Culturogenic Harm: Unintended Impacts of Military Acculturation

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Canadian Armed Forces Diversity Strategy

"respect for and appreciation of differences in ethnicity, language, gender, age, national origin, disabilities, sexual orientation, education and religion.

It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing, celebrating, and integrating the rich dimension of diversity within each individual"

(DND, 2017, p. 1).

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Masculine Socialization

"The military has socialized millions of men according to some traditional blueprint. As such the dominant adult male role model could largely be the product of the military, particularly in as much as those who are thus socialized have returned to society".
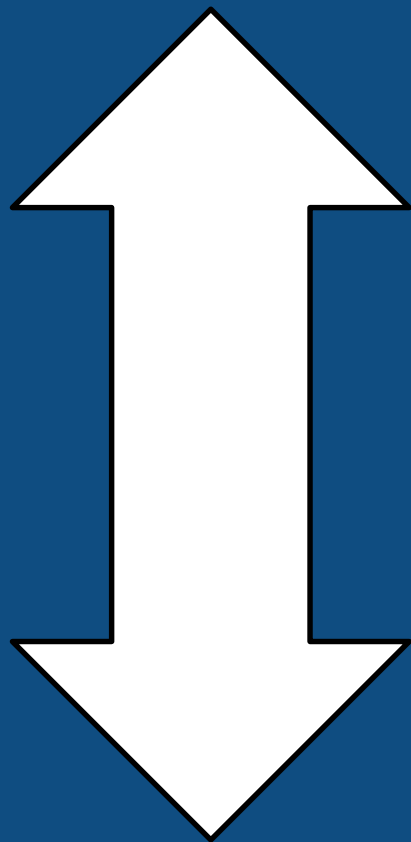
(Arkin and Debrofsky,1978)

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Rules of Masculinity

War Games

The Hegemonic Ideal

The "Abject" or Broken Identity

Assumption of this "fallen" identity can result in shame, stigma and isolation.

(Butler,1999; Kristeva, 1982; Shields et al., 2017)

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Objective:

A critical analysis of the cultural and organizational narratives through which personnel give meaning to, and cope with, their military experiences.

Participants:

Shared one aspect of intersectional identity - disability

75 serving military or recently released Veterans (124 hrs)

27 health and transition support personnel (30 hrs)

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Themes within the 'Mission First' cultural narrative

1. Performance Culture: Belonging must be earned
2. Precarious Belonging: Mission and team before self
3. Culturogenic Harm: Disrupted recovery environments

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Performance Culture: Belonging must be earned

"The military is a family and yet it's also a hierarchy. There's jostling for position and everyone isn't valid unless they're at the sharp end of the stick. That mentality helps motivate people to do the hardest work".

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Precarious Belonging: Mission and team before self

"We all worked together – we went through stuff. I was trusted to have their backs and they had mine. Then the second there's something wrong with you – nobody wants to associate with you. You're a Sick Bay Ranger, MIR commando".

"I'd see someone I know and I'd wave to them and they'd look away because they can't associate with me because I have PTSD, because I'm weak".

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Culturogenic Harm: Disrupted recovery environments

"Coming back ... Being completely devalued by a system that I had fought for and had given my best years to and given my sweat equity to, that certainly contributed to my PTSD".

"I was called out by my Sergeant Major in front of my squadron, calling me a malingerer, a piece of crap... Talking to me like that in front of 120 guys. When I tried to respond, he told me to call him 'Sir' and started to 'come on board me'".

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Implications for Cultural Change Initiatives

In a military performance culture, where everyone's belonging is *strategically precarious*, how does the organization engage effectively in "embracing, celebrating, and integrating the rich dimension of diversity within each individual"?

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Implications for Cultural Change Initiatives

Change requires engagement and leadership from the '*culture keepers*' within the organization – those at the top of the hegemonic hierarchy who act as '*permission givers*' for others to follow a new blueprint of masculinity and reinforce modified norms of legitimacy, performance and inclusion.