

Exploring the Cultural Context of Agricultural Education for Military Veterans



Objectives

- ✓ Explain the importance of veteran research in Agricultural Education Programming.
- ✓ Identify the role Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism plays in a veterans transition from a military to a civilian role.
- ✓ Explain the role and influence an agricultural education program can have on a veteran's identity.

Topics to Be Covered



- Introduction
- Background
- Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- References

Reflexivity



Self

“Rarely, if ever in ordinary life are people required to focus, with such purity, everything in them-mind, emotions, physical strength, perception, and skill- on the present moment with so many others... Euphoria [of war] is addicting and self-sacrifice is transcending; but equilibrium is life-sustaining and reciprocity is the heart of love” (Brock & Lettini, 2012).

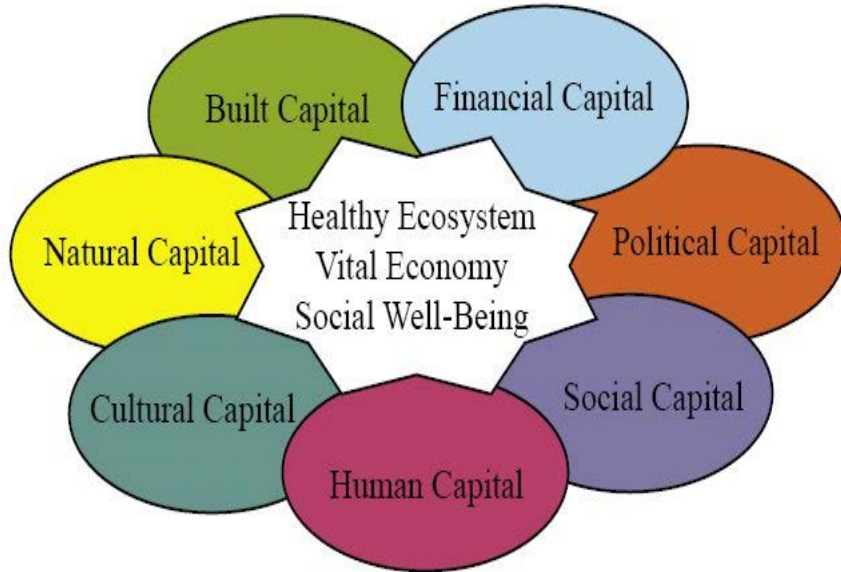


Ontological and Epistemological Views

- ❖ Constructionist - values each individual's unique experience (Patton, 2015)
 - ❖ Knowledge - assembled by individuals through active and meaningful interactions within a social setting (Gergen, 1999; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Patton, 2015)
 - ❖ Understands the importance of our culture's influence on how we see and experience the world around us (Gergen, 1999; Patton, 2015)

Purpose of this Study

- Examine Veterans participating in a agricultural education program through the lens of Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism
- Identify critical reinterpretations of objects and self in verbal and non-verbal communications
- Influence of veteran symbols on socialization, group interactions, and concepts of self
- Ability to adapt civilian culture and create opportunities for social mobility



**Interconnected Community Capitals
Framework Model (Green & Haines, 2012)**

Veterans possess social, human, and financial capital, but lack the establishment of civilian cultural capital to integrate into a non-military community.

