilian life aids or hinders transition (Bergman et al., 2014; Wolpert, 2000; Higate, 2001; Jolly, 2001; Brunger et al., 2013; Walker, 2013; Redmond et al., 2015). This study found that, while performing quasi-military tasks helped transitioners to adjust to the 'reverse culture shock' (Brooks & Greenberg, 2017) of civilian life, when they tried to impose their old military standards and expectations in civilian settings, they became disillusioned and struggled to integrate. For example, Rob was starting to find a balance in his transition between his old military ways and new civilian ones. He maintained a sense of order through the role continuity of a male dominated working environment with a clear ranking structure that used exclusive, quasi-military terminology, he performed a very similar role to former his military one and formed a friendship with the another ex-military person in his new team. Outside of work he also played for an ex-Army sports team, lived near his former base and was considering signing up to the Territorial Army.

However, alongside this role continuity, Rob began to accept the need to create distance from his military mentality, focus less on work, spend more time with his family to adjust to the rhythm of civilian life. A balance between his military mentality and his emerging civilian identity was needed:

> Rob: I just feel like I need to chill out more, ‘cause I’m so used to… you know, a high tempo structure and I don’t need to work at that tempo anymore. I can relax, you know… I feel like I want to have a structure of doing things, but it doesn’t need to be as rigid as it was before. I can be, you know, more flexible.

In accepting his evolving identity, Rob was optimistic about his future among civilians. However, my study found that role continuity became a problem for transitioners when it was their sole focus in transition, when they could not embrace any aspect of civilian life or adapt their identities. Luke was actively looking for the most “similar related to this [the Army]” employment possible. He believed such a job would be the difference between, ‘when you are working and enjoying what you do and working just earning money.’ This restricted Luke’s career options and may have contributed to him being unemployed at the time of interview but also ossified his view that military life was inherently better than civilian life, which added to his sadness that his military career was over.

It was those who showed an awareness that their identities would be remoulded as an amalgamation between their former military and developing civilian identities who seemed to be most engaged with their new civilian surroundings. To Max this awareness was the key to transition; realising that there was a transition to make and, “not just doing the same thing in a different place.” This is in keeping with Heidegger’s (1962) concept of ‘the They’ and how transitioners discovered a new kind of individuality when they were separated

from the institution of the Army. With military values being less applicable in civilian life, transitioners could review their whole value system. Transition became an opportunity for reinvention for those willing to adapt. However, transitioners who remained wedded to their former military values, were the least accepting of civilians, least open to changing, integrating and were consequently more isolated and unhappy:

> Aaron: ...in the Army, well, everyone helps. You know, you get the odd person who's a bit...that only does things for themselves but, you know, most of the time somebody's there who'll always help out umm, if you get into a pot of trouble... Civvy life, they don't really give a shit. If you can't cut it, they don't care. They'll drop you as quick as look at you...They don't really give a shit...They're all out for themselves so...*whispers* I hate it.

There was a visible difference between those who chose to leave the Army and those who were forced to leave. Voluntary leavers were critical in evaluating which aspects of their military identities they wanted to retain and relinquish, were more present and future focussed so were able to plan better and with a greater sense of purpose. Those who were forced to leave were more idealising of their military pasts, were more past orientated, and had less desire to adjust to their present surroundings, seeing civilian life as a culture clash with the superior military way of life.

5.2.2 The judgement of competence

A unique finding in this study was the way in which the transitioners conceptualised their past Army achievements as a measure of their competence in life. The more a transitioner identified in this way, the more he struggled in transition because their military skills were not understood by civilians nor were their skills that were applicable in civilian life. This meant that they identified as competent but were not as capable in civilian life as they had been in the military, which had a detrimental effect on their confidence. Professional competence was the main means of judging character in the Army meaning that in transition, incompetence had a detrimental impact of transitioners' self-worth.

For example, Ben distinguished between the 'grey guys' in the Army who had no aspirations and no ambition and the 'highflyers' who strive to be the best in the regiment. He was clear from the start of his military career that he was a highflyer and that he carried this attitude into his civilian work:

> Ben: I'm top biller in the company now, so I'm earning the company the most money erm and it's not a difficult job to be fair, it's just getting on the phones, it's going out meeting people, it's being persistent and it's not sitting on your arse and doing nothing, which a lot of them do.

Max distinguished between the 'good blokes' and the 'shit blokes' in the Army or the highly competent and the mediocre members of the regiment and struggled to shift this military mindset in his new civilian office environment:

> Max: I mean it's a very military thing to see, you know, if someone gets you know, a bit poor grades in exams say, the sort of military mind-set would be, you know, 'Oh, they're shit.' I think that's not necessarily a good, a good sort of way to look at the world. Especially if you're sort of, you're going to sort of an office environment… so that's a very hard thing to get out of… it makes it difficult when you come to the real world 'cause you kind of, you look at it and you go, 'look at them, they're ten times shitter than I am.' But, you know, he's my boss… and actually I think part of maybe the transition is learning to… like co-exist with different types of people and not be sort of drawing lines and putting people in those sort of boxes where I'm going, 'I like him 'cause he's good and I hate him because he's…' because actually you drive yourself mental.

This shows how hard it was for transitioners to respect anyone who showed signs of what they recognised as incompetence because of its importance in judging character in the Army. In John's case he became unable to take 'command' from civilians because he found his civilian managers to be fundamentally incompetent.

However, Max was the least attached to his military achievements, recognising the difference between how much they had meant while he was in the Army and how little they meant now he was outside of it.

> Max: So if you'd done a tour of Afghan, you'd done like squadron parachute jumps and sort of been on squadron exercise, you know… you could cut the sleeves off your squadron jumper… you look at it now and think… blokes lived their lives trying to get to that level where… they could have their sleeves here rather than down there and be seen as, like, one of the boys rather than, you know, one of the newbee guys. And you look back on it now and you think actually no-one in the real world would give two shits whether I cut the sleeves off my jumper or not… I think, when you leave, you realise how little everyone else cares about those things. And so it's kind of like you have to shift your whole world view.

He could identify the former military criteria by which he judged someone's character and adapt it so that it aligned better with his new civilian world. Compare this with Luke's asking me to contact his regiment to prove how exceptional he was at his job:

> Luke: They all liked me. You can, or I can sign a consent form, you can go to my regiment or seek for my records, I'm one of the best in my battalion. I'm one of the fittest in my battalion. I do my 1.5 in seven minutes. Seven and a half minutes.

The grammatical tense is revealing here. It seemed that Luke was more past-orientated compared to Max who was more present and future-orientated. Luke, living in a frustrated and 'broken' present after his medical discharge due to his injury, focussed his attention on his military past in which he was liked and extremely capable, serving as a source of pride and validation:

> Luke: At times I look at my pictures and I think, 'I'm just a memory of everything that's happened.'

When Luke referred to his past military achievements, he did so as a means of distinguishing himself as a competent individual yet he, frustratingly, could not apply these skills in a civilian context.

The lack of transferable skills was especially true for those who, due to injury were literally weaker or even disabled and stripped of the physical and mental assets that once gave them a sense of power and confidence in their military careers.

> Pete: I'm not needed here anymore. I'm going out there and those people, they need people who can help them, who can play a role in the society. What role can I...if I cannot play a role in the [military] family that I have lived with for years I've been there, what role am I going to contribute to the outside world?

Pete's fear that his military competence would not translate to civilians was well-founded and became the reality for every transitioner in this study to some degree. Their use of military language in our interviews exposed this best. Every transitioner used military language in their interviews and their use of it was an indicator of their awareness their new civilian context affecting their competence. Every interview contained a military term or acronym that, as a civilian, I did not understand. In these moments we were talking two different languages: civilian and military. Those that recognised this and translated the meaning for me were more aware of their redundant language and could adapt to their new context. Those who did not notice this spoke more often of feeling misunderstood, frustrated and isolated among civilians.

Awareness of this kind related to how accepting transitioners were about being in transition. All four of the soldiers who were discharged; Aaron, Pete, Luke and John; found it difficult to accept that they were no longer soldiers, that their dream of a full Army career was 'cut short', as Luke put it. The Army was where Pete was 'at his best' and where Aaron would 'still go back in a heartbeat'. John named the regret he felt for having to leave the Army in the opening sentence of his interview. Their identities remained intertwined with their military pasts, and in their new civilian context, were stuck feeling disorientated, unsure of themselves and incompetent.

Conversely Max, Ben, Rob and Jack, all achieved what they wanted to in the Army and elected to leave to seek new paths for themselves. This helped them

to appreciate their military past without being stuck in it and to recognise that their context had changed and their competence with it:

> Max: …there is no, 'I'll go back to the real world.' This is the real world!

At one point in my interview with Ben, he detailed the complexities of co-ordinating battle units and how stressful and demanding it was. Immediately after this he decided:

> Ben: Actually, I'm going to leave now. I'm nearly thirty, I'm going to leave and do something else. I've got a young baby, I've got a wife, umm if I don't leave now and start a career and start something else, I'll be too old to do well in it.'

He felt that his skills were not directly transferrable outside of a military context and that, on leaving, he would need to spend time gaining the competence to build a successful civilian career. He realised he needed to leave the Army before he became too old a dog to learn new tricks.

This concurs with Jolly's (2001: 446) finding that ex-service people can be organised into two groups, those who have fostered new identities through civilian occupations, and others, unable to shrug off the legacy of their previous status, forever seeing themselves as ex-service people.'

The difference between Jolly's findings and mine is that all my transitioners still identified as ex-servicemen even when they had civilian, non-uniformed vocations. The transitioners in my study supported papers that found role transition after Army exit to be a curse for some and a blessing for others (Wolpert, 2000; Brooks and Greenberg: 2017). For those who did not want to leave, it marked the loss of familiarity and competence that came with military life, and for those who did it was a liberation from this familiarity and the beginning of a newfound individuality.

One universal aspect of the transitioners' newfound incompetence in this study was they found it shameful and judged themselves for it. For example, a transitioner I met, who I could not use in my study because he was just over forty years old, spoke with exacerbation that he used to call in air strikes, demanding high skill-levels in pressured environments and yet now he could not keep a classroom of primary school children in order in his new teaching assistant role. He could not accept this contrast of competence, judging himself as an embarrassingly deskilled civilian. This supports Atherton (2009) that upon discharge, ex-servicemen rework their identities as they become domesticated by civilian life and feel weakened by the process.

This study shows that transitioners were sensitive to feeling incompetent and deficient if they could not perform what they perceived to be simple civilian tasks. Professional ability was a directly reflection of a transitioner's character: to perform poorly was to be of poor character. While this

judgemental perspective was professionally crippling for some, it was less so for others who had found a more forgiving attitude in recognising they needed time to adjust to new systems. Those who maintained their inherited military values found transition harder this obscured the new civilian context they were now in.

5.2.3 Mental health and stigma

With this research eschewing a pathological focus, as recent scholarship calls for, it is worth noting how transitioners' talk about mental health when it is not the central subject of their transition.

I wondered, in not explicitly asking about combat or deployment experiences, whether transitioners would reference them and the impact they had on their mental health in transition. Aside from Jack, they were only briefly alluded to and this was mostly to illustrate how they contributed to positive memories of their military life:

> Ben: …so that was one of many experiences in Afghan where sort of tried taking control and err I love that aspect of it.

> Pete: Actually, I was myself at the best against war.

Some talked about being shot at explicitly and implicitly but only Jack spoke about expecting to die. These transitioners continued to be on edge, expected imminent threats, were hyper-vigilant, hyper-aroused, had heightened anxiety, flashbacks, anxious dreams and mood swings months and years after Army exit, which supports the findings of Osório et al. (2017).

> Jack: I don't trust no-one. Like, when I'm out there I don't go to, what's it called? What's it like the, the, the like gigs or like when someone comes on stage, like yeah, I don't...it's too close. It's too packed. Can't have no eyes on.

It was clear that family and most of all partners experienced the brunt of these symptoms and were the main sources of support through them, which is in keeping with both of Rutherford's (2010 & 2013) reports.

> John: I have to pick up the phone and call my wife back home because she's the only one that I trust.

John used alcohol to manage his post-deployment symptoms, in keeping with the findings of Fear et al. (2007) that ex-forces personnel were found to use alcohol as a coping strategy to avoid having to access mental health support.

> John: …if I feel like having flashbacks and all this kind of things especially in the middle of the night sometimes when I'll be in my bedroom and I'll hear explosions sometimes I'll be carrying a rifle and I hate that kind of thing, so I decided every time I woke up and hear that kind of stuff I will drink alcohol to just to keep my mind off.

This is also something that Aaron recognised amongst his peers:

> Aaron: …especially squaddies, males have such a macho attitude as such, you know, 'All I need's a couple of drinks,' you know, 'I'll sort it, you know, be sorted like that.'

There was evidence in this study of stigma around mental health preventing transitioners from accessing support. Firstly, there seemed to be an unspoken understanding between former military colleagues to only talk about the 'good times' and not 'the shit', as both Jack and Aaron attested. This meant that there was no opportunity for ex-servicemen to support each other if they were struggling in any way in transition, at least not in social settings. There was also an expressed belief that admitting to being mentally unwell was a weakness akin to succumbing to a minor physical illness or injury.

> Jack: I I felt it embarrassing…like weakness you know?… that's like saying, we're about to do a six-mile run and you're about to come in and

> say, ‘Ah well I’m not… I’ve got a toothache.’ You can’t run. That would… in the Army that would come across like weakness.

Both attitudes contributed to non-disclosure of mental ill-health in transition concurring with the current literature that soldiers believed they would lose the respect of their peers if they disclosed that they had mental health problems (Coleman et al., 2017 and Jones. et al., 2016).

Mental ill-health was also talked about in feminine terms with mentally struggling ex-soldiers called ‘fannies’ who needed to ‘man-up’. Mental ill-health was seen as weakness and a threat to transitioners’ masculinity, as Koeszegi et al. (2014) suggested would be the case.

Rob had noticed a recent shift in the destigmatisation of mental health issues, where before Iraq and Afghanistan personnel were more ‘guarded with their feelings’ with ‘a big stigma attached’ to it but recent media exposure, particularly on television had ‘opened people’s minds up’ to the validity of mental health issues. Nonetheless, the dominant narrative remained that mental illness, just like physical illness, was something to ‘crack on’ with, as Jack said and, like Ashcroft (2014) found, transitioners reluctant to access the help available to feeling stigmatised for doing so.

Transitioners judged themselves and others as weak for having mental health issues and wanting help with them. Mental health problems were shown to be a challenge to transitioners' masculinity and, therefore, something they wanted to deal with alone. Rather than access the support available to them, some transitioners in this study exacerbated their problems by isolating themselves and self-medicating with alcohol. Stigma was a clear barrier to accessing support.

5.2.4 Grief

My findings revealed multiple losses that come with military to civilian transition and it followed that every transitioner in this study was experiencing some form of grief. In losing their military status they lost the financial security of guaranteed employment, the emotional security that came with their bond to the 'military family'. They also lost their military identity, symbolised in their final action as soldiers, handing over of their military ID cards at the barracks gate, all of which also mirror findings from Brunger et al. (2013) and Herman and Yarwood (2014) who found that military exit was experienced as a bereavement by soldiers. Pete could be said to have been bereaved of his military identity in the early stages of his transition, realising that he was already losing his connection to military life only weeks after his exit:

> Pete: And when that is dying, you feel like you are dying as well because the light you used to live in it's, as much as it was a very hard job, there was a light part of it, which you're going to an easy sort of life in the

> civilian street and it's very dark, as in everything lies low. And that in that sense of, of, of closeness does not exist.

For similar reasons, Luke stated:

> I'm grieved. I mean every day I grumble in myself. At times I look at my pictures and I think, "I'm just a memory of everything that's happened."

