An interpretative phenomenological analysis exploring the transition from army to civilian life

Alice Jones

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Abstract

This thesis presents an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) exploring the transition from army to civilian life. The research purpose was to explore the experiences of ex-army personnel of their transition from army to civilian life by building an in-depth picture of each participant's experience of transitioning from the army to civilian life, as well as an understanding of how they felt about their time in the army. The following research questions were used to guide the research, Question 1: How do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life? Question 2: How do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle? Question 3: How do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle? Question 4: How do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life? The thesis addressed three research aims, Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

The three aims were achieved through the use of an IPA approach to the analysis of 9 interviews. Participants were individuals who had served in the army and experienced the transition from army to civilian life first hand. Nine master themes were developed as a result of the analysis. The nine master themes identified were: Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the army, Wellbeing, Civilian lifestyle, Civilian connection, Army life, and Support.

In its unique contribution to knowledge, this thesis builds upon the existing quantitative research on the topic of the transition from army to civilian life creating further depth and understanding. It explores how individuals perceive their transition experience and how they made meaning of this in their reflections. In addition to this, it uses the examination and evaluation of the transition experience to develop an interpretation of how ex-army personnel may be better supported in their transition to civilian life.

Authors Declaration

I declare that the work in this thesis was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Gloucestershire and is original except where indicated by specific reference in the text. No part of the thesis has been submitted as part of any other academic award. The thesis has not been presented to any other education institution in the United Kingdom or overseas.

Any views expressed in the thesis are those of the author and in no way represent those of the University.

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1) Introduction

a) Introduction to the chapter

This chapter provides an introduction to the current research and how the research topic and approach was developed. This includes my decision for undertaking research on the topic of the transition from army to civilian life. Further, my justification for approaching this topic in the manner in which it was, including the use of the qualitative research methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is discussed. This chapter offers a starting point upon which the research was developed, and the aims and objects were created. Following the justification for the research approach which I adopted, there is a discussion of the unique contribution this research offers. The research aims and the three research questions are also presented here. Finally, this chapter will introduce the format of the thesis to help direct the reader through chapters which will follow.

The following section titled 'Reasons for conducting the current research' is a personal account of how I became interested in the topic of the army transition to civilian life. It also includes a brief rationale for the reasons why the research was of importance.

b) Reasons for conducting the current research

Having never had any personal experience of being in the army and no desire to join the army, I became interested in army personnel when I found myself in the company of those who had served and left the army. The one element which specifically caught my attention was the positive and passionate way in which these individuals would talk about the army, and how they knowingly discreetly sought after the military lifestyle even after leaving the army, even though they left under difficult circumstances.

I was fairly new to military research. I had completed a BSc in Psychology and then went on to complete an MSc in Forensic Psychology, but neither programmes of study had presented military research in any depth or as a central topic. At the time that I was considering a research topic, news reports were dominated by stories of soldiers in combat zones as a result of the conflicts erupting overseas in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thus, being surrounded by military news reports and army service leavers, and having little knowledge of what research existed in relation to the army population, I embarked on an exploration of military research to and increase my knowledge base.

Upon investigation of the existing military research, two main things became apparent to me. Firstly, there was a wealth of research which focussed on the mental health of the military population, both while serving in the military and upon leaving the services. Secondly, comparatively there was a wealth of research which emphasised conflict/combat related issues within the military population, ignoring the wider experiences of those who had not encountered hostile environments. Of key interest within the research was the number of studies investigating the transition experience of those returning to their military work or to civilian life in the UK following a tour of Afghanistan and Iraq. This was arguably because of the wars in Iraq in 2003 and Afghanistan in 2001, making it a prominent topic of interest. Due to the nature of this research being a reflection of the issues caused to soldiers as a result of war, there existed a bias towards the negative impact serving in the military can have on mental health, and how this can create challenges for those leaving the military and starting a civilian life. There existed a gap in the research, as was also identified by Brunger, Serrato and Ogden (2013), where the overall transition experience of military personnel leaving the services had been overlooked. This included those who had not experienced combat tours.

Identifying this gap in knowledge led me to become further interested in the experience of those leaving the military, particularly those in the army, due to the personal networks I had with individuals who had served in the army. Furthermore, at the time the British army was facing a restructure whereby numbers of serving personnel were to be reduced (Parliament.uk, 2015), resulting in more individuals being required to transition to civilian life.