Research Question



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

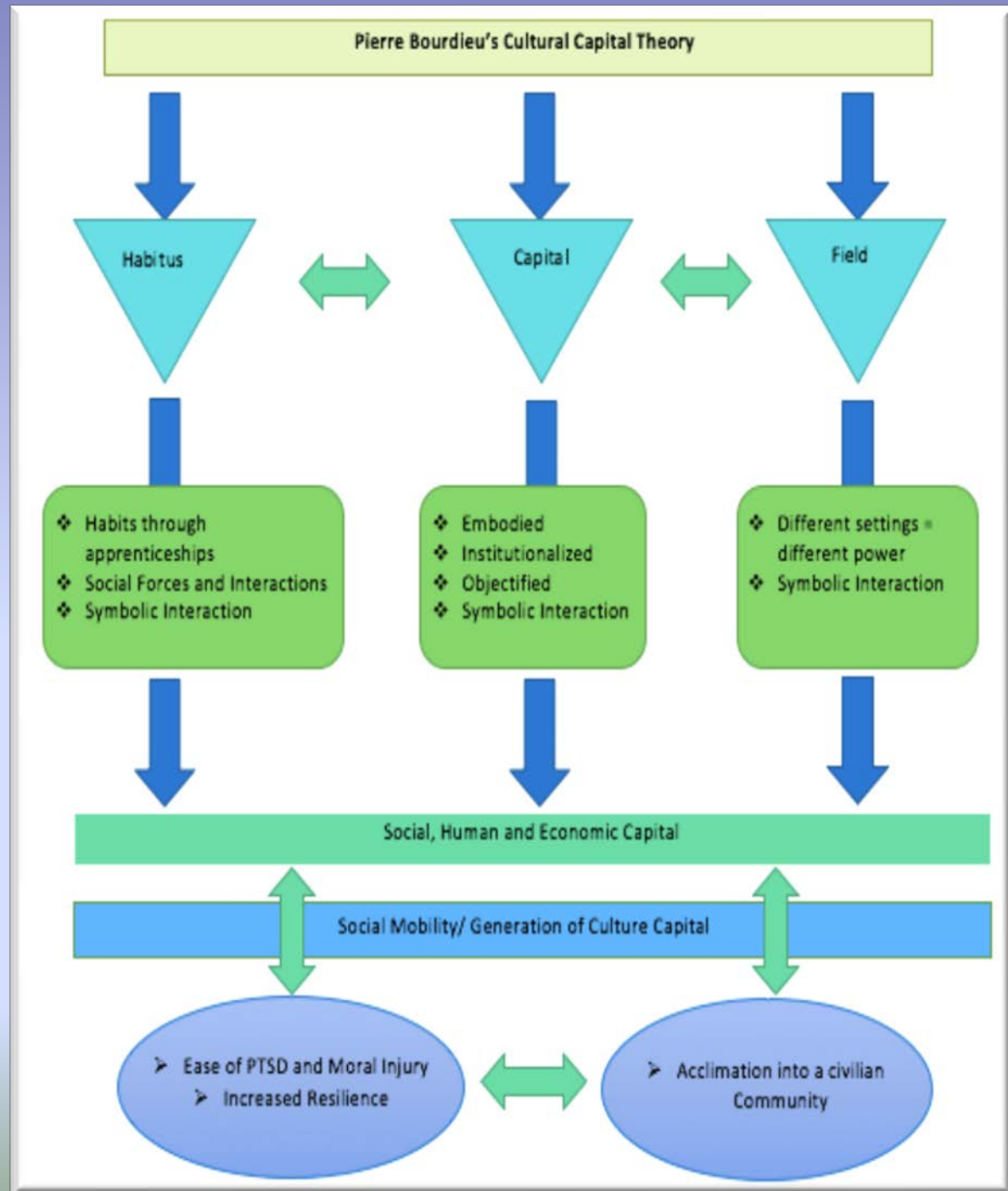
Observational Questions



- How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an adult agricultural education program?
- How (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in agriculture assist in forming a civilian identity?
- How are veterans with moral injury and PTSD symptoms socialized through their new role of farmer?



Theoretical Framework



Sample and Unit of Analysis



- Sample= A Military Veteran Agricultural Education program
- Unit of Analysis = program participants

Sampling and Recruitment

Participant recruitment (N=21)

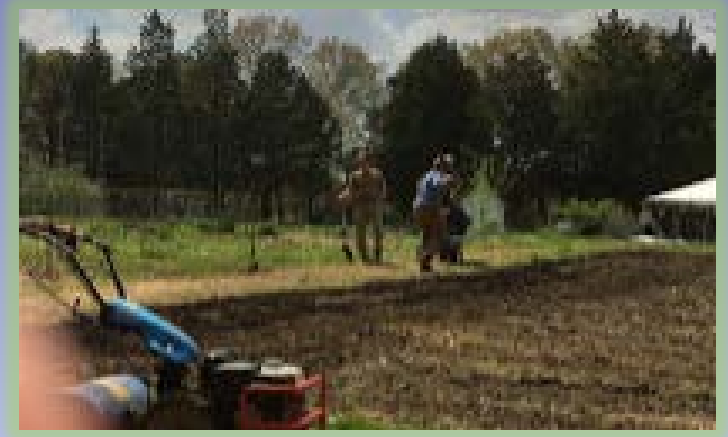


- Used Patton (1990), purposeful (nonrandom) sampling.
- Inclusion criteria: any one who has participated or instructed participants of the veteran farming program.

Methodology

- **Qualitative** methods or interpretive techniques
- **Ethnographic Bounded case study** as described in (Creswell, 1998).
- **Naturalistic** unstructured observer-participant observation, focus group and semi-structured (Yin, 2015).
- **Embodied Practice** or myself as the primary instrument

Sample Demographics



- 21 initial participants
- 14 regular and highly active participants
- 20 observational participants
- 12 questionnaires completed
 - 6 males/ 6 females
 - 8 Army, 2 USMC, 2 Air Force
 - 2 African American, 3 Latino, 7 Caucasian
- 12 participated in the focus group discussion
- 11 completed Interviews

Participant Descriptions

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Branch	Deployments	Community grew up in	Symbol	Challenges
Rob	44	male	Caucasian	Army	AF, AG, IR, HA, SA	Rural	Combat Patch, Unit code of arms	Physical health
Louis	44	Male	Latino	USMC	IR, AG, AF	Urban	Rosary, A ring,	Anger, depression, trust, antisocial
George	54	Male	Caucasian	Army	KR, IR, BA	Suburban	Shot up Berretta, Coin	Loss of leg and part of hand, trust
Keith	47	Male	Caucasian	Airforce	None	Suburban	Uniform	Trust
Brittany	35	Female	African American	Army	AG, IR	Military Base	BDUs, Coin	depression
Selena	43	Female	Caucasian/Latino	USMC	AG	Urban	Idea of Comradery	PTSD, anxiety, back pain
Luz	50	Female	Latino	Army	IR, AG	Urban	Dog Tags, Uniform	PTSD, anger, Panic attacks

IR=Iraq AG= Afghanistan. AF= Africa HA= Haiti SA= South America BA= Bangladesh

Data Analysis

Ethnographic focus Codes

- Acts
- Activities
- Meanings
- Participants
- Relationships
- Settings

Increased dependability by:

- ✓ Maintained an audit trail
- ✓ Member checking
- ✓ Code-recode strategy



Researcher Observations

1. Recognize and celebrate the importance of each others' service
2. Individual use of military emblems
3. Engagement increased as program progressed
4. Dependence on military symbols decreased
5. Strong Comradery
6. Military structure and language was critical
7. Acknowledgment of physical and mental challenges
8. Engagement increased when the instructor was a fellow veteran

Emerging Themes

- **Transitioning**
 - **Transitioning of service**
 - **Transition challenges**
 - **Agriculture as the transitioning tool**
- **Educational programs in the context of veteran experiences**
 - **Educational programs' influence on societal mobility**
 - **Need for veteran influence in educational programs**
- **Identity**
 - **Agricultural programs' influence on identity formation**

Transitioning



Transitioning Subthemes

Transitioning of Service

“More important than an object was the concept of service. It was my job to help people and that is what I was good at. I had a purpose and it was service to others.” (Brittany)

“For me it's company Insignia Ranger Tab and other memorabilia that represents my company that I was in. Definitely represents hard work and service to my country and how I can do this [farm] now.” (Rob)

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

Transitioning Subthemes Cont.

Transition Challenges

“ Besides PTSD,, the biggest challenge has been trying to figure out my own purpose and how to trust civilians.” (Brittany)

“Trusting and organization of civilians is my biggest challenge, veterans’ loose their structure that they are used to.” (Keith)

“My anxiety and PTSD played a major role in me not being able to do well initially in the civilian world.” (Luz)

Agriculture as the transitioning tool

“That's one of the reasons why I'm here. Farming seems to be less of a stress on me. It's kind of weird considering how hard farming can be.” (Luz)

Educational Programs in the Context of Veteran Experiences



Educational Programs in the Context of Veteran Experiences Subthemes

Educational programs influence on Societal Mobility

“This [agricultural educational program] has been that security blanket. The job that I am doing came directly from [program director]. Before, I was kind of more of a recluse in the civilian communities.” (Brittany)

“The picture that comes to mind with [this agricultural educational program] was the weekend that we received our our t-shirts...The pitch fork on the T-shirt has kind of embodied to me, this program. And I think for me the reason that it takes so much meaning again represents hard work and labor. Working with civilians here, I know I can interact with them with more ease.” (Rob)

“I noticed the civilians are starting to see that veterans perform well and that we fit well for the needs in farming. I am not just a veteran with PTSD anymore.” (Luz)

Educational Programs in the Context of Veteran Experiences Subthemes Cont.

Need for veteran influence in Educational Programming

“I am a better person after participating in this program. I don't think I would have participated if it wasn't for the veteran focus, because I would not have shown who I really am and been vulnerable in front of civilians. But the fact that there are veterans here and we are all working towards something very similar makes participation a lot easier.” (Rob)

“Being around other veterans made it possible for me to open up enough to learn material without feeling unsafe. I was not constantly watching my back. I was in an open space, where I could communicate with others that were like me and I had a common language with. I knew no matter what, they would watch my back.” (Luz)

“You know, when we walked in here on the first day there was a huge flag in the room and a lot of patriotic stuff and it just made me think, wow I'm in the right place. Also the Pitchfork on the t-shirt that they gave us and the word veteran, like we are all here and we are all serving our country in a different way now.” (Keith)

Identity



Identity Subtheme

Agricultural Programs' influence on Identity Formation

“The word veteran used to mean, just being someone who served in the military, now (after this program), I think it means being resilient, trustworthy and selfless and serving my country in a different way.... food! What's better than that!” (Brittany)

“Putting on the boots and serving has a whole new meaning to me now. It has gone from work that needed to be done, to more of a service for the community. I want to teach children now about agriculture. This helps with my depression.” (Brittany)

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

Limitations

- Time
- Participant rrecruitment
- Participation
- Researchers veteran status
- Researcher PTSD and traumatic brain injury
- Exclusion of civilian perceptions



Conclusion

A need for educational programs to incorporate:

- Veteran community
- Use military symbols

Critical aspects that are vital to educational programs:

- Changes taking place in individual identities
- Social mobility



Future Research

- Gender
- Race
- Branch of service
- Type of service
 - Rank
 - Position
 - Status
- Type of deployment
- Perceptions from the civilian community

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Questions?

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