While everyone in this study was experiencing grief, those who had chosen to leave could mitigate it with the knowledge that they had something to gain from Army exit. For example, financial security was a priority for the transitioners as the literature suggested (McNeil & Giffen: 1967; Rutherford: 2010, 2013; Ashcroft: 2012), and those who had chosen to leave could appeal to the gains in career potential, social flexibility, personal safety and geographical consistency that civilian life facilitated to compensate for their losses. Those who were forced to leave the Army had no such relief and instead had a frantic scramble for new life direction, meaning and purpose.

> Luke: So, it's just in a rush, yeah. *claps hands together* You need to do it! This is what you need to do. Umm, you need to choose right or left… These are decisions which you… as a normal human you have to sit down for two or one year to start making this plan bit by bit, which wasn't in my own path. So I wasn't fortunate to have that time. I had to rush down and do this, makes these decisions.

Comments like the above show how forced leavers had to contend with losses of meaning and purpose in addition to the losses of security and identity felt by everyone. When these additional losses combined with the relatively sudden and unacknowledged end to their careers, beyond handing back their ID cards as mentioned above, it gave the transitioners a great deal to grieve and insufficient time to dedicate to it until they were out of the Army. To this extent, it can be said that transitioners were, in a Heideggerian sense, 'thrown' out of the 'Theyness' of military life and into an unknown civilian context, at which point they are awakened to their grief.

Those who acknowledged their grief were able to adjust better to the changes in civilian life, accepting their circumstances and finding new direction from it. Pete was perhaps the best example of this in that he was forced out of the Army due to injury, named how this marked the deaths of his military identity and security and strove to find new life meaning for himself. He enrolled in university as a means of fostering this new meaning and designating time to adjust to the shock and grief associated with his sudden Army exit.

It was evident that a barrier to this grieving process was the lack of expectation among transitioners that grief would form part of the transition process, yet it was present in every account of transition in this study. Even those who chose to leave the Army and expected or desired to change their identity, still felt the loss of security, familiarity and competence in the military. As Woodward

and Jenkings (2011) suggested, soldiers feel the absence of what they once did as an aspect of their post-military identity.

With the lack of recognition of the grief that comes with Army exit, transitioners found it challenging to acknowledge, then address their grief, and in the case of the forced leavers, this was compounded by their losses of life meaning and purpose. When this is considered in conjunction with the stigma associated with help-seeking, transition is revealed to be a lonely process punctuated by grief.

5.2.5 Unending transition

There is a crucial message about military to civilian transition revealed by the universal presence of determination in the transitioners in this study: *no-one felt their transitions were complete*. In remaining determined, the transitioners still had something they wanted to achieve in transition. This may also have been why no-one felt that they had either succeeded or failed in their transitions. For example, Luke had faced numerous challenges in his transition in adjusting to his injury, in reconnecting with his family and in seeking employment but he was determined to change his fortune, determined not to let his transition 'break' him.

Conversely Max and Rob had well-paying civilian jobs and were spending more time with their loved ones so were achieving the goals they had set out on

leaving the Army. They could have classed these as successful transitions, but they maintained that their transitions were incomplete:

> Max: I mean I've been out since 2011 and I'd say I'm still not completely transitioned into being a 'civvy'. I'm not sure I ever will. It's a bit asynthetic in the sense that I get closer and closer, but I'll probably never get there.

> Rob: The day you leave the Army to when you become a civilian, I think it's an ongoing transition that you slowly adapt.

In this way, it feels inaccurate to distinguish transitions in terms of successes or failures. Instead, determination helps to show that the process of transition is a non-linear, ongoing one as Kralik et al. (2006) suggested, rather than something that is achieved and concluded. To paraphrase Higate (2001), the transitioners in this study were found neither to be fully integrated civilians nor hapless former squaddies unable to create non-military identities. It is indeed far more complex than this.

5.3 Professional relevance and further research

The feelings of alienation, uncertainty, disempowerment and losses of meaning, identity, purpose and belonging that emerged in the transitions in this

study are all central subjects in existential philosophy and, therefore, well suited to existential-phenomenological psychotherapy (EPP).

EPP escapes easy definition but this section introduces key concepts in existential philosophy and phenomenology that illustrate how EPP can help transitioners in their transition process. By the end of this section I show how EPP can help transitioners to: better integrate with civilians; better hold in tension their civilian and military identities; better accept their sense of incompetence and uncertainty in civilian life; channel their determination into something meaningful to them; grieve their past military lives; and to appreciate transition as an ongoing process and to feel less stigmatised in transition.

5.3.1 Existential anxiety

Fundamental to existentialism is the understanding that anxiety is part of existence and cannot be eradicated. Instead, anxiety can be embraced to heighten our appreciation of life and to empower us to live better. By the same token, EPP can help transitioners to appreciate that their anxieties are a given of existence that can be better understood and learnt from.

Existentialists distinguish between fears and anxieties by the way that fears have objects whereas anxieties do not: I am afraid of something, I am anxious about no-thing. Existentialists (for example Tillich, 1955; Yalom, 1980) argue

that we are confronted with existential anxiety when considering the following aspects of existence: our own death, the meaninglessness of our existence, the guilt of how we might have lived differently, and the isolation felt from the fact that we alone are responsible for the choices we make in life. These anxieties are all intrinsically connected to our existence and will remain as long as we exist, as Rollo May (1977, pp.206-207) clarifies:

> ...since anxiety attacks the foundation (core, essence) of the personality, the individual cannot "stand outside" the threat, cannot objectify it. Thereby, one is powerless to take steps to confront it... "One has a fear" but "One is anxious."

If a transitioner is afraid of being unemployed on Army exit, he can attend a CV writing course to make him a more appealing candidate to a wider range of employers. His fear has an object which he can confront. If, however, he is anxious whether he has made the right decision to leave the Army, there is no object to confront, no way of knowing what might have been if he had chosen to stay. His choice anxiety will remain as part of his existence.

This also shows how the existential position on anxiety is destigmatising for transitioners because, rather than anxiety pointing to personal incompetence or weakness it is instead understood as a necessary part of being human. EPP can use this position to help transitioners distinguish between the anxieties that

they cannot change in life and guiding them towards what they can change. As van Deurzen (2002, p. 38) says:

> Human beings can spend tremendous energy on trying to remedy what cannot be remedied, and in attempting to establish security where danger will unavoidably appear.

Furthermore, by establishing these anxieties as givens of existence, EPP can help transitioners to appreciate and make use of them to improve their transitions. Taking mortality as an example, the finiteness of existence can be explicitly discussed in EPP to motivate transitioners to assess what they really want for their post-military lives:

> When I feel that this could be the last moment of my life, I necessarily ask myself what my life adds up to and who I am. Do I really want to live and die as a gardener (a sculptor, a politician, a priest)? In anxiety, I face up to mortality because I feel the fragility of my life and the necessity of deciding what it all means. (Polt, 1999, p. 88)

We have seen how this 'facing up' was already happening to some transitioners in this study. On realising that their military careers were ending, they were in anxiety about their next steps in life. 'Now that I am no longer a soldier, what do I want to be?' Anxiety, then, can help an individual question how they can live their life in a better way. As John Macquarrie (1972, p. 169) puts it,

"Anxiety awakens us from our illusions and false securities". It is to be harnessed in EPP wherever possible.

Finally working with anxiety can be empowering by helping transitioners realise that they have the resilience to endure it:

> The existential practitioner does not...try to make life seem better than it is. She does not try to sooth anxiety, for she is convinced of people's basic capacity to face whatever comes to them, and she helps them to find the courage to bear their anxiety, however intense (van Deurzen, 2002, p. 39).

In this way EPP can channel transitioners' determination into their anxieties, helping them to embrace and use them to discover the path they want to take in civilian life.

5.3.2 Authenticity and inauthenticity

Transitioners have been shown to question how they can remain true to themselves in transition, being concerned about how civilian life will shape their identities. EPP can normalise this as a fundamental aspect of being-in-the-world. Soldiers have already been shaped by 'the they' of military culture and now they will be influenced by a new 'they' among civilians. The influence is inevitable, which Polt (1999, pp. 62-63) illustrates using the analogy of fashion. When I try to look fashionable, I am conforming to a communal sense

of style rather than something of my own creation, so I am one of ‘the they’. Yet if I try to dress against the fashion, I still need to reference ‘the they’ to know how not to dress so the influence is inescapable.

This influence over one’s individuality is existential inauthenticity in action, with Spinelli (2007, p. 50) describing existential inauthenticity as, “a way of engaging with existence that allows a distance or detachment from any sense of ‘owned’ involvement with what presents itself to a being’s experience.” Therefore, inauthenticity is an inevitable part of being-in-the-world as we are always susceptible to being influenced by ‘the they’, detaching us from our individuality. The role of EPP here is to help transitioners to realise that it is impossible to sustain being true to themselves and that their transitions will be an ongoing tension between being authentic and inauthentic. This is what Kierkegaard (2008) is referencing when he states that man is in an ongoing ‘process of becoming’. We cannot reach the point of being authentic and remaining so because we are in constant tension with ‘the they’ and inauthenticity.

At the same time, EPP can be empowering in understanding this tension and the power that existential authenticity has to distinguish ourselves from ‘the they’.

> Heidegger's concept of authenticity ascribes to us the capacity to free ourselves from the imprisonment by 'das Man' ('the they') and to find out our own responses to what we encounter (Cohn, 1997).

EPP can facilitate the time and space that transitioners need to explore what they want for themselves, helping them to connect to their authentic being, as van Deurzen explains:

> authentic living is all about: becoming increasingly capable of following the direction that one's conscience indicates as the right direction and thus becoming the author of one's own destiny. Quite simply, being authentic means being true to oneself (van Deurzen, 2002, p. 43).

Understanding the tension between authentic and inauthentic being in EPP can help transitioners to recognise when they are conforming with the former military 'they', when they are conforming with their new civilian 'they' and when they are being true to themselves. This destigmatises inauthenticity as part of the process of becoming a transitioner and empowers transitioners to consider what they truly want for in transition.

5.3.3 Being-with-others

Heidegger's *Dasein* or being-in-the-world, asserts that beings are so thoroughly interconnected with the world that even the words that refer to them

should be hyphenated. Being-with-others is an aspect of being-in-the-world and, just as we are interconnected with the world, so are we interconnected with others. Cohn explains:

> Being-in-the-world is a relational state and human beings are always part of a context which includes the world and others. All experience is experience of this context and any disturbance is a distortion of such an experience. (Cohn, 1997, p. 80)

Therefore existential-phenomenological psychotherapists engage with their clients by inviting understanding of how they disturb, distort and connect with their clients' being-in-the-world. Cohn continues:

> Seeing relatedness as an aspect of existence is the existential-phenomenological approach. Being is always 'Being-with-others', the world is a 'with-world'. We are always in a relational field, in a state of intersubjectivity.' (Cohn, 1996, p. 117)

In so doing, psychotherapists can help transitioners to find themselves in the new civilian world they have been thrown into by being-with them and helping them to recognise how they, their world and their experiences in it are changing.

My study also revealed that transitioners expected neither to understand nor be understood by civilians on Army exit. By psychotherapists being-with transitioners, they facilitate a space for transitioners to build a relationship of trust and understanding with them, which could restore transitioners' faith in civilians' capacity for understanding. Being-with gives transitioners a chance to discover a new subjectivity for themselves and to see the civilians around them as individual subjects too, creating a better environment for inter-subjective understanding.

5.3.4 Engulfment

We can now appreciate how existential concepts awaken us to the fact that when we, our world and others in our world change, we can use it as an opportunity for life re-evaluation. The answers to questions that arise in transition; who I am, where I am, my meaning, purpose and what I want for my future; are all in constant flux and need adjusting to. Existentialism exposes these questions and EPP provides a space for them to be explored collaboratively with a therapist, giving transitioners a chance to locate themselves in their transition.

However, an issue that emerged in this study is that some transitioners felt so disenfranchised by civilian values that they withdrew from society, isolated themselves and stopped adjusting to their transition. It was as if they feared being influenced and corrupted by civilians in their vulnerable, disorientated

state. This fear of being changed by the outside world is sometimes referred to as ‘engulfment’, which R. D. Laing introduces as follows:

> A firm sense of one’s own autonomous identity is required in order that one may be related as one human being to another. Otherwise, any and every relationship threatens the individual with loss of identity. One form this takes can be called engulfment. In this the individual dreads relatedness as such, with anyone or anything or, indeed, even with himself, because his uncertainty about the stability of his autonomy lays him open to the dread lest in any relationship he will lose his autonomy and identity…Engulfment is felt as a risk in being understood (thus grasped, comprehended), in being loved, or even simply in being seen. (Laing, 1959, p. 44)

The transitioners in this study frequently spoke of not being seen, understood or cared for by civilians. At its worst, transitioners’ fear of engulfment meant they became increasingly disconnected from their civilian peers and needed to refer to their military pasts to retain a sense of their identity, which kept them from adjusting to their new life. The psychologist Rollo May explains how participating with others:

> always involves risk; if the organism goes out too far, it loses its own centeredness, its identity… If the neurotic is so afraid of loss of his own conflicted center that he refuses to go out and holds back in rigidity and

> lives in narrowed reactions and shrunken world space, his growth and development are blocked (May, 1961, cited in Friedman, 1964, p. 441).

Theoretically then, if a disenfranchised transitioner can develop a firmer sense of their identity, they are less likely to feel the threat of engulfment, are more likely to engage with civilians and flourish in civilian life:

> It is the task of the therapist, therefore, not only to help the patient become aware, but even more significantly, to help him transmute this awareness into consciousness… In doing so, the client comes to see, 'that he is the one who is threatened, that he is the being who stands in this world which threatens, that he is the subject who has a world. And this gives him the possibility of in-sight, of "inward sight," of seeing the world and his problems in relation to himself. And thus it gives him the possibility of doing something about them.' (May, 1961, cited in Friedman, 1964, p. 442)

In this way EPP can disentangle transitioners from their fear of being engulfed by civilian life, can help them to reidentify themselves in their transition and to understand what they want from it. As the existential psychotherapist Viktor Frankl says:

> Ultimately, man should not ask what the meaning of his life is, but rather must recognize that it is he who is asked. In a word, each man is

> questioned by life; and he can only answer to life by answering for his own life; to life he can only respond by being responsible (Frankl, 2008, p. 113).

Again, this also shows how EPP can empower transitioners to harness their determination, to discover new aims to apply it to and to re-engage with the process of transition.

5.3.5 Existential uncertainty

Existential uncertainty recognises how the constantly changing nature our being-in-the-world renders everything that is relational fundamentally uncertain. It is not the case that nothing is certain in existentialism; indeed the certainty of mortality is central to existential philosophy. Rather existential uncertainty arises in the way that, "each human being's *lived experience* of such certainties is open to multiple possibilities." (Spinelli, 2014, p. 21). So my death is an inevitable certainty but the nature and time of my death will remain uncertain to me and my attitude towards these uncertainties will also change unpredictably throughout my life. Within the realms of the certainty of my death, anything could happen, which is why Spinelli says, "Paradoxically, uncertainty is a certainty of existence." (Spinelli, 2014, p. 24).

Now it becomes evident why existential uncertainty can be made useful to transitioners. We have seen how the anxiety of uncertainty rises in soldiers at

the point of Army exit because they do not know who they are or what will become of them in civilian life. They can feel incompetent and defective for not understanding civilians or civilian ways of life because transition should not have posed a challenge to them. Spinelli would argue that this is the consequence of over-emphasising the value of certainty:

> In general, Western culture perhaps overvalues the comfort of certainty and underestimates the benefits of uncertainty. We assume a 'naturalness' to the former and impose a sense of the unusual or the unwanted in the latter. We tell our selves that it is better to act as though we were certain of our selves or some viewpoint rather than reveal our selves to be uncertain. Certainty is strength; uncertainty weakens us (Spinelli, 2014, p. 28).