The following section will further discuss the justification for choosing the research topic of army transition to civilian life, and will outline why I adopted a certain approach to the research. The research aims and questions influence the methodology which, in turn, impacted on the approach that was taken for analysis.

c) Justification for approach

Research studies with a British military population exploring transitions to civilian life can differ based on which branch of the military (Army, Navy or Royal Air Force [RAF]) the researchers have decided to focus upon. For example, some research has opted to focus specifically on the army (e.g. Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013; Morin, 2011) while others

have chosen to recruit individuals who have served in the Navy (Spiegel & Shultz, 2003), or have focused on a pool of participants from more than one strand of the military (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015; Binks & Cambridge, 2017; Bowes, Ferreira & Henderson, 2018; Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper & Fossey, 2018; Herman & Yarwood, 2014). The current research recruited participants who had specifically had an army career at some point in their lives, regardless of how long their service lasted. There were two main reasons behind this decision. Firstly, to address the research aims which had been identified at the outset, the current study utilised Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology, and as such, required a fairly homogeneous sample where the research questions would be relevant to the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Therefore, the decision was made to choose only one strand of the British Armed Forces. The army was chosen because individuals serving in the army have been suggested to voice the experience of challenges in their transition to civilian life more than those in other strands of the military (Buckman et al, 2012; Iversen et al, 2005a; Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray & Harrison, 2009). Further, I had the means to contact a number of ex-army personnel through their own networks.

As previously noted, IPA was used to address the research aims. This decision was made as IPA lends itself to exploratory research into individual experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is also used to explore transitional experiences that tend to impact on identity, which fit well with the research aims. A fundamental part of IPA is the aim to begin to try and acquire a deep understanding of an individual participant's account of an experience they have encountered, and further, to appreciate how they have made meaning of their experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This methodological approach was an ideal perspective which would complement my interest in the experiences of the transition from army to civilian life and would allow the lived experiences of individuals to be explored.

I also decided that while the participant group had to be reasonably homogeneous, there was no justifiable reason to impose criteria on the group in terms of participant's age, gender, and rank before leaving the army, time spent in the army, tour commitments, reason for leaving, or the time passed since they left the army. The research was concerned with the experiences of those who had served time in the army and had since experienced leaving the army and moved back into civilian life, therefore it was possible in include

individuals who had had very different army experiences as the focus was ultimately on the transition stage. One balance I was keen to ensure was the inclusion of female participants. Females have long supported the UK Armed Forces and in 1941 it became legal to conscript women into the army for employment as opposed to just voluntary roles, and in 1949 the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) was created however, this excluded any combat roles (National Army Museum [NAM], 2020). In 1992, the WRAC was merged with the rest of the army instead of having a separate corps for females, again, combat roles were restricted and females were relegated to support roles and medical positions (NAM, 2020). As of 2018, all roles within the army were available to females including combat roles which were formally male only roles (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2018a). In the year to September 2019, 9.7% of UK regular army personnel were female, and 9% of the total army intake for that year were female (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2019a). For this reason, it was important to represent females in this research to include their experiences.

The previous sections outlined how I became interested in the topic of army transitions to civilian life and discusses the importance of the research study. This includes a rationale for the research and justification of the approach which was taken. The next section will present the aims and questions of the thesis followed by the discussion of how this research is providing a unique contribution to knowledge.

d) Research aims and questions

The research aims and questions were developed to reflect the interpretative and phenomenological approach of IPA. The purpose of the current research was to explore the experiences of ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life. There was a focus on building a rich in-depth picture of each participant's experience of transitioning from the army to civilian life, including considering an understanding of their time in the army. In doing so, this revealed how each individual made sense of their experience and how they adjusted to a new and different life during that time. It also gave light to how they perceived themselves and their identity through that period of their lives, and the support they sought and/or received to help them through the transition. Further, it highlighted how the service leaver felt about the support offered to those who are leaving the army including suggestions of what might have been of more benefit to facilitate their transition.

This aim helps to achieve an original contribution to knowledge in that it explores individual experiences of the transition from military to civilian life. It provides a first-hand account of those who have experienced this transition and explores how they themselves made meaning of the process. Further, it brings the experience of the individual to the forefront considering their personal view of the support provision available to ex-army personnel. This includes the provision provided to the service leaver by the army, and the support facility available in civilian life.

There are three core overarching aims, these were;

Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life.

Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

The three aims were achieved by exploring the experiences of ex-army personnel during the transition from a military into a civilian life, and considering how they adjusted to a new lifestyle during this time. To achieve the three overarching research aims, the following four core research questions were used to guide the research;

Question 1: How do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life?

Question 2: How do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?

Question 3: How do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?

Question 4: How do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life?

The research questions demonstrate the exploratory nature of IPA and are focused on meaning and understanding within specific contexts. They reflect the focus of a detailed exploration of an individual's lived experience. In answering these four research questions through the findings of the research, the research aims can be met.

The aims of the research help to achieve the original contribution to knowledge. The aims will be presented throughout the research to demonstrate how each chapter contributes to achieving them. In addressing the four research questions the research aims will be answered. The research questions and aims are achieved in relation to the participants included in the study and are therefore specific to the unique experience of the individuals. Aim 3 however takes the findings and discussion from the research to develop and interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel based on the current provisions in place and the participant's experience.

The next section presents a discussion of the original contribution to knowledge that this research provides.

e) Contribution to knowledge

This section will outline the original contribution this research makes to the current knowledge in light of available literature. It identifies the rationale for the study and presents the context in which this current research is situated.

Much research investigating the transition from army to civilian life has used quantitative methods (e.g. Buckman *et al*, 2012; Iversen *et al,* 2005a; Iversen, Fear, Ehlers, Hughes, Hull & Earnshaw *et al*, 2008; Kapur *et al,* 2009). These methods have allowed insight into the numbers of ex-army personnel who disclose facing challenges in their transition. This includes the type of challenges they face such as, housing, financial, metal health, along with the number of people accessing support provision. Quantitative research has contributed substantially to the topic of the transition from military to civilian life and forms the basis upon which this current research is built upon.

This current research study used Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the individual's experience of the transition and adjustment to civilian life. This gave insight beyond the demographics and statistics, and built upon the limited qualitative research that is currently available. The purpose of this was to create a rich picture of the individual's experience from army to civilian life to gain a meaningful portrayal of the nuances between each person's transitions and capture the idiosyncratic nature of such an experience. Further, it allowed an exploration of the support provision provided by the army from the service leaver's perspective. Therefore, this research compliments and builds upon the

already existing quantitative research to create further meaning to a complex subject matter.

Furthermore, past military research often over represents the male population. This is because for many years the army mainly consisted of male employees due to restrictions placed upon the roles females could apply for. Similarly, research has focussed on recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Due to the combat purpose of the army and the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, research focussing on these wars was topical and important. However, this current research study recognised the need to include females, as in recent years there have been an increasing number of females joining and leaving the army (Woodward & Winter, 2006). Also, the focus extended beyond those who have been on tour, including ex-army personnel who have never been posted overseas. The understanding gained from this helps identify needs of those experiencing transition from army to civilian life from the individual's perspective and will help highlight the differences and similarities between the transition processes for those leaving the army, regardless of their army experience.

It is important to conduct research into ex-army personnel and transition into civilian life to understand their adjustment and explore how individuals make sense of this experience. With the British Army being regularly restructured (United Kingdom Defence & Security Report, 2013) many people being made redundant (Brooke-Holland, 2013) and Government funding being changed (United Kingdom Defence & Security Report, 2013), regular research with service leavers and serving personnel is of great importance. Research which explores the transition experience of individuals of different ages, who served during different time periods, would begin to identify some of the changes to the army, including the support provision.

As demonstrated by Aim 3, this current research also goes beyond creating a depth to the knowledge surrounding the transition to civilian life to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. This takes the meaning and understanding which has been created through Aim 1: to explore how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, and Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, and uses it in a contribution to the interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel.

This uses the unique lived experiences of individuals to inform practice and improve the provision for ex-army personnel.

In summary, the current research adds further depth and understanding to the quantitative research on the topic of the transition from army to civilian life. It does so by adding detail to the reasons why and how individuals perceive their transition experience in order to examine the experience further. Furthermore, it adds to the current qualitative literature as, based on individual accounts and the challenges faced by the participants, it develops an interpretation of how ex-army personnel may be better supported in their transition to civilian life. The next section presents the thesis structure to assist and guide the reader through the current research.

f) Thesis structure

The next chapter to be presented will be the literature review. The Literature Review discusses relevant literature on the topic of the military and the transition to civilian life and includes pertinent areas of discussion such as military culture and identity, transition and adjustment, and wellbeing. It also outlines the support entitlement for service leavers. Throughout the literature review the researcher has offered interpretation of the research and theory presented, approaching with a critical lens by which to evaluate. The theoretical framework upon which the current research was considered is Goffman's work on Total Institutions (1961) in relation to identity. This chapter will present Goffman's work and provide an evaluation of his ideas using alternative literature.