Instead existential uncertainty recognises that we, our world and other beings within it are ultimately unknowable and that existence precludes any constancy of identity or context. EPP can help transitioners to understand how military to civilian transition will inevitably throw them into uncertainty because Army exit marks the end of being-in their military world and the start of being-in an unknown one. Therefore, EPP can serve as a destigmatising force against of the incompetence felt by transitioners in this study.

EPP also models this uncertainty as therapist and client relate to each other as two shifting individuals in-the-world, embracing uncertainty together and gradually understanding each other better:

> In abstaining from the enterprise of therapist-direct change-focused dialogue, and instead immersing them selves in the uncertainty of a dialogue which finds its own direction and thereby opens the possibility of change whose direction and impact is unpredictable, existential psychotherapists express their willingness to face uncertainty in the presence of the client. Viewed from this perspective, the existential psychotherapist becomes an agent of uncertainty as expressed through his or her way of being with the client. (Spinelli, 2014, p. 76)

In this way psychotherapy acts as a counterpoint to the military bubble. The military bubble protects soldiers from uncertainty in providing its recruits with structure, collective values and purpose. Instead EPP abstains from structure and direction and the uncertainty and anxiety that is generated in this abstinence helps clients to identify what they want for themselves.

This clashing of positions could make EPP unpalatable for some transitioners, though, by psychotherapists being-with transitioners and showing them their willingness to contend with their own uncertainty, they model that it is possible to live with uncertainty, which might appeal to otherwise reluctant transitioners wanting help with the kind of uncertainties named in this study.

5.3.6 The giddiness of freedom

The alienation that followed the loss of camaraderie and belonging in military exile life leaving was disorientating and overwhelming and the transitioners in this study who acknowledged this disorientation fared better in adjusting to it in their transitions. Therefore, any assistance transitioners can be offered to recognise and understand their feelings of alienation will be helpful to their transitions. Heidegger’s uncanniness, discussed in the Literature Review, and Kierkegaard’s (1980) concept of ‘the giddiness of freedom’ can be implemented in EPP to help transitioners to this end`.

Heidegger’s (1962) concept of ‘Unheimlichkeit’ refers to feeling uncanny, that something is out of place or does not belong and is something that EPP can highlight for soldiers in transition to their benefit. By becoming more aware of the uncanny when it arises, transitioners will better understand their sense of alienation and be more able to can articulate what they need in order to feel more at home among civilians. Tantam, van Deurzen & Arnold-Baker explain further:

> Heidegger distinguishes a type of anxiety that he terms ‘unheimlichkeit’, ‘homelessness’. This is anxiety that comes from not taking a place in the world for granted. Experiencing unheimlichkeit is an indication that a person has cut themselves off from the comfort that comes from custom and prejudice (and therefore feels ‘ill at ease’). It is an indication in a group that a person is observing or experiencing the group in a new way,

> and thus a possible indicator of the potentiality of change (Tantam et al., 2005, p. 150).

The problem that several tranisitoners described was that it took them some time to realise that they felt an uncanniness in civilian life and without this realisation, they did not see that they were encountering an opportunity for change. This was in part because the transitioners were entering a world that was not altogether alien to them. Instead they moved in permanantly with their wives, families and girlfriends and so struggled to acknowledge feeling ill at ease in surroundings that they felt should not have presented a problem.

EPP can help transitioners to better understand this alienation by elucidating the difference between going home on temporary leave from the Army and now being on 'civvy street' permanantly. Van Deurzen articulates something of this difference in the following passage on alienation and freedom:

> There is a sharp contrast between being this permanent stranger and being the temporary tourist. Being the stranger is to be alienated. It gives you that sinking feeling of no longer having any point of reference. To not belong anywhere leaves you stranded in no-man's land. To be without a home can give rise to the floundering and fluttering of insecurity or even to that of experiencing panic attacks. Freedom is one of the most scary things to handle and it consists of not being attached to anything. What we forget is that attachments are what secures us in the world and what

gives things their meaning and context. Freedom is often used as a negative concept: what is attractive is the idea of being liberated from the ties that bind us. In reality the experience of absolute freedom is quite close to that of emptiness. Paradoxically, we cannot use our freedom when we have too much of it, for the more freedom there is the less certainty and less reality we have (van Deurzen, 1998, p. 54).

Here we see how the freedom to choose their new life direction that transitioners have on exit is overwhelmingly intimidating. This what Kierkegaard (1980) referred to as the 'giddiness of freedom'. Freedom is dizzying when we have no reference point to orientate from and become uncertain how to wield it. Perhaps this captures how John came to sleep in his car in the first weeks of Army exit.

Psychotherapy is well placed to make military to civilian transition significantly less alienating and destigmatising for transitioners in that it can help them to acknowledge how anxiety-provoking this sudden imposition of freedom is for anyone. When combined with the subtle feelings of alienation in the uncanniness of transition, it is natural for transitioners to feel exiled and disorientated and to feel that they do not belong anywhere. Again, by offering a space for transitioners to be-with a therapist, they can feel destigmatised in their alienation, can take the time to relocate themselves in their new surroundings and decide how they want to continue in their transition.

5.3.7 Bereavement

Finally, the way that EPP approaches bereavement can be appropriated to support transitioners through their multiple losses in transition. As with all challenges in transition, it was those transitioners who were aware of their losses and made time to grieve them that seemed to be more settled in civilian life. EPP can provide a space for transitioners to confront their grief to this end.

An existential study on bereavement (Yalom & Lieberman, 1991) found that confronting existential issues in bereavement often led to positive psychological changes. This might also be applicable to transitioners grieving their former military identities. The transitioners in this study who had adjusted the most since Army exit were the most existentially aware and least idealising of military life. Conversely those who idealised the military most were those who most wished they could return to the Army, regretted leaving and appeared to apportion little reflective space for their grief in transition.

This reveals how transitioners can be supported through their ongoing grief in transition. Just as psychotherapy can be called upon to help a bereaved person to comprehend their loss and how their life has forever changed, so can psychotherapy support transitioners to grieve their losses in transition. In grieving the fact that life is full of endings and losses, one can better appreciate the life that we have left to live. Using an EPP approach to bereavement in this way could help transitioners to better understand what they have lost in

transition and what they want for their civilian lives now. Again, EPP can help channel transitioners' determination into grief, motivating them to live better, as May says:

> The normal anxiety associated with death does not at all imply depression or melancholy. Like any normal anxiety it can be used constructively. The realization that we shall be eventually separated from our fellows can be a motivation for achieving closer bonds to other human beings now. The normal anxiety inherent in the realization that our activity and creativity will eventually be cut off can be a motivation – like death itself – for the more responsible, zestful, and purposeful use of the time in which we do live. (May, 1977, p. 212)

5.3.8 Professional relevance summary

Throughout this section, the same point is returned to; EPP can help raise the awareness of transitioners to the impact that the challenges in transition have on them and provide them with an understanding environment in which they can respond to them. As one EP psychotherapist puts it, "When the client can truly see the way they have constructed their way of being-in-the-world, they may elect to make changes to it" (Du Plock, 2007, p. 71). With transitioners better supported by EPP through the anxiety, uncertainty risks to authenticity, fear of integration with civilians and grief in transition, they are less likely to feel isolated, alienated and misunderstood, making for a less challenging transition altogether.

5.3.9 Recommendations for further research

In a study sample of 8 transitioners, my findings cannot speak for all transitioners and instead provides rich detail on a narrow cohort. Therefore, further study involving the following demographic groups could uncover more about military transition:

1. Women.
2. Officers.
3. Navy and RAF personnel.
4. Soldiers under 20 years of age and over 40 years of age.
5. Soldiers who fought in other conflicts aside from OEF and OIF.
6. Soldiers who were not deployed during their military careers.

It would also be valuable to conduct comparison studies between the following demographic groups:

1. Medically discharged, redundant, resigned, and retired soldiers.
2. Single, partnered, married and parent transitioners and the roles of partners and family in transition.
3. British national and Commonwealth soldiers and notions of 'home' and 'belonging' in transition.
4. Regular soldiers and reservists in transition.

Finally, as I am yet to find any military scholarship that explicitly acknowledges the determination of transitioners, the subject of determination could be more thoroughly investigated – both qualitatively and quantitatively - to understand how it impacts upon military transition.

5.4 Critical evaluation

To my knowledge, this study is the only research inquiry into military to civilian transition that uses a hermeneutic phenomenological method for data collection and analysis, and I am the first existential-phenomenological psychotherapist to research the subject. As such, this research is unique in the insights it offers on military transition and the connections it makes to existential theory. This study coins the term 'transitioner', which was necessary as transitioners no longer identified as soldiers and did not believe they would ever become civilians. The term alludes to the ongoing process of transition and, therefore, informs practitioners about the continuing contention with uncertainty and alienation in military transition, having been exiled from the military.

Uncertainty as a concept is rarely alluded to in military scholarship and mentioned explicitly in two papers that I have found, one of which was written in 1967 (McNeil & Giffen). There is no mention of existential uncertainty in current military transition literature, neither are the concepts of exile from the military nor the legacy of military determination. Therefore, a strength of my

study is that it produced novel and revealing information about military to civilian transition from an existential perspective that can be made use of by clinicians, service commissioners, transitioners and civilians to the benefit of transitioners and those around them.

My findings were limited by my use of the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation (Stoll) in the recruitment of five of my participants. These individuals required the support of a veterans' housing association and were struggling in transition. However, these limitations are balanced by the fact that having the support of Stoll allowed me access to participants who would otherwise have been reluctant to be interviewed. Two hesitant participants only consented to be interviewed by me after I was vouched for by Stoll support workers who knew and trusted my integrity as a researcher. Without Stoll's support these transitioners might not have been accounted for. The limitations of the use of the narrow Stoll demographic was further counterbalanced by my use of other recruitment channels. As a result, the other three participants had not accessed the support of a veterans' service nor felt the need to, broadening the sample of participants in terms of support needs.

Conducting the interviews on site at Stoll may have contributed to an unduly formal or official atmosphere and impacted on how open participants felt to disclose certain details about their transitions. However, being in a professional environment and in a private room with staff nearby helped the

more anxious participants feel safer knowing that trusted support was available in the building, which improved the quality of the interviews.

There were occasions where I could have asked more in-depth questions about a subject, believing that doing so would have provided valuable information about military transition, but I chose not to due to concerns of the participant's wellbeing. To this extent, interviewing transitioners with ongoing issues relating to their transitions restricted how much we could ethically explore these experiences together. However, these occasions were rare and without incident, and having the flexibility to restrict my questioning to allow for this sensitivity was a strength of conducting unstructured interviews.

Another limitation was that most of the participants were a self-selecting group and may not have volunteered for the study had they not felt that they had something to say on the subject of military to civilian transition. However, in Rob and John's case they were asked to participate in my research through trusted contacts and were both quoted in their interviews stating that they would not have thought to discuss their transitions with anyone had I not met and interviewed them.

I remain relatively inexperienced at engaging phenomenological analysis. This research has taught me much about staying close to – and not 'butchering' - the phenomenon. I learned how important it was to be responsive to and do justice to the lived experience. I learned also about the challenges of being a

‘researcher-as-author’ as recommended by van Manen, aiming for concrete but evocative description. I believe I was somewhat successful here but could have done more to engage a poetic and metaphoric sensibility as fitting my hermeneutic approach. In the end, the analysis remains tentative, emergent and incomplete (Finlay, 2011). I hope I will continue to develop and hone my writings.

My background in existential phenomenological psychotherapy facilitated my analysis and deepened the recognition of the role played by existential issues. This enabled me to go beyond dry thematic analysis towards a more holistic approach. However, I acknowledge that much more could be done to engage empathically and to appreciate embodied lifeworld dimensions more fully. As Merleau-Ponty (1962) teaches us, human language is profoundly carnal, embodied in our sense of each other and the world. It is also constituted as much by silence as it is by words, with much meaning arising from wordless participations within a sensuous world (Finlay, 2011). As van Manen (1990, p. 112) notes, ‘deep truth…lies just beyond the words, on the other side of language.’ In the future, I would like to do more with my phenomenology to capture these deeper, more implicit realms.

I believe my findings accessibly present relatable and insightful aspects of military-to-civilian transition. The temporal structure of my findings, with transitioners looking back to their military past in exile, feeling alienated in their civilian present and looking ahead to an uncertain future in their

determination, is a useful framework within which military transition can be understood. This enhances the key point in my Discussion that transition is an ongoing process and I have shown how this perspective, when worked on in existential psychotherapy can play a vital role in destigmatising and validating the challenges in transition.

The iterative process of writing and re-writing my themes eventually bore fruit. I am grateful for the flexibility that hermeneutic phenomenology offered me as a researcher, but it took me many attempts to inject some soul into my writing. My first attempts were more anaemic, clinical pieces of writing that offered a general and distant sense of the experience of transition but not the blood and guts of it. By writing, re-writing and reforming my themes, I became more practiced in the art of hermeneutic writing and was gradually able to write my experiences more into the themes. By feeling more connection to my writing, I feel I offer a chance for the reader to connect more to the subject in turn. With more attempts at re-writing I am sure I could get closer still to the experience of transition and I hope to when I write articles on this subject in the future.

If I could conduct this research again, I would approach my method differently most significantly by starting the recruiting of participants far earlier in the process. This was a problematic and slow process, taking me 18 months to recruit the 8 participants. Two main factors hampered recruitment. Firstly, my cohort showed a strong aversion to being subjects of research, which meant

participants were not forthcoming. Secondly participants cancelled on the day or did not turn up on three separate occasions, meaning that I recruited 11 participants in total but only managed to interview 8.

Regarding participant aversion, one anonymous reply to an advertisement posted by a veterans' support service professional on my behalf shows the beliefs that some of my cohort felt about academic research and the subject of transition:

> I don't know of anyone who has left recently I know personally who would be willing to participate. I wouldn't. I am sure Ali has the best intentions, but my personal opinion is that too much attention is focussed on this subject. The Army provides an excellent resettlement package which I went through. The support given in re-training and adjusting to civilian life is top notch, however it is up to the soldier to exploit it which some don't to their advantage. This sort of thing has attracted the odd disgruntled soldier in the past who thinks the world owes them a living because they have fired a few shots and makes the headlines. Most soldiers come back from operations a different person. Most firemen come back from their first fire a different person. Sorry to be so cynical but at the end of the day it's a job and when it's over move on. Why the big deal? (Anonymous, 2014)

Further to this cynicism and feeling an over-researched group, there was one member of the veterans' community who felt 'compelled' to contact my ethics

panel to raise awareness about my ‘alarming in the extreme’ approach to research following my advertising for participants on a LinkedIn veterans’ discussion group. He questioned whether I was a genuine researcher and the ethics, safety and clinical governance of my research, being concerned about me acting as a lone researcher, finding me lacking in transparency and voicing his ‘primary fear’ that:

> …these interview sessions will rapidly turn into ad hoc therapy sessions without adequate support for the interviewee, and as such I feel that approach is a clear case of the commodotization of veterans, which I must protest at (Anonymous, 2014).

Conversely one ex-serviceperson and fellow student researching into transition who also ran groups for transitioning soldiers contacted me in support of my research subject and offered his personal assumption about civilians and how this affected his ongoing transition:

> I do not accept the essence of civilians…they look after themselves before looking after others (to the extent at times those civilians who look after others first are seen as being 'odd', after something or have an external locus of evaluation). The military essence is based on selflessness…I do not look after me I look after my mate next to me…and he looks after the person next to him and eventually someone looks after me…that is the way of it. On coming to civilian culture the selfless person is isolated and is used by those who want to utilise the selflessness for their own

> benefits…the veteran will do this as a matter of course…it is normal…the isolation comes from when they are in distress no one wants to know…it is at this time that this isolationary practice reminds Veterans of the Brotherhood that they feel they have lost (Anonymous, 2014).

While this served as validation for much of my Findings and provided valuable insight from an ex-serviceperson's perspective who had experience of supporting other veterans in transition, it also highlighted how wary transitioners are of civilians. It also shows how vital trust and ethics are to the research process.

As a civilian researcher it might have been a much quicker recruitment process if I had focussed my attention on recruiting through the professional contacts I established through Stoll, who acted as a mediator for the participants they found for me, making participants more accepting of me as a civilian researcher. It should be noted, however, that one of my participants was motivated to contact me in response to seeing the aforementioned challenge to my research on the LinkedIn discussion group who wanted to present a counter-position to the fears the complainant stated, and his interview provided rich and valuable data, so there were positive aspects to this issue.

In terms of method, I progressed through my research chronologically, meaning that I did not begin analysing my interviews until I had interviewed all 8 participants. This had some costs and some benefits. The main cost was that,

because of my long recruitment phase, my progress was significantly delayed. However, by withholding from analysing until I had finished all my interviews, I protected myself from thinking too analytically in my later interviews. Had I started analysing before I had finished interviewing, I would have raised the likelihood of asking questions according to my emerging themes, rather than remaining more open to new themes in the later interviews.

A better compromise may have been to start the analysis after 4 interviews, as I was aware of the themes that had surfaced in my Pilot study and, even though I had not started formal analysis, I had an awareness that certain themes kept resurfacing in the early interviews and continued to in later ones. This would have made for a more efficient process.

It also would have led to me writing up my findings earlier, which would have helped, as this writing process guided me to my conclusions about military transition more than any other aspect of this thesis and I would have had a better grasp of the subject sooner into my thesis. For example, it was only as I was completing my Findings chapter that I realised all the transitioners were in grief in their exile. This understanding helped me to revisit my Literature Review and further consolidated my understanding of military transition and the key subjects that I wanted to depict in my research. Analysing sooner would have provided me with better clarity about transition sooner.

With regards to practical considerations, it would have been useful to formally record more demographic information about participants to allow for a better analysis of how these factors affected the findings. For example, it would have been useful to have recorded the military unit and role of each participant. My choice not to ask these at the start of the study was based on my belief that asking about military role might lead to an over-emphasis on their military careers rather than their transitions since exiting the Army. While this information emerged informally in every interview, I could instead have confirmed such information at the end of each interview.

Theoretically I would have liked to have more deeply explored the philosophy of some of the concepts in transition, most notably the Heideggarian *'Unheimlichgeit'* or uncanniness that is present in the ineffective determination, the unexpected alienation and ambivalent exile in transition.

Finally, it is worth noting that most participants stated that they found the interviews to be valuable experiences in themselves as an opportunity to process their transitions and have them validated by me hearing their accounts.

> Max: It's kind of nice in a way just to, 'cause like, you don't really talk about it with anyone. The sort of processing of feelings and it's, I suppose a bit like, they say when people get back from Afghan it's always the married ones who struggle the most because they go home and their partner doesn't want to hear about all the harrowing experiences, umm,

> and it's, you know, the people who cope best with it are the guys who are in the block and they can sit with their mates and talk about what happened. I think it's a bit like that in the sense that, you know, once you leave, no-one really wants to talk about what you struggled with leaving the Army. So it actually feels, it's kind of nice to, just to verbalise it and I suppose it puts a few things in perspective because I think by talking about it you kind of organise your own head as well.

This is a testament to the value of my research subject and the validity of my findings, with the transitioners being surprised that someone would take an interest in their transitions and realising that there was some worth in describing their lived experience of transition.

Such feedback also speaks to the nature of the relationship I developed with each participant, eased in part by my therapeutic presence and skills. While I was a researcher and not a therapist during the interviews, I remain a skilled and empathetic listener. My responsive way of being undoubtedly impacted positively on the extent that participants were forthcoming.

To conclude, research can be evaluated in terms of what Finlay and Evans (2009) call the 4 R's: *Rigour, Relevance, Resonance* and the extent that *Reflexivity* is demonstrated.

Rigour evaluates the extent the research been competently managed and systematically worked through. In this study, while my use of van Manen's (1990) HP could have been deepened, I gathered my evidence in the form of quotations and reflexive accounts, opening myself to external audit. In this I hope I have shown my interpretations are both plausible and justified.

I believe I have demonstrated the relevance of my topic to psychotherapy and how it contributes to practical application. The deep existential discussion of transitioning also has the potential to be of interest to psychotherapists.

Resonance pertains to emotional and artistic dimensions. I have tried to present findings in a textured way, and I believe the selected quotations carry their own power and poignancy from interviews that the participants found validating of their transition experiences.

Finally, reflexivity considers researcher's self-awareness and openness about the research process. I have endeavoured to offer an account of my own subjectivity and positioning and considered the possible impact of these on my research and offer further discussion of reflexivity in the next and final section.

5.8 Deeper Reflexive Discussion

My personal influence on this research has been constant, from the choice of subject and my way of reviewing the literature to the data analysis, writing process and findings. This section attempts to highlight my influence transparently. To this end, I provide further detail about my relationship with the research question, how this relationship drew my attention, when I noticed my influence becoming particularly prominent, how I managed this and what I learned about myself and military transition in the process of writing this research. Finally, I discuss if I expected the Findings that I presented and what that might reveal about transition as a subject of scholarship.

Building on the motivations for choosing my research question as stated in my Introduction, I wanted my research to be military in focus because I was ignorant about military life and wanted to learn more about the people living it. After heated discussions with my military friends, I had initially wanted to research what might motivate someone to join an organisation whose primary function was war fighting. However, given the climate of military redundancies and recent returning of my friends from war, it became more relevant to me to understand military to civilian transition than anything specifically pertaining to fighting and killing.

When I started researching the literature on military transition, I had a huge pool of materials to review. As a psychotherapist researching into experiences of transition, it was the literature that offered some insight into the lives of

soldiers and transitioners that most caught my attention and provided me with the 'addressive moments' I went onto describe in my Methodology.

Methodologically, HP analysis is inherently reflexive, as Langdridge says:

> There is a deliberate move away from a mechanical application of coding to discern meaning hermeneutically, recognizing the important role of the analyst in the co-construction of meaning (Langdridge, 2007, p. 123).

My horizon changed with each interview that I conducted, each article I read, along with the changes in the world and my personal life that have happened across the course of the project. Higate and Cameron (2006) call for more reflexivity in military research to best ensure a transparent research process and advocates for the use of 'fieldwork diaries' for this reason. Initially I kept a research journal, which I added entries to before and after each interview and whenever I felt that my mood or thinking might particularly influence my reading, writing or talking in my research. However, on revisiting journal entries, I found them unhelpful in revealing how I personally influenced the research direction. Instead, there were moments in analysing the interview transcripts that were much clearer in exposing when I seized upon a theme, missed the significance of a statement, misinterpreted and misunderstood what was being said, which changed the direction of the interviews.

There were occasions where I felt an interviewee alluding to an emerging theme and I introduced the theme term in a way that sounded scholarly, disrupting the flow of the interview:

> Me: So it sounds like, like identity is like a big thing throughout all of this for you.
>
> Luke: Yeah. Well, whatever word you use for it! *laughs* It is, it is.
>
> Me: Yeah. Well is there a word you'd use for it?
>
> Luke: Well, I would say identity. I don't know whatever big words or similar you want to use.

If I had invited my interviewees to elaborate in such instances, I may have discovered that they were alluding to something else entirely to what I was anticipating. The above excerpt is likely an example of an interviewee complying with me, telling me what I wanted to hear rather than what he would have expressed had I not suggested that this was a matter of identity. Here we can see how my influence sometimes stifled descriptions of transition, impoverishing my findings in the process.

However, there were certain that I do not regret having introduced a term because, when they captured what was being articulated, the transitioners seized upon them and this contributed to the flow and feeling of mutual

understanding in the interviews as the following example shows regarding belonging:

> Luke: I felt like I've been cut away from the world you know.
>
> Me: Like you don't belong?
>
> Luke: Like I don't belong anymore, that's it!

In some moments where my introduction of a term did not chime with a interviewee, I recognised this and rephrased my question, or invited the them to educate me as to where I had misunderstood them, as the following excerpt shows:

> Me: Any choices that particularly stick out for you that you made?
>
> Pete: The choice that I had to start studying now. Because if you go out there, you're going to find it very difficult if you just sit down. You have to do something. What job are you going to do?
>
> Me: So taking the choice to be responsible, that responsibility to yourself?
>
> Pete: …was, yeah. I would say…Yeah.
>
> Me: And once you made that decision a lot of the weight lifted did it? Is that what you're saying, that you… 'cause you felt this pressure by the sounds of things to, "What am I going to do when I get out to the real world?"

> Pete: It does. The pressure I would say that. It…it's a very difficult thing. I mean…
>
> Me: You know, you had that year where you were running as fast as you could to read everything.
>
> Pete: Yeah. I would say that I was reading everything, but I was reminding myself of the words that I can be able to read, write, be able to describe something or discuss something with the right people. As in, I may not be good, as in when you're talking to me you can understand what me but I also questioned myself, "How am I going to present myself out of the society or to the…to somebody who doesn't understand my way of thinking or how I do things because…"
>
> Me: So, sorry to interrupt but I guess you're saying that in the 'real world' as we're calling it, people think differently or talk differently or perceive differently? Is that what it felt like when you were in the military?
>
> Pete: I would say, I would think it like that when I'm in the military because in the military you're family and regardless of what colour if anything happens, this person will come to you.

There were other occasions where I consciously redirected the conversation or chose not to enquire further into the subject discussed out of concern for the wellbeing of the participants. While I cannot know what would have emerged had I delved deeper in these moments, they happened when individuals were becoming hopeless, despairing and dejected in their descriptions of their transition and, while these concepts could have been valuable to explore further, I felt it was more important to keep the interviews emotionally safe

for the participants. In these instances, I was keen to stress the available ongoing support that I had included as part of my debriefing information after the interviews.

I also challenged certain positions that the participants took when I felt that they were being hard on themselves and that my challenge could both reveal more about their self-critical mindset as well as helping them to reconsider these attitudes, as I did in Jack's interview when he told me that he felt weak for needing the help of a support service in transition:

> Jack: I felt it like weakness you know? So…
>
> Me: What do you mean weakness? Like why is this weak?
>
> Jack: Pff umm, that's like saying, we're about to do a six-mile run and you're about to come in and say, 'Ah well I'm not… I've got a toothache.' You can't run. That would… in the Army that would come across like weakness.
>
> Me: So that was in the Army so any, anything from a toothache, I mean…
>
> Jack: Yeah or let's just say you got a headache, 'Man! Crack on! Do your job!'
>
> Me: And is that what this feels like as well?
>
> Jack: Yeah. Like, well it did because now I'm here now you know. I missed like two or three appointments, can't remember at first. But…

> Me: But, what are you saying you missed those appointments because you didn't want to believe that there was something you needed or something like that?
>
> Jack: Yeah. 'Cause like I… it seemed like weakness but like, you know?
>
> Me: So that sounds like it's something that's starting to change?
>
> Jack: Yeah.
>
> Me: That maybe, I mean it sounds like you still feel like it's weakness but maybe not as weak?
>
> Jack: Ye…ah because I, I, I want… I want to be fixed, you know?

My line of questioning shows that I inadvertently had an agenda to get Jack to rethink whether help-seeking is weak. Therefore, I did not use this excerpt in my analysis because I felt I had influenced the dialogue too much and not facilitated Jack in describing his sense of 'weakness'.

It is clear that I was involved in the co-production of these findings. Another researcher may well have elicited different stories (Finlay, 2011). The stories that were told to me came about through our specific relationship aided by my personal concern and responsiveness. Further analysis of this intersubjectivity could enrich the research.

In the process of reflecting, I have been able to consider how conducting this research changed my perspective on military and ex-military personnel. I am

no longer so curious about individual motivations for joining a war-fighting organisation and instead have a greater appreciation for the ethos of the Army, the camaraderie it instils among its personnel as well as how much military culture stigmatises mental health. This meant that every participant was noticeably unfamiliar with mental health discourse and is why I felt more justified in employing hermeneutics to interpret the meanings beyond what was being said to me.

I had not expected every transitioner to feel that their transitions were ongoing, for every transitioner to find their transitions hard and for every transitioner to be in grief over their former military lives regardless of their reasons for leaving. It surprised me that in a group of transitioners who had a range of different transition experiences, the themes in my findings appeared universal. Now as I come to the end of my thesis, I can state that I understand transitioners better because I understand some common themes of transition. I also have a greater appreciation for how challenging transition is and how vital the development of support for transitioners continues to be.

I am grateful to my inspirational participants for providing the humanity in transition that I sought in this research. I hope it inspires others to welcome transitioners and help them find their way.

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7. Appendices

I. Ethical approval

Alistair Ross
21A Brading Road,
Brixton,
London,
SW2 2AP

4th April 2013

Dear Alistair

Re: Ethics Approval

We held an Ethics Board on 20th March 2013 and the following decisions were made.

Ethics Approval
Your application was approved via Chair's action and confirmed at the board.

Please note that it is a condition of this ethics approval that recruitment, interviewing, or other contact with research participants only takes place when you are enrolled in a research supervision module.

Yours sincerely

Prof Digby Tantam
Chair Ethics Committee
NSPC

II. Call for participants

NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

"What is it like for Ex-Servicemen to Return to Civilian Life?"

Are you male between 20-40 years old?

Were you a NCO or OR in the British Army and have left within the last 10 years?

Would you like to participate in a research project?

- The project is studying the experiences of ex-servicemen on their return to civilian life.
- Your views and opinions about this transition can help psychotherapists and veteran's services provide better services for returning soldiers in the future.
- This project is being undertaken by myself, Alistair (Ali) Ross, as part of my Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling under supervision.
- This project is undertaken with the approval of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling's Ethics Committee.

What will happen in the interview?

- Participation in this study will involve agreeing to be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation on a date and time of your convenience.
- The interview will consist of a series of broad questions to get a better understanding of your transition experiences.
- Your interview will be recorded on an audio digital recorder.
- Talking about your transition experience can provoke uncomfortable or distressing feelings. Your wellbeing is paramount so if at any point this becomes too uncomfortable we can stop the interview and your data will not be used.

- Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.
- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide you no longer want to take part you may withdraw at any time without needing to give a reason.

Confidentiality

Everything you say during the interview will be treated as confidential. The only exceptions to this are in the following circumstances when concerns for safety mean our confidentiality would need to be shared with an appropriate third party:

- If I believe your or another person's life is in immediate risk of harm.
- If there are serious child protection concerns.
- If you provide information that associates you with terrorist activities.

Wherever possible I will always talk to you first and involve you in the decision to break confidentiality.

What if I need help after the interview?

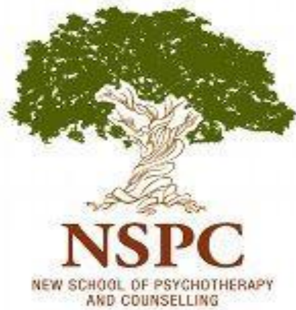
If, following our interview, you would like to access any support services please do ask me. I will also provide you with a list of some relevant services for your consideration.

Any travel expenses to and from the location of the interview will also be reimbursed.
If you have any further queries or concerns regarding your participation in this study please feel welcome to contact me:

Ali Ross
NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT
Mobile Telephone: 07769 156 614
E-mail: ali.ross@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this and for considering taking part. This research project is completely independent from the London Veterans' Assessment and Treatment Service (LVS). In no way will choosing to participate or not participate in the research affect your assessment or treatment at the LVS.

III. Participants' Information Sheet



NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Date: 27th April 2015

Research Participant Information Sheet

"A Phenomenological Exploration of the Transition by Ex-Army Servicemen Between 20-40 Years Old Returning to Civilian Life."

Would you like to participate in this research project?

Before you decide, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully, and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take your time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of this research?

The project is studying the experiences of ex-servicemen on their return to civilian life.

I hope to use your views and opinions about this transition to help psychotherapists and veteran's services provide better services for returning soldiers in the future.

This project is being undertaken by myself, Alistair (Ali) Ross, as part of my Doctorate in Existential Psychotherapy and Counselling at the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling, under the supervision of Werner Kierski and Chloe Paidoussis.

What will happen in the interview?

- Participation in this study will involve agreeing to be interviewed for approximately 60 minutes at the Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation on a date and time of your convenience.
- The interview will consist of a series of broad questions to get a better understanding of your transition experiences.
- Your interview will be recorded on an audio digital recorder.
- Talking about your transition experience can provoke uncomfortable or distressing feelings. Your wellbeing is paramount so if at any point this becomes too uncomfortable we can stop the interview and your data will not be used.

How will the information be used?

- During the research process I will use a qualitative method to analyse your interview. I will then combine this data with the data from the other participant's interviews to draw out any themes of your experiences.
- Audio recordings will be encrypted and stored in a password protected computer. Files from the recorder will then be deleted. I will transcribe the interview and label it with a pseudonym when it is stored on the password protected computer.
- Your consent form will be kept in a file identified with a project code and stored in a locked container accessible only to me.
- The recording, transcript and consent form will be kept six months after graduation and will be treated as confidential. When the research is published I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used. Excerpts from your data may be published verbatim but these will be anonymised.
- Data will be stored according to the Data Protection Act and the Freedom of Information Act.
- Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you decide you no longer want to take part you may withdraw at any time without needing to give a reason.
- You will be provided with a copy of this information sheet for your personal records and, if you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign the attached consent form before the study begins.
- This project is undertaken with the approval of the New School of Psychotherapy and Counselling's Ethics Committee.

Confidentiality

Everything you say during the interview will be treated as confidential. The only exceptions to this are in the following circumstances when concerns for safety mean our confidentiality would need to be shared with an appropriate third party:

- If I believe your or another person's life is in immediate risk of harm.
- If there are serious child protection concerns.
- If you provide information that associates you with terrorist activities.

Wherever possible I will always talk to you first and involve you in the decision to break confidentiality.

What if I need help after the interview?

If, following our interview, you would like to access any support services please do ask me. I will also provide you with a list of some relevant services for your consideration.

Any travel expenses to and from the location of the interview will also be reimbursed.

If you have any further queries or concerns regarding your participation in this study please do not hesitate to contact me:

Ali Ross

NSPC Ltd

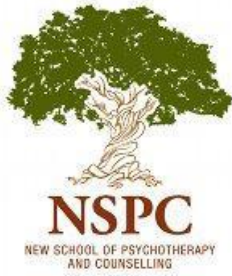
258 Belsize Road

London NW6 4BT

Mobile Telephone: 07769 156 614
E-mail: ali.ross@yahoo.co.uk

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for considering taking part.

IV. Consent Form



NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Date: 27th April 2015

Written Informed Consent

"A Phenomenological Exploration of the Transition by Ex-Army Servicemen Between 20-40 Years Old Returning to Civilian Life."

Researcher: Alistair Ross

Supervisor (1st): Werner Kierski
Supervisor (2nd): Chloë Paidoussis

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

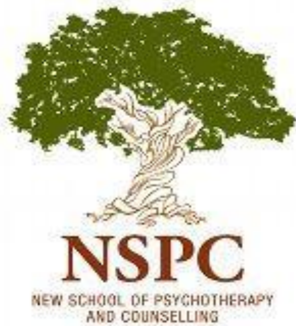
I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication and provide my consent that this might occur.

Print name: ________________________________ Sign name: __________________________________

Date: _____________________________________

To the participants: Data may be inspected by the chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits: ____________

V. Debriefing Letter



NSPC Ltd
258 Belsize Road
London NW6 4BT

Middlesex University
The Burroughs
London NW4 4BT

Date: 27th April 2015

Debriefing Letter

"A Phenomenological Exploration of the Transition by Ex-Army Servicemen Between 20-40 Years Old Returning to Civilian Life."

Thank you for taking the time for this interview with me today. Your efforts are very much appreciated and make a valuable contribution in providing psychotherapy and veterans services with a better understanding of what it is like for servicemen to return to civilian life.

Should you have any concerns following this interview and you would like to access any of the resources I have informed you about please do ask me or alternatively speak to your GP for further advice and support.

Your information will now be kept until publication of the research and will remain confidential. When the research is published I will make sure that neither your name nor other identifying details are used.

If you have any further questions please do not hesitate to contact me at the NSPC Ltd postal address above or email me: ali.ross@yahoo.co.uk and if you have any concerns about the conduct of this study you may contact my supervisor Werner Kierski at the same NSPC Ltd postal address.

Kind regards,

Ali Ross

VI. Resources Sheet

Ex-services Support

Civvy Street

For serving and former members of the UK Armed Services and their dependants. It offers free information and advice about resettlement into civilian life, learning and work.

Web: http://www.civvystreet.org/

Tel: 0800 678 5848

COBSEO

The Confederation of Services Charities. Acts as a single point of contact for all enquiries from the Armed Forces community.

Web: http://www.cobseo.org.uk/

Tel : 0845 504 6630

Combat Stress

Works with Veterans of the British Armed Forces, and members of the Reserve Forces, through effective treatment and support for mental health problems.

Web: http://www.combatstress.org.uk/

24 Hour Helpline: 0800 138 1619

7385 2110

Longboat Home

Reduced-cost psychotherapy and counselling for ex-services men and women across the UK.

http://www.thelongboathome.co.uk/

Peace of Mind Project

Meditation groups for veterans.

http://www.londonmeditationproject.org/veterans/index.php

Royal British Legion

Practical, emotional and financial support to all members of the British Armed Forces past and present, and their families.

Web: http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/

Tel: 08457 725 725

SSAFA

Forces Help provides financial, practical and emotional assistance to anyone that is currently serving or has ever served in the Army, Navy or RAF, and their families.

Web: http://www.ssafa.org.uk/

Tel: 020 7403 8783

Stoll

Sir Oswald Stoll Foundation. Housing and support services for ex-service men and women.

Web: http://www.oswaldstoll.org.uk/

Tel: 020

Veterans Aid

Veterans Aid exists to help you if you are in crisis, homeless or likely to become homeless.

Web: http://www.veterans-aid.net

Tel: 0800 012 68 67

Warrior Programme

Taught programme to help with confidence and self-esteem on leaving the armed services.

http://www.warriorprogramme.org.uk

National Counselling/Psychotherapy Services

BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy)

Accrediting body for counsellors and psychotherapists in the UK. Searchable database to find a counsellor by postcode or town/region.

Website**:** http://www.bacp.co.uk/

Tel: 0870 443 5252

The Counselling Directory

Searchable online database of counsellors.

http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/

Mind

Mental health charity offering people access emotional and practical support UK wide.

Web: http://www.mind.org.uk/

InfoLine: 0300 123 3393

Samaritans

Crisis support for anyone in emotional distress or thinking about suicide. Support by telephone, face-to-face at many branches, e-mail or letter.

Web: http://www.samaritans.org/

Tel: 08457 90 90 90

UKCP

Membership organisation for psychotherapists. Information about psychotherapy and searchable database to find a counsellor by postcode or town/region.

Web: http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/

Tel: 020 7014 9955

VII. Sample Transcript

Okay hi C, I'm Ali. Just to go through the formalities

Yep

I've given you the consent form

Yep

And you've seen in information sheet and everything's…

Yep, happy with that yep.

Good stuff.

Okay.

Alright so, as you've seen, what I'm doing here is just trying to find out what, what people's transition's like after they've left the Army.

Ummhmm. 20secs.

It's as open as that. It doesn't go anywhere further than that. It's just to find out what it's been like. Umm… I don't need to hear anything in particular about anything that's happened. It's just whatever occurs to you and we'll just free-flow from there.

Yep.

So, yeah. Where, where would you start if you were to describe it?

Umm… well I guess it's… Umm… it's kind of, well I suppose I'd probably start towards the middle of my tour. Umm… that's kind of when I decided I wanted to get out.

Yeah.

And, because I joined at sixteen, 'cause I had family issues and stuff and I was just looking to get away from it and it was kind of, it was never a nat… not necessarily a natural career choice for me. I came from like, a good middle-class school. All this sort of stuff.

Yeah.

And umm… I went in as an Other Rank which is not traditionally the kind of career path that most people from my uh background come from.

Mmm

But yeah, so, middle of my tour I kind of decided I'd had enough. Umm… I was about three and a half years into it umm… um no, in fact it wouldn't have even been that long I wa… ju… actually it was just before my sign off window started, which is obviously a year.

Mmm

And so I sort of, uh, I knew I was looking to, uh, go back to university when I left so I was umm, I was sort of trying to get in contact with my RCMO, who's a career manager, um in the UK, getting the

okay that, you know, when…if I signed off, umm they would make sure that, you know, it was all processed so I could be out for that date to start my course etcetera.

Mmm

Umm so when I got back to the UK I signed off, did my seven quicks?! Umm, unfortunately I… a lot of my umm career profile stuff was very good and I don't think they really wanted to lose me. Umm so actually they cancelled my sign of notice *laughs disparagingly*

Right

And didn't tell me. Umm and then…

What was that like?

Well that was pretty shit. 'Cause actually I didn't find out until about four months down the line.

Huh

'Cause I was literally just having the conversation with my chief clerk umm about somet… which was one of those…. I saw him in the hall and we were talking about something and he… and I sort of mentioned that we need to start doing something and he said, "Oh, you're not signed off are you?" and then he went and checked and it had been cancelled.

Wow

Umm, my troop commander had been there with me when I'd done it and of course that, like, so that *immediately* put a lot of stress on my situation actually. Because umm, you know, by this time the year, a year from four months after I'd signed off was, I think it was maybe… January would have been my official end date.

Yeah

Which of course wouldn't have allowed me to go to my course. And it would have left me, would… if… it would have… the worst, 'cause you know I could go to when I wanted to go to university and it left me with eight months with, you know, nothing to do.

Mmm.

And umm, yeah. Not really much potential to get a job if planning to… *laughs* in a few months.

Yeah, for sure.

Umm, so, umm I kind of went and spoke to him and I asked him, I said, "What's going on? *laughing* Where was my…." And he sort of told me I wasn't eligible to leave, umm, which is actually not true.

Mmm

Umm, but after a lot of fighting I managed to get my notice put in *chuckles*. Umm, and then I had to go through the, sort of, the process of, to apply for shortened leave, um for the next period, umm, which was, you know, I had to have, I had go up to the chief of general… well maybe not the chief of general staff, but it had to go to someone ridiculously high.

Yeah *raising tone of almost disbelief mirroring absurdity of the situation*

Who I'd never met and it kind of, I only found out actually that I was eligible to leave three months before the course started.

Mmhmm.

Umm, and so it was kind of a bit like, I think what I was doing, I was very uncertain what was going to happen for a very long time. Obviously I still had to do everything as if I was going to leave but then, umm, but with the potential of not being able to leave, but actually it kind of um, yeah it… I think the only reason it came out was, I found out I was getting this sort of, I was going to be released.

Yeah

Umm, the day the announced the second wave of redundancies. I think that actually, you know, played into my hand a bit.

Yeah

And they figured, "Well if we've got to cut loads of jobs we're not going to hold onto him for six months."

Mmm

Umm, just so yeah, then I came to leave and I left on 30th September I think. I started at the University of Loughborough in October or something like that. So stuff in the car, straight to my new digs.

Mmm

University. Umm, which was, and it's kind of… It was weird. I didn't really get a lot of umm, you know, of time to acclimatise to it. You know the change that was going to happen because it was very much, "You're going now. You've got to fit a year's worth of admin into three months. Go!"

Yeah

And the just literally it's the biggest anti-climax when you leave. You kind of, you're told, you build up to it for ages and it's like, "Oh, bye then." *Chuckling* You know…

Yeeah

And it's kind of, it's a very, it's very much a non-event when it comes to it but then you sort of umm yeah then you sort of like… You get to university and all of a sudden, or into the real world or whatever you do and it's like, just a world of difference. So… and I think I was still getting up at like seven in the morning going for runs for about two and a half months! *chuckles*

Yeah.

Just 'cause it's like, it's just such a stark… I mean, reality/ lifestyle change.

Well it sounds like it was important for you to keep something.

Yeah, yeah.

To keep that seven AM start.

Yeah, yeah. I think it was just trying to… 'cause especially… maybe if you'd going into training to do a job maybe it would have been a little bit different 'cause you still have some structure but to go straight to… back to university is so unstructured it kind of blew my mind for a long time. Like just

to… 'cause you know the army was all I'd ever known. I'd been doing it since I was sixteen. And actually sort of, like, it sounds silly but, finding out how to live day-to-day when, when you are not being told what to do is kind of like a strange thing to do if all you've ever done is…

Well, I mean that's a big part of what this whole piece of research is about.

Mmm.

Not, you know, to me it doesn't sound silly at all. Particularly if you go from the kind of contrast of the army with the structure it has.

Yeah.

To university with the well documented lack of structure!

Laughs Exactly.

Umm, that is a *big* contrast.

Yeah, yeah.

Umm and yeah, struggling with structure, struggling with all that re-acclimatisation.

Mmm.

And like you said, there can be this feeling of it being a non-event when you leave.

Yeah, 'cause it's just… you kind of expect… well something. I dunno, I dunno what I would expect. I don't think for the day I expected a definite thing but you kind of expect it to be, you know, something to happen. But actually you've kind of, you leave like it's a Friday and then you just never go back.

So you would have liked some sort of recognition.

Yeah, or even some sort of like, umm, draw down would have been good. 'Cause you kind of go from doing, like, exactly what you would have been doing on any day regardless if you were leaving or not to like the next day it's just gone. And it kind of like maybe would have felt like a more sort of gradual process if you kind of had been, you know, winding down. 'Cause obviously what you do in the military is like so different to a job.

Mmm.

You know, when you're leaving is there any need for you to be going on two runs a day? And things like that. Or, I mean, they still had me doing like training exercises and stuff and I'd just come back from Afghan so I mean first of all I'm not sure it was that appropriate anyway *laughing* but like, you've just come back from Afghan and you're still going out into the woods and doing Cold War fighting stuff and you're thinking, 'Well… I'm gone next week. Why do I, why do I care? I'm not deploying anywhere'.

Yeah.

And it kind of, so like, that makes the contrast really big. Because there's no… like when you're in work there's no recognition that you're leaving really.

Mmm.

Like people obviously they know you're going but there's no real reflection of that. Whereas like, then maybe in a civilian workplace, like you're in an office, you wouldn't… they wouldn't expect you to be doing like work on some big client one day and just go the next day. It kind of… to have a draw down in what you do and you kind of do things like handing over and…

Yeah there's more of a…

… A sort of step back from the coal face sort of thing I think.

Mmmhmm.

But there isn't any of that at all I think. It's just…

Well so for you, you literally came back and you had a week having come back from Afghan…

Umm, I had a few… I had a few months after coming back from Afghan but like, as in, we'd just come back from Afghan in the April.

Mmhmm.

Umm and so obviously I left in September. Umm but then there's about two and a half months of leave and stuff so you sort of just come back to work. That's when I just about found out I had, I was leaving. And so you do all your paperwork and all that time you're kind of still doing… they're bringing things back up to doing training exercises, doing all the marches, doing runs. So you've got a few months to sort of get back into a habit that you then have to get back out of.

You didn't want to get back into that.

Yeah, you didn't really want to get back into it and you kind of… It's really difficult to motivate yourself to do something that you know's so pointless as well *laughing*. Because like, I can understand totally why you have to train if you've got to go to Afghan or… but you kind of, we knew… I mean, which again is also quite a bit frustrating I suppose when I wasn't sure that I was going to be let out, because I knew my regiment wasn't going to be going back to Afghan or going on any operational duties at all for another two years and so I was sort of sitting there thinking, 'What's the point'. Potentially they're keeping me in and they were causing a big stir and I think it was only because I had a really good sort of Squadron Command who was receptive to me, who liked me umm, who was able to fight it a bit higher up the chain umm that it actually happened. But it kind of felt like, if it hadn't been the case, if I hadn't bonded so well with my Troop Commander and stuff they would have potentially kept me in.

Mmm.

To train me to then kick me out! *laughs*

Yeah.

Umm and I guess that whole process seems a bit pointless in the sense that it's, yeah, you don't want to get back into a routine and be doing, you know, going on exercise sitting in the cold at four in the morning.

No.

When you know that you're like, you're leaving.

Putting that through all of that.

Yeah and it… and you can't… it's a sort of… it's a sort of job that you can't do it half arsed. And so if they obviously know you're going, like, if they start giving you work you kind of, not to be unprofessional, but you don't… you know what the sort of boundaries are and you go, 'I'm not going to stay, I'm not going to kick the arse out of it. I'll do what I need to do so they don't screw me over'. But you can't do that. I mean if it's like, 'Oh, the squadron's marching all day,' you can't walk, like, half the speed of anyone else. You've got to do it the same…

Yeah.

With the same input and sort of motivation.

Yep.

And that's really… I think that's, that tough. And like, I think lots of people find that they, umm, they sort of struggle when you know you're leaving and I think some of that potentially maybe is down to the notice period as well 'cause you kind of… it's… 'cause once you sign off obviously that's it. That's a line in the sand and you can't necessarily come back from that.

Mmm.

So by the time you get to that point where you're going, 'Oh I want to leave,' you're actually usually at a point where you've decided: this is not for you anymore. And so regardless of what… whether you've been to Afghan or you've, you know, just been in the UK or whatever, you've actually decided, 'I don't want to do this job anymore.' But then you've got to do it for a year. And no-one sort of tolerates half-arsedness for a year… for more than a few days I don't think.

Yeah.

Umm, and so, yeah it's very much a… just, 'Yep you carry on. We expect exactly the same of you as we've always expected and then this date, drive out the gate, never come back,' kind of thing.

Mmm.

Which, yeah, I think is where… what makes it more difficult in the sense that they could quite easily transfer you to… or have a, have a formal policy of… where you do, I don't know, do guard duty on camp gates. And I mean some, some sort of troops did that if there was capacity but it wasn't like a guaranteed thing at all.

Mmm.

But you know, sort of winding you down a bit so that you've got something that's a bit, umm, you know, less structured and less full on *smacks his hands* kind of thing, would be a much better way to do it in hindsight.

Well, you would have liked to have had a wind down period and actually you've, you were finding yourself getting wound up again for getting back into those habits.

Yeah.

Only to know that you're leaving anyway so there was that sense of pointlessness.

Yep.

And also by the sounds of things umm, you know you were really grateful of your umm superiors who were receptive to you.

Yeah.

But you were aware that you were in their hands really.

Oh yeah, totally. I mean, 'cause, I mean I don't know what's happening, 'cause I know there's been a few things about, like, they introduced more ombudsmen since I left and things. Umm but I think the reality is that as a sort of sapper/private kind of level, even as, like, up to a corporal, you've not really got a redress in the sense that, I mean I think I pray guilty of a dangerous game by sort marching right up to our RCMO's [Regimental Career Management Officer] office who's like a colonel or something ridiculous and having sort of quite frank conversations with him umm and didn't… and I think he was an alright bloke (even though he obviously screwed me over a few times *laughs*). But, like, I think it's very difficult because that sort of action can really go against you. If you're… I just knew if I… I knew that's what I wanted to do and I knew that I had to, you know, I would rather get them discipline me and have to fight that out for being, you know, overstepping my rank kind of thing.

Yeah.

Because I knew fundamentally that if I just sort of sat there and let it run away from me I'd regret that at some point. Umm, but you have almost no power really because you're talking about having con… like these decisions being made by a full colonels and above brigadiers and things. And actually as a private I mean you can't even speak to those people.

Mmm.

Let alone, you know, like be able to say, 'Why?' And try and point out that this is pointless. 'Why am I being kept here?'

Yeah.

And I think that's a real… that's a real feeling I had… was that you're completely powerless. And even if you're, you know, a sort of kind of proactive person, you've got to hand it over to someone else and go, 'There you go, sort it out.' And actually that's not a particularly nice thing to do because you know for them it's just a job and they're just doing the paperwork. If you were doing it for yourself you would handle it in a much more sort of proactive… you'd be a lot more committed to it.

Yeah.

And for them, I mean, in a sense, apart from a sort of personal relationship point of view, it doesn't really matter to them if they give you a yes or no.

Mmm.

So that if they get a no, they're less likely to be like, going back and fighting for you.

Yeah.

And that's… and there's no redress against that. I mean if it comes back no, well, what can you do?

Mmm.

You've just got to take it on the chin really.

So, so I *guess* for that last however long it was, few months, you were anxious about this powerlessness.

Mmhmm.

And getting more frustrated that you're getting wound up and there's that sense of pointlessness.

Yeah.

And it's building and building and then you know where that line in the sand is. There's a non-event.

Yeah.

And then that's it.

Yeah, exactly. And it's kind of… I suppose it's weird 'cause you *thinking* yeah, like, I'd say you, you kind of fight for this, I mean maybe not everyone but I fought for this for so long and so hard and I was really pushing it and then you get to it and it's kind of like, you know, you've got yourself all riled up and you've done all this stuff and then it's just like *blows out cheeks*.

Can you talk me through that last, I mean, the last few moments? How… would you say it was a few days or was it, you know, a matter of…

Okay umm… well I'd say it was kind of a couple of days really, was where it umm… 'cause like even though I knew I was leaving for a few weeks before, umm, 'cause even when you get the okay to get like a, a form that you can leave early, you still have to sort of agree specific dates and things and that didn't happen until very, very close to my leaving date.

Mmm.

'Cause there has to be, like, troop management and stuff. Umm… so I knew I was leaving for about a week before.

Okay.

Umm… I was going. But actually, it was only the sort of last couple of days where you felt like anything was going to happen because, like, it's one of those things where it's a massive event in *your* life but no-one else cares about it, like...

So was it really like that then that *nobody* else cared about it as far as you were concerned?

Umm, a little bit but, ah, but not necessarily that they didn't care because they didn't care about me but, you know, it's, like to me that's like a whole life shift. But to them it's just like, 'Oh C is leaving.'

Mmm.

And so you kind of, it feels like, everything you do is from that perspective. Especially in those little… in the last sort of week, or the last few days. It's from the perspective of, 'I'm going.'

Mmm.

But actually from their perspective, they don't care you're going and they just want you to be there and to move on.

Yeah.

Kind of thing. And so, again you have real mismatch of, you know you've got to like, I think the day before even you've got to turn up as normal to work and, you know, get the stores out and clean the stores or something.

And that's what you did was it?

Yeah. And so you sort of sit there and you're like, 'Well umm… shouldn't I be like packing my room?' Or… sorry my phone's going…

It's alright.

Yeah umm… Yeah so it… so in your head there's… 'I need to be packing my stuff. I should be, you know, doing all my admin,' and so maybe they'll let you go after like a couple of hours to go hand your kit back or something. But again that feels pointless but I guess from their point of view they're thinking, you know, 'I need the stores cleaned,' so…

Yeah!

Why not! *chuckles* 'Why should C get away with not doing it?'

Mmm.

Sort of thing.

But *literally* the last day you're still doing…

Yeah, yeah. And then when it came to my actual last day I turned up in the morning with all my stuff that had been packed in my car and I kind of… there was a couple of hours of briefings I had to go to and things about, like, what we're doing for next week which was like… pointless! *chuckles*

Yeah.

Umm and then I kind of… 'cause I think I left at the end of the day so the sort of morning was normal, the afternoon they said, 'Go back to your room, make sure everything's sorted,' umm and then after that, sort of like two o'clock, came back, I kind of went round, got my final signatures, 'cause you have to get some people to sign saying that you don't know anything, then literally sort of went, shook everyone's hand and got in my car and left. And so, yeah, even I suppose, even that morning of me leaving I was getting briefed on what I was doing or not doing next week!

Mmm.

And so, I guess that's a really weird thing… it's a weird sort of attitude to leave on. Because you're just, you know, you're still almost in that frame of mind and that process.

Well until you had those signatures it sounds like everything else was run-of-the-mill stuff.

Yeah, yeah.

So probably the last hour, that was the…

Yeah, yeah, that was the sort of, when you sort of actually felt, 'Right this is done now. I'm leaving now.' And so it's a really…like and so I guess that's what… why it feels like a kind of non-event. Because you… in essence it's a normal work day.

Mmm.

And then you, you just drive out and never come back.

Yeah.

And it's kind of, yeah, it's really surreal sort of feeling.

Surreal?

Yeah, yeah, 'cause it's kind of like… you don't really know what to expect about leaving, what you're going to feel like because obviously you've never done it before.

Yeah.

And I suppose especially if you're a bit older and you'd had a job before then it would be different but for me the only life I knew was, you know, shit family life or army.

Mmm.

And so to sort of step out in to something that's not one of those on such a, like a, just a line that you drive out and it's like, 'Right, now everything *else* starts.' It's kind of, it's a really weird thing because you've never done it before and you don't know what to expect or what's going to come.

Mmm.

And sort of, especially, literally driving from my barracks to university, you know, they're two main, like, that's two major life events *laughs*.

Yeah.

And two really big transitions that kind of superimpose and you don't really know what's coming I guess. I think that's a really sort of weird feeling, is that it's just so… I guess *sigh* it's like probably more something like people can connect to like when you're at university and you have like your last ever exam, I suppose, you know, when you're sort of building up to that you think, 'I can't wait,' you know, 'it's going to be amazing'. And you kind of walk out and everyone goes, 'Oh how was it,' and then you kind of all go home and that's it! And if, you sort of… if that was the end of your experience of university then, I think that's what leaving the army's like. Ten times what that felt like.

Mmm.

And it's kind of such an anti-climax sort of superimposed with, 'Well what the hell happens now?!'

Yeah.

I think it'd be the best way to sort of describe it.

Yeah, that's a good one. The, the flatness of there being an anti-climax.

Yeah.

> And then all that, well, you've got that uncertainty and what that, that's like just to be sat in 1your car driving towards…

Yeah, yeah exactly! Yeah it's just… I guess you can't… because there's so much uncertainty in everyone who leaves, who I've spoke to anyway, feels that uncertainty and a kind of foreboding because, I mean, whether you like the army or not, whether you enjoyed service or not, you know, you have certain guarantees when you're there. So you *know*, 'I will always be fed, I will always live somewhere,' you know, 'I'll always turn up to work at nine in the morning and then whatever happens from then is kind of, is whatever,' and, you know, 'I'll always get paid,' and there's all these sort of guarantees you get.

Yeah.

And then sort of, going from that into a world where there is none of that… no-one puts order up at university *chuckles* like, you don't get told where you've got to be and it's kind of, it's a very… well I think it takes a lot of getting used to because… it seems so simple now, again with hindsight, in the sense that it's just what everyone does. Everyone does it. Especially when you join young as most privates and stuff would do, is you have umm, you know, you get very institutionalised I think. I think I'm still, to an extent I still have like that hallmarks of the military.

Mmm.

Umm.

What makes you say that?

Umm, I just think in the sense that umm, it shaped how I like, how you enter into interactions with people who are… and like you don't… if you… if I'd sort of stayed in school, you know, I would have never been in the environment where you kind of… there, there's no… some sort of acceptance of umm, you know, sort of falling short or… the kind of attitude is – you do it. It's not, 'What if it doesn't happen?' It happens.

Mmm.

Like that's kind of what happens and so how you sort of view people… so like I mean it's a very military thing to see, you know, if someone gets you know, a bit poor grades in exams say, the sort of military mind-set would be, you know, 'Oh, they're shit.' I think that's not necessarily a good, a good sort of way to look at the world.

Mmm.

Especially if you're sort of, your going to sort of an office environment. 'Cause if you're sort of… I mean even if you don't verbalise it to the person, if you're going round and marking people out as like – shit, good, good, good, shit, shit – like, which is kind of like a very, I think a very military way to look at people. Well you tend to have… these are our good blokes and these are our shit blokes, sort of thing.

Right, okay.

I think that's a very… and so that's a very hard thing to get out of. Umm, I think it makes it, it makes it difficult when you come to the real world 'cause you kind of, you look at it and you go, 'look at them, they're ten times shitter than I am.' But, you know, he's my boss or… I mean sometimes you feel like that in the military as well like *chuckles* but umm, you know, and you sort of go around and you see all these different types of people and actually I think part of maybe the transition is learning to exis… like co-exist with different types of people and not be sort of drawing lines and putting people in, in those sort of boxes where I'm going, 'I like him 'cause he's good and I hate him because he's…' because actually you drive yourself mental if you, like I mean there's people at university I went to who are nowhere near as good as me and you think, but they've got their rich dads and stuff so they're going off to top universities to do masters' and it's kind of one of those things where you, if you're not careful you can sit there driving yourself nuts because you're going, 'But that's a shit bloke and he's going to Oxford just because he's got a rich dad!'

Yeah.

You're going, 'I'm not a shit bloke.'

Mmm.

Do you know what I mean and I think that's something that you never really have to do in the military.

Well, maybe there's a couple of sides to that because there's umm, if it's about rich dad type stuff umm maybe in the army you can, if you're good you can just work.

Yeah I think that's a good… that's a very valid point in the sense that it's not completely meritocratic but it is very meritocratic and actually, you know, hard works solves a lot of things in the military. But actually in the real world sometimes you've got, like… I think hard work doesn't always, you know, I could probably… you could probably still get to the same place but it's not the key it was.

Yeah.

And sometimes you have to just accept that things are different and people have advantages that you will never have and actually in the military I think what's nice about it is that everyone's stripped back so it doesn't matter if you come from, you know, ten generations of lords and ladies or, you know, you come from a council estate in Hull, you kind of, you're put on the same, same level.

So umm, social mobility is alive in…

Yeah, I think so.

…in the real world. Umm and not that prevalent or hardly at all. You're stripped back.

Yeah, yeah. So everyone's kind of put on the, absolutely the same playing field and it… good blokes go up, shit blokes stay where they are kind of thing.

Yeah.

And so…

And also there's that certainty by the sounds of it **(NB I am pushing this point!) 29.44**

Mmmhmm.

Like yeah, if you're good you'll go up and if you're shit you'll stay there but there's still a certainty there.

Yeah, yeah. You can kind of… obviously you don't necessarily know when. But you know like the good blokes do well and that it's a good sort of stable career path. And actually it's, it's fairly laid out for you as well because you know, 'I do two years here and I get to this rank and I have to do three years minimum here and it's all kind of, you know, it's a simple, straightforward track where if you were so inclined you could even go get the pay scales and you could work out what you could earn at every stage for the next fifty years or however long you're gonna be there. You know what I mean?

Yeah, yeah. 30.29

So you do have a level of certainty that you get used to.

Yeah. I get that.

smiles with small laugh of recognition

I'm also intrigued that you're calling outside of the army, 'the real world'.

Oh yeah.

Umm, so what do you make of that?

I think that's a switch now from being… I think I would have considered the army the real world a few years ago.

Oh yeah?

Umm but I think that's kind of part of my transition. Probably… I think it takes… it's taken… I mean I've been out since 2011 and I'd say I'm still not completely transitioned into being a 'civvy'. I'm not sure I ever will. I think it's kind of it's a bit asynthetic in the sense that I get closer and closer but I'll probably never get there.

Mmm.

Umm but yeah, I think the way I see the military now is it's like, it's a bubble and you kind… you exist in this bubble and it's got all its own rules and its own list of expectations and traditions and, you know, all the sort of… there's this stuff that means so much… Like in my regiment for example, there was a sort of seniority and if you'd done certain things. So if you'd done a tour of Afghan, you'd done like squadron parachute jumps and sort of been on squadron exercise, you know, there was sort of like certain things you could start doing. So you could, you could cut the sleeves off your squadron jumper for example and just little things like that. And you kind of, you look at it now and think, you know, that was… blokes lived their lives trying to get to that level where they could, you know, they could have their sleeves here rather than down there and be seen as, like, one of the boys rather than, you know, one of the newbee guys.

Mmm.

And you look back on it now and you think actually no-one in *the real world* would give two shits whether I cut the sleeves off my jumper or not. And it's kind of *laughing* you know! And it's kind of such a bubble and so much that you place such importance on when you're in it I think, when you leave, you realise how little everyone else cares about those things. And so it's kind of like you have to shift your whole world view.

Or what? What if you don't?

Well I think… actually funnily enough there was a guy who was at my uni who was ex-Royal Engineers, he was about forty five, he'd done a full career.

Yeah.

And he left and he was one of those guys that I think I would never want to be. Possibly part of the reason why I left. It's I think, when you see the sort of forty five year old men and you can kind of tell that they're not in the military any more but that their entire life was the army and they kind of, you know, they still carry their military rucksacks on them. You know, and you can just tell for talking to them, they're using all the slang still and there's no real attempt to sort of reintegrate and they still see the world in that, that level.

Well they're worlds apart by the sounds of things.

Yeah, yeah. And so they would still… I mean, nowadays, you know if I saw someone in a squadron jumper with their sleeves off I… and I knew… for some reason I knew that they hadn't done whatever was required I wouldn't give a toss. They could do whatever they want.

Yeah.

But actually I could tell he'd be the sort of bloke who would say something about that. And I kind of think it's really telling that, you know, actually, probably the best example would be when we went out for a Christmas drink once… and I think drinking is one of… it's a really big area that people have to sort of transition when they leave because there's a really big drinking culture in the military.

Mmm.

Well there was in my unit anyway. And I think, it's not necessarily the… it's not necessarily the drinking that you have to change 'cause there's lots of people that go out and get very drunk but I think it's your behaviour. And actually in the military it's kind of like, whenever you go out it's like a sort of 'lads on tour' mentality and you do stupid things and you do, like, you know, and you just act like idiots basically and it's great fun when you're doing it.

Yeah.

But actually, so when we went out for Christmas, I kind of moderate how I behave, 'cause actually getting so drunk you piss yourself, most people don't see that as funny. Like in the military that's like legendary.

Mmmhmm.

But like, you know, if you did that in the student union, you were so drunk you just stood there and pissed yourself *chuckling* most people would not be impressed by that. And you kind of have to moderate things like that I think. Whereas I… and when he went out he was like forty five. So he was in the S.U. [Student Union] with eighteen year olds anyway and he's there getting absolutely tanked… I think he did piss himself at one point actually and, you know, unconscious outside at about one in the morning. And I think it really shows that he's, that he'd not made that transition.

Mmhmm.

And even though he wasn't with military people and he wasn't with people who were accepting of that behaviour, he was still doing it.

I guess I mean, to me that sounds similar to your few months of still doing the two jogs in the morning and the evening.

Yeah, mmhmm.

He was still drinking as if he was…

Yeah, yeah. Well it was as if he was within his troop. I think that is, you know, I think you have… realistically you have to expect, with such a stark change, you have to expect, you know, some of those habits will carry on. I mean some may carry on forever.

Yeah.

Hopefully the good ones and umm, some of them may take you a bit longer to fizzle out. Umm…

But you were talking about choice there aren't you.

Yeah, yeah.

Some of the things you want to take on as valuable experiences but some things you're actually quite keen to let go of.

Oh totally, yeah. Totally, I think, umm… I don't know. It's difficult to say like how I arrived at that choice necessarily. I'm not sure if it was… I don't want to sound like derogatory to some people but I think potentially, maybe, it's a, it's an upbringing thing or a, a kind of background thing. 'Cause even though my family life wasn't great, I was kind of brought up in a fairly reasonable middle class, umm, family when I was younger and stuff and it sort of fell apart later but so, I kind of always knew somewhere in my head that, you know, going out and getting absolutely stonking drunk all the time is not a good thing to do. But equally, you know, it's good to work hard and to have a good work ethic. I think those are the things that I always knew were there. And so when it came time to sort of remoulding myself a little bit, I kind of, I knew what had to be cut away.

Mmm.

Whereas I think there are some guys who maybe are from more sort of working class backgrounds who actually, all their friends go out and get tanked every night anyway. And so for them, all the people who've done it… maybe the people who've done it for a very long time as well who completely forget sort of, the wider world is that they don't really… you know when it comes to that time to remould themselves they don't know where to start. And they've no… the only compass they've got is a military one and so they don't… there's nothing to cut. Because if you look at your life with a military perspective then you go, 'Well it's all good.'

Yeah.

'I don't have to change anything.'

Mmm.

And so, maybe it's kind of, it links to your… it's your support network. That's maybe a better way to put it than your upbringing. So you my girlfriend is professional. She works in a bank and stuff. So actually I always had that sort of support network that would help me. And I kind of, I kind of knew, like, what traits maybe needed to be phased out over time and, you know, how… I had a sort of little bit of a compass of how I needed to redevelop myself.

Mmm.

And how to manage that transition a little bit.

So as you were sat in the car back in 2011, even though you had that uncertainty ahead of you, you had some stuff from your upbringing.

Yep.

You had your girlfriend… were you with your girlfriend then?

Yeah, yeah.

So even though you had that uncertainty, some of the stuff that got you to uni and through uni was having that distinction of the stuff you want to cut and the stuff you don't.

Yes.

And the support network around you.

Yeah, I think that umm, sort of my… knowing my potential. 'Cause I mean like, obviously when I was sixteen, I left school at sixteen…

Yeah, yeah.

It's like all my family fell apart and all sorts of horrible stuff that just kind of happens to some people.

Yeah.

Umm, and but I came from sort of a really good grammar school background, you know, I've got friends who are doctors, physicists, blah blah blah blah blah and so I think I came into the military knowing somewhere deep down that I had a lot more potential than the military in a sense. Like, 'cause obviously I mean, which I guess was carried through, because when I, umm, you know, graduated from university with a first class engineering degree from a top engineering university.

Yeah.

So there's obviously that like… I knew I had the potential to do that and so for me I think throughout the whole time there was always a sense of… I knew that what I was… there were some things that I was doing that were not good long term decisions. So, you know, I still went out, I still had fun but equally I knew that that wasn't something that I should make part of *me* in a sense. And yeah, so when I left, I had, I still had that sense of the 'me' from before a little bit.

Mmm. You still had that connection.

Yeah, and so even though the transition was hard and there was a lot of changes, you kind of, it was enough memory of what, you know, what it could be, or what my expectations used to be of myself.

Mmm.

Which I think is actually where a lot of my sort of guidance might have come from as well so… my girlfriend… is remembering what I wanted to do before.

Mmm.

Sort of helped me in… so, that sort of started as a baseline. 'Cause like I think when I was like fourteen I wanted to be a surgeon or something. And so, obviously medical school's out of the question after sort of like… being twenty two when you start, you're going to be about fifty by the time you graduate! *laughs*

Yeah!

But like, so I knew that that was kind of where my focus sort of went and when it came, when I was getting sick of the army and I knew it wasn't for me that was kind of where my eyes naturally fell. 'Cause well, lots of people couldn't… you know, I could have left and been an electrician but, you know, I think from that memory of before I was kind of able to sort of hone in on what I should be doing. I think once you sort of identify that, it kind of, even though it's not easy, you're on a path that kind of, you know, you go through a bit of changes and you modify it, you realise what you should be doing next and…

You've got a goal.

Yeah, yeah, 'cause you're working towards something and you're on that path. Even if you… even if there's a lot of uncertainty, a lot of that gets resolved in the natural sort of course of events I think.

Yeah.

Whereas I think maybe if you kind of, you know, if you left and you were a self-employed electrician, that would be infinitely harder because you have no… you know things don't evolve in the same way. You just sort of leave and go, 'Oh, I've got to make money now. How do I…'

Yeah.

So… whereas my path I kind of… things followed on.

Well remembering where you were at with the sort of, 'What's the point?' powerlessness stuff as you were leaving but then you have a few points. You have your girlfriend, you have some sort of goal so even with those uncertainties umm you… you've talked about sort of having a compass and guidance.

Mmm.

You also said that you've spoken to a few other people who've left, yeah?

Yeah.

So that sounds like a combination of having a goal, having a partner and having contact with some other people who've done it was useful. **NB – he hasn't yet mentioned speaking with other's who have left, just observing one.**

Mmhmm, well actually most of the people who I sort of am in real contact with are actually people who are about the same sort of stage as me.

Oh okay.

Umm, and we sort of left at the same time. I knew a few people who left the regiment about the same time as me really struggled and sort of signing back up to the TA and things like that. Umm, and I think, yeah, having the goal and having the sort of support's really important to me in sort of my journey as it were.

Mmm.

Yeah.

And you can contrast that with some of your other mates who haven't had that.

Mmm. Yeah I think, ah, I think aspiration is a strange thing for ex-military people. In the sense that they're often actually very, like if you compared them with other young men of their cross sections sort of thing you'd probably find they were more hard working and you know, a bit better rounded people. But actually I think like, my umm, sort of memory of myself enabled me to pick goals and to have… and so I came from a family where, you know, I was encouraged to have aspirations and things. But some of those guys I think, you know, they came from significantly worse backgrounds than I did and so actually maybe they never had, they never had that goal in the first place?

Mmhmm.

And so for them, you know, they kind of look back onto what they remember of pre-military life and it's, you know, it's just like, I don't know, hanging around in council estates or getting drunk with their mates and I think the guys who are a bit like more like that, they struggle more and they tend to be the ones who, you know, drift back towards the military because, you know, they sort of… they're guys who if they had aspirations could do really well but they're just not set up *coughs* sorry…

It’s alright.

…they’re not kind of set up to have, to have those aspirations in the sense that your not… like in the military you’re not encouraged to have a dream as such.

Mmm.

Like if it is, it’s get promoted or, you know, no-one’s encouraging you to… ‘You could be a doctor or you can…’ and actually, you know, some of these guys could probably quite easily go work in banks and do all sorts of professional careers but no-one… you’re never encouraged to do that in the military and I think if you never developed that before the military…

And if you never had encouragement…

Yeah so if you were never sort of told, ‘You can be a doctor,’ or you know, you never have realistic expectations of that before…

Yeah.

…and maybe, you know, ‘cause obviously my girlfriend being professional as well, I knew that that’s kind of where I was wanting to be ending up as well. And she was, she was like supportive of that and actually really helpful because it’s, I think when you leave as a private, everything is set up for you to do certain things. So, you know the kind of, the general, for want of a better term, working class kind of job bracket – so work on a construction site, health and safety, private security, like tradesmen – those kind of level of jobs, and actually there’s nothing in place really. I mean I really, really struggled umm, in terms of ex-military support for privates who want to go into, or sort of Other Ranks, who want to move into more professional services, which actually are generally the sort of preserved officers and ex-officers.

Yeah. 47.24

‘Cause I went to a few networking events for ex-military people and there’s even something like umm, like the Officers Association for example, they keep a list of officers who have left and who work for banks and businesses and actually as a private you can’t even really get access to that.

Right, okay.

Err and so.

What you mean you’re not allowed to…?

No. Because it’s for ex-officers. It’s an ex-officer’s association so unless you’re an ex officer, you’re not entitled to that sort of bracket of support.

Mmhmm.

And so I think everything is set up so when you leave as a private, it’s set up so you have low expectations of yourself and I think if you’ve not already got a goal and you’ve not already got a challenging aspiration for yourself, how you go about moulding yourself into someone who would do really well in this sort of wider world is quite difficult I think. Because you just don’t know what to… if I say you’ve got to become a self-employed electrician and you’ve got no-one who’s telling you… because if you want to be a banker it’s not simple. You can’t just go, ‘There’s my CV, I was in Afghan six months ago, give me a job trading shares.’

Yeah.

It doesn't work like that. There's so much development that you have to do to get to sort of move yourself upwards.

And particularly if you're leaving with that sort of non-event moment on your own and you've had that period of time where you've basically been err, whatever it is, structured by this group and then you're not in that group anymore then it sounds pretty isolating.

Yeah, yeah. I think it is a bit yeah. And umm, like a lot of the….even the… 'cause you do get a lot of resettlement stuff umm, but that's all fairly rudimentary. I mean like maybe you go on a couple of courses telling you how to write a CV and stuff, but actually that, I think, could be better in place say, you could… because I never knew at that point that I want to go into finance, which is what I do now. And well I mean, obviously I was going to university so it was a bit different so I wasn't jumping straight in.

Mmhmm.

But, you know, if I'd have gone to the resettlement set and gone I'm a sapper and I want to go work for a bank on their trading floor, I mean, I would have probably got a leaflet from some generic careers thing, you know, and a bit of advice about writing a CV. And actually the whole process is, there's nothing set up in the whole process to really foster those goals. And that may be, that would again make the transition easier because then if you're working towards something, once you leave you've got a sort of goal and stuff. And actually that time wouldn't be dead time because even if you had to go to work, but you were say, taking a course in finance, you would feel like it's useful time and, you know, you're developing towards your end game…

Your goal is being fostered as opposed to…

Yeah, yeah, yeah, whereas there's no… so I mean, unless you know for definite that's what you want to do, there's no like, yeah, you'd have to do it all off of your own back. There's no sort of attempt to say you… there's no reason you guys who are leaving can't do these professional careers. It's kind of like, 'Oh,'… like 'cause if you were… there's resettlement websites and things and if you click on them then it's kind of like, 'Oh Virgin Media are hiring a cable engineer,' or something.

Mmm.

And it's just basically, you know, you go around connecting people's broadband. And I mean some will be happy with those kind of jobs but I actually think it's healthy for people to, you know, especially people who are so well developed as some of the ex-military guys. I think there's a good cross section of people who actually would benefit from being given those, or being shown that there is potential for much more aspiration and to not just assign, like, say, 'this is the bracket of job I'm going to have for the rest of my life.'

Yeah.

Umm, I think all of that support that would give you knowing that it's all supported as you left, you know, once you leave making it a bit less of an anti-climax and then making it a bit less uncertain and isolating like you said.

Mmm.

Because it's kind of, at the moment, or when I left anyway, it felt very much like no-one else really cares about what you want to do. I mean these guys you work with, I mean yeah they like you but I mean no-one cares if you want to go work in finance or you want to go to university because you'll

be gone. Like, and so kind of there's not really an outlet for that. And the careers resettlement stuff that's set up for… is, like I said is… if you did CV writing at school, you've probably done most of what you'll learn there anyway.

Yeah. And so… and I think really that adds to you know… the surrealness of what happens next, because actually they prepare you so poorly for anything other than the most basic of jobs that it… no wonder you're going to feel like, 'What the hell happened? What do I do now?'

Yeah and I guess that's pointing to the more difficult stuff that you, you said it has been difficult at times.

Mmhmm.

So you had those, 'What the hell happened? Where am I now?' moments.

Yeah.

Can you say anything more about the difficulties that you came across.

Umm, well, so I think it… the sort of frustration of umm… so before I left obviously there was the difficulties of the real frustration of not having any power. Once you leave, I think again it, I felt a real frustration sometimes about just how you haven't in the real world as well. In the sense that, even though it's university and it's not really that important, umm, you kind of, people are, you know, you've got to interact with stupid people and people do stupid things and like, it's frustrating because you think you… in your head you think, 'If this was the military, I'd go speak to the Troop Commander and go, "this guy's an idiot, he's telling me something stupid. Get it sorted."' But like… not in those words, but like that sentiment. But then actually you sort of get into the world and realise that you've got to deal with all these people and you have no authority. No way to… like if someone's calling you and idiot and doing something stupid or unprofessional or whatever, I mean unless it's in a workplace, you just can't… I mean what can you do. You can kind of have it out with them, have an argument, punch them in the nose or like just kind of leave it.

Mmm.

And it's a really, that a really difficult thing to sort of, again, sort of moderate how you interact with people and try and not to… I think it probably draws back into what I was saying about putting people in boxes. And you have to like, learn to manage things in a completely different way.

Yeah, and I guess you had those experiences because you would have at times, I mean obviously you go on leave and stuff so it's not all, not all of your interaction was in the army with other service personnel.

Yeah, mmhmm.

But there's a difference when your… what's the difference there?

Umm, I guess it comes… that's a good… I don't… it's hard… well I… it's a hard distinction to draw. I think possibly because it changes from when you're in the military, even when you deal with idiots in the sort of wider world you kind of think, 'Ah it's just a… I'm here for two weeks, there and idiot and I'll go back and I'll forget about it.'

You'll go back to the real world.

Yeah, you'll go back to the real world and there just idiots who don't understand what's going on in your life. They need to sort their life out.

It's a kind of, umm, us and them thing. **NB Putting words in his mouth?**

Yeah.

And so when you leave, you kind of realise there is no us and them. **NB but seems to have struck a chord.** I can't, you know, this isn't a two week leave thing.

Yeah.

Especially when it's things like on your degree programme and somebody on your group who you're working with, you know, part of what they do is part of your mark or something, just, you know, something really trivial.

Mmm.

But then there's just no... there is no, 'I'll go back to the real world, this *is* the real world'. And so my future counts on things like this. You know, I've got to deal with these idiots constantly now. Not... I don't get a break from it.

Mmmhmm. Yeah.

And I think also as well, like, I think, it sounds a bit sort of weird but, how you interact with people just on a really fundamental level is quite different and actually your, you know, your day-to-day interactions with people you work with kind of, you know, no-one's particularly serious. Everyone's quite sarcastic in the way they do things and if someone asks you a question that was a little bit silly or a bit obvious you probably take the piss out of them for asking it. And things like that have... that's not a sort of a way of interacting that is you know, gets the best response from a lot of people. Like umm, I think I found it even when I, you know, interned in offices and stuff when I went back to university. Is that I really have to make conscious efforts still not to... like if someone asks me something that I think's a bit silly or a bit obvious, to not sort of give a quick sarcastic, you know, umm sort of one liner back at them and...

Yeah.

...*laughing* and I know it's kind of... that way of how you interact with the world, 'cause I think the military is fundamentally... it's a, it's non-serious... like people who are very laid back and not very serious doing very serious things.

Uh-huh.

And I'm sure there's like billions of war stories of people, you know, being ridiculously calm, you know, taking the piss under all sorts of things. Umm, and actually getting yourself out of that mind set is a really, really hard thing to do. Because that's quite fundamental.

Umm, I was just thinking as you were talking, I know this is a bit of a tangent, but I imagine the few times, 'cause I can relate to that on a level and I've never been in the military.

Mmhmm, yeah.

Umm, the few times when you do click with somebody who can be sarcastic in those moments. Is that actually a nice part of the transition?

Yeah, yeah.

You know, you can go, 'Oh I can still do this from time to time, I've just got to find the right people.'

Yeah, yeah, exactly. But that… and yeah I think, because obviously in the military it's like it's a self-selecting sample isn't it and that…you get those kind of people and it's pretty much just those kind of people.

Mmhmm.

And if you're not that kind of person you become that kind of person pretty quickly.

Or you don't last.

Or you don't last, yeah, exactly. And so, when you go out into the wider world you realise there are some people who are receptive to, you know, that kind of attitude but actually if you're working in an office and you're doing all sorts of work coming in and out maybe, you know, your friend who's just graduated and the same age as you, yeah that's kind of okay between you but you know, the forty five year old woman sitting next to you, if she asks you something stupid and you're sort of going and giving back that kind of reply umm, it's not going to be going down so well! * laughs*

Yeah. Yep

It's kind of, it's really strange because on one level it seems like, it seems like a clear thing and you think, you know, surely that's an obvious thing that you would moderate how you talk to people but I think from the military it's quite institutionalised. Like even, I mean, maybe not very senior people but definitely most of your troop seniority you would have some level of kind of casual, funny interaction between you and they would be sarcastic or sort of derogatory to you in a sort of fun way.

Humour's really important.

Yeah and that's kind of like a lot of how you bond with people but actually that really doesn't transfer well to a lot of situations.

Well far from it. By the sounds of things it can be disconnecting if you use that sort of… where in the army it was really sort of bonding and a big part of how you interact, umm, out of it, it can be disconnecting. You have to moderate yourself.

Yeah, yeah.

And you're okay with that because you're aware of it.

Yeah.

But, still.

You're doing the remoulding.

Yeah but it's still hard and I think it becomes, you know, you do it every day for years and years and years and becomes very ingrained. And then, I think for me I either find myself like, when I was working over at one of the summers you know, I still did it and the guy kind of made a, 'Oh yeah, another sarcastic reply,' kind of comment.

Yeah.

And I actually just sort of clicked in my brain, 'Oh shit.' So obviously I thought I was try… kind of moderating how I was behaving but actually as I sort of relaxed into the situation it kind of crept back in under my radar a little bit.

Mmhmm.

Which I think is one of the things I still have to work on. Umm, and actually, and again maybe the difference is that in the military, if you kind of overstepped your line or you were close to overstepping it someone would probably tell you and they would tell you pretty quickly.

Mmm.

Whereas actually if you have a normal job, you know, likelihood is the first time you find out about it is when you get a formal warning for it or something.

Mmm.

Umm, and people aren't necessarily going to bring you up on your behaviour in such a tight way 'til it becomes a problem.

So you're more your own guy in that sense.

Yeah. And I think, and again that's hard because, you know, I don't intentionally mean to deride anyone but it just kind of comes naturally and then you, and then you only realise afterwards that, 'Oh actually yeah, he thinks I'm a bit of an idiot,' like, you know, I've not meant that in any way but it just happens.

And you're sort of looking to claw that back but it's a bit too late.

Yeah, yeah, yeah exactly. And once someone's got that opinion of you they kind of…

It's coming from good intentions but you've found that you've been misunderstood.

Yeah. Definitely. And I think, yeah, it's kind of… it's difficult because there's this… the only thing… the only way you could… the only thing you could say to someone, you could say, 'don't do it.' Like, there's not really much you can do about, like, that because, you know what I mean. Someone doesn't need to tell you that necessarily. I'm kind of aware of it but actually knowing you don…and changing what's like quite a big part of what's quite ingrained in you is very difficult.

Mmm. *emphatically* Well that's a transition in itself.

Yeah.

It's like you said earlier, it's a process that probably never ends.

Mmm. I think, and it's probably the same in a lot of… I think it's a lot of the little details, like even when you, like 'cause I've had some of ex-military guys who I've had a read through their CV and stuff umm, just to give them some points and you see they still speak in a very military way and they use, you know military language and that's one of the transitions again is, like you said, about being misunderstood about what your intentions are. Is that actually, you can write something that as, if I read it as a squa… as an ex-squaddie I know exactly what it says. But that actually, to someone who's not an ex-squaddie, you know, the meaning is a bit clouded and they'll say, 'What does that mean? I don't know what that means. What the hell's that?'

Mmm.

And part of that transition is so like I said about it being a bubble and no-one really cares outside of that bubble you know. All these acronyms they, they float around and everyone knows and they're universal within this bubble but then the transition is knowing that no-one cares about that bubble. No-one gives two hoots to learn about what's the difference between the RLC and the Royal Engineers.

It's recognising the limits of that universe.

Yeah.

And that's what's helped you is that you have recognised sometimes it's trial and error, sometimes it's because of the outside connections that you've got.

Yeah. I think, yeah, I think it's a combination of the two and I think maybe being at university was a little bit beneficial in a sense that I had the freedom to have trial and error without impunity… or with impunity sorry.

Yeah, yeah.

And, umm *laughs*

Well I guess, umm, there were still laws you know.

Oh yeah, obviously I couldn't break the law but like you know if I, if I interacted in a way… or even say if I, if I was communicating in like a military way and it wasn't very clear to people, it would be fairly obvious fairly quickly that I was kind of, no-one was really understanding what I was saying properly. That I wasn't getting my point across.

Mmm.

And so I had that trial and error where there was no real comeback from that. I mean maybe someone thought I was a dick but apart from *chuckles* you know, apart from that it's so… whereas if you'd gone straight into a work place, I think it'd have been a lot easier for people to label you as not very effective or, you know, not having those communication skills.

Mmhmm.

Because in reality there's no… there's trial and error but the first trial is when everyone forms their opinion of you isn't it. So even if you… unless you can correct it in a really substantial way…

So and that time was really useful for you to integrate and to remould gradually.

Yeah, yeah. Because, like I had that opportunity so I… and I knew that there was no real harm if I sort of tried one thing and I thought, 'Oh if I,' you know I try and develop my writing style or speaking style in this way, if it kind of didn't work out, people… it wasn't, you know. If I thought, 'ah that's a bit naff,' or whatever I could try something else. And it was a random group of people who, you know, I'm never going to see again so I don't really care.

Yeah so you can try again.

Yeah so you can try again another day. And also maybe as well integrating with some people who weren't my age group but who were close to my age group was maybe good.

Mmm.

Because actually I think when you're in the military you have a life, like even at twenty I was significantly more mature than friends that I had at twenty five, twenty six. And so actually it's kind of, I think if you come out as a younger guy it can be quite weird because people, when people interact with you, you come across as like, you know, you're this thirty year old man.

Mmm.

And you know, you're only twenty one and people don't really know how to take that.

Yeah.

And it's kind of being able to integrate with the kind of and see how people interact like in that age group helps you sort of ground yourself into the sort of, what the, the new sort of social expectations are and stuff.

Yeah that's a good expression, 'grounding yourself.' That was a big thing.

Yeah. 'Cause even like, I mean, just texting my friends… I mean this is so trivial it's ridiculous but like, I would never have text my military friends apart from being like, 'Ah, drunk in pub? Pub.' You know, if you had normal friends and you didn't speak to them for six months they'd probably be like, 'What's going… what's going on? Where's C gone?'

Yeah.

But like that was kind of how it worked and you know, you didn't see guys for a year and a half and then you'd just go to the pub with them and be like best of mates. And so sort of learning all of those, how different everything is…

And you've said a few times, 'it sounds silly,' or 'this sounds trivial,' but you know, in the basically hour and ten we've been going those are the few things that you've chosen to mention.

Oh yeah, yeah.

So actually the trivial things are much more serious than meets the eye.

Oh yeah, I think the key is in the little details. In a sense I think what makes your transition hard is not some massive, gigantic event that you've got to overcome or some really big obstacle, it's all the, it's the little details that sort of grind you down. It's the day-to-day. And I guess it kind of, it feels, like I said, it feels trivial to someone else. Because if you said, you know, my dad was never in the army or whatever, so if I said to him, 'oh it's really difficult knowing what to do with my day,' it would be like, it's a kind of alien thing to him.

Mmm.

He can maybe appreciate it a sort of, in an intellectual way kind of thing, saying, 'Yeah, yeah I can recognise you've gone from structure to no structure,' but it's something that so many people do all the time. You feel like, a little bit over deficient in such a basic area.

Mmhmm.

Do you…?

Yeah. Very much.

laughs It would kind of almost feel nicer if it was like, this really big event so that like, you know, if you didn't have any legs and you were trying to learn to walk again. People can… you would maybe feel… not to try and trivialise that…

No, but this is your point.

Yeah.

Because it's not trivial.

Yeah, people don't see it as a sort of obstacle or a problem and maybe you don't recognise it. And actually from a personal point of view, you'd accept a set amount of deficiency and a learning curve with like big things like if you lost your legs or something.

Mmm.

But actually the frustration is things that should be so easy and that are so easy to most people are like so alien to you.

Mmhmm.

I mean that, that's something that particularly intrigues me is that there is this idea that it would be trivial to other people when actually there are loads of different things in peoples' lives that they keep saying are trivial – they're not. And it's not just something, umm, that a particular group of people experience.

Mmm.

Umm, but it's something that seems to be occurring in a lot of people in different walks of life as - it would need to be more significant for this not to be a deficiency.

Yeah.

Umm…so it has to be silly because everybody else would see it as such.

Mmm.

When it clearly isn't. It's… it's a significant thing.

Yeah.

Umm. I'm aware that we could keep talking for a long time.

Yeah.

But I think it would probably be useful just to wrap things up.

Okay. Yep.

I just want to check though, is there anything that you feel like you haven't said that would be important to say?

pause 5 seconds

Well I guess that I never really had any expectation that there would be a transition for me. I think, which again is probably what made it quite difficult.

Mmhmm.

In the sense that I kind of expected, probably because, you know, I've done all this stuff in the military, you know, passed these ridiculously hard courses, served in all these regiments, done my tour and I never really, you know, I had this view of myself as a competent good guy and so I never expected that I would struggle with, like, the little details of life after the military.

Mmhmm.

And I think that's like, that's a real journey to even accept that you can't do it all.

Mmm.

And I think that was maybe for the first few months where I was still getting up at seven and going for runs and stuff, I was not really *accepting* that it needed to be a transition. And then for a while I was treating it as if my job is now university so, you know, I get up and I go for a run and then I go to work at university. Whereas actually that's not your transition that's just you know, you're doing the same thing in a different place.

Mmm.

But actually it's a whole lifestyle switch isn't it. Umm, so I think that expectation that everyone has to go through this really fundamental change actually. Like, it's kind of what I didn't appreciate when I left I think. I, I sort of assumed I'd go to university and it'd all be fine.

You struggled to accept your limitations.

Yeah.

Mmm. I, I don't know whether that's a sort of military thing in the sense that you always have a high bar set for yourself, you know, no-one expects you just to do the average so in your own head, anything other than excellent is fail.

Mmm.

Is kind of the mentality we had as paratroopers I suppose. And so getting out of that and saying it's okay for me not to do everything perfect first time… you have to do trial and error even, is kind of, was the hard thing I think.

Yeah. Thank you.

It's alright.

That's been really helpful for me.

Good. I hope so.

What was it like to talk about?

Umm, yeah it was fine. It's umm it's kind of nice in a way just to, 'cause like, you don't really talk about it with anyone.

Mmm.

The sort of processing of feelings and it's, I suppose a bit like, they say when people get back from Afghan it's always the married ones who struggle the most because they go home and their partner doesn't want to hear about all the harrowing experiences, umm, and it's, you know, the people who

cope best with it are the guys who are in the block and they can sit with their mates and talk about what happened.

Mmm.

I think it's a bit like that in the sense that, you know, once you leave, no-one really wants to talk about what you struggled with leaving the army.

Mmm.

So it actually feels, it's kind of nice to, just to verbalise it and I suppose it puts a few things in perspective because I think by talking about it you kind of organise your own head as well.

Mmm.

So…*laughs*

Good to know.

Yeah.

Alright, happy to leave it there?

Yeah, yeah.

Good stuff.

END