Following this chapter there will be a discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of the chosen IPA methodology to present the researcher's epistemological and ontological position in the chapter 'Methodology and research design'. This chapter will also then give details of the design, participants, materials, and the procedure of the research. Ethical considerations are discussed throughout this chapter in the sections where are most relevant and applicable. This chapter also includes details of the analytical strategy. The way in which the analysis was approached, and decisions made during the analysis are outlined here, in light of IPA guidelines. This will allow the reader to follow the steps taken during data collection and analysis, and the reasons behind these actions. The final section of this chapter will be the reflexive analysis. This section will reflect on five if the critical incidents that occurred throughout the research process. The five critical incidents are: Critical

Incident 1 – Personal negative perception of the army and the impact of this on my research, Critical incident 2 -Failing to build rapport by giving the role of the 'expert' to the participant, Critical incident 3 – Pre-existing personal relationship with India; the effect of the relationship on the interview, and how the interview changed the relationship, Critical incident 4 – Lack of qualitative research experience and the negative impact this had on the creativity of the current research, Critical incident 5 – Participant 10 withdrawing from my research and how this changed my outlook on conducting the research. This chapter discusses the reflections made by the researcher and considers the researchers role in shaping the research process.

Following the chapter on 'Methodology and research design', the next chapter is the 'Presentation and evaluation of master themes'. This chapter presents the nine master themes which were created following the analysis. The nine master themes are; Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the army, Wellbeing, Civilian Lifestyle, Civilian Connection, Army Life, and Support. Each of the themes is discussed in turn, integrating participant quotes and accompanying analytical narrative. This includes interpretation of the narrative with the incorporation of relevant literature. Discussion of literature has been included in this section to demonstrate how the research supports the interpretations made by the researcher. The master themes will then be discussed in relation to Goffman's Total Institutions (1961).

The next chapter is the 'Discussion' where Aim 1, 2 and 3 will be explored. Aim 1 of the current research: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, and Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life. This chapter begins with a discussion of how the participants in the current research viewed and made meaning of their transition from army to civilian life. This examination is based on the interpretation surrounding the nine master themes. Following this, it then offers suggestion of some of the differences between the participants and the uniqueness of their experiences. This incorporates some of the circumstances upon which they were discharged from the army. Previous literature is incorporated here to indicate how an individual's perception of their

transition experience can be altered depending on the circumstances upon which the individual has left the army.

Following this, Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle is presented is discussed. This section looks at the positive and negative ways that participants in this current research adapted and readjusted during their transition to civilian life. This includes the methods and strategies they adopted to facilitate the change such as the 'get on with it' attitude, coping strategies through the use of alcohol, and the maintenance of civilian connections during service. Interpretation is based on how participants portrayed their identity during transition, including feeling a sense of loss, being unable to reconnect to civilians and a new civilian identity, and the distinct differences between the army culture and civilian culture.

Drawing upon the discussion of master themes, examination in Aim 1 and the exploration in Aim 2, Aim 3 is then presented. Aim 3 is to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. These recommendations include the improvement of the existing Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) Scheme, a 'need testing' provision to find out the most appropriate support for the individual based on their specific requirements, and an after service support system.

Finally, the last chapter is the 'Conclusion'. This presents the key findings of this current research, followed by an evaluation of the utility of the present study for academic and policy/practice communities. The next section will then focus on the evaluation of the study before closing the chapter with suggestions for future research. The 'Conclusion' is the final chapter in the thesis.

2) Literature Review

This chapter will help set the context of the current research, identifying key themes in the area of army transition to civilian life including identity, loss, adjustment and mental health. It provides a basis for the analysis of the interviews in chapter 4 and further creates a foundation to answering the three aims, Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. To achieve this, the research surrounding army transitions to civilian life is presented. In addition, interpretation and evaluation of the literature is provided along with details of the support offered to service leavers. Furthermore, in this chapter the theoretical framework upon which the research will be evaluated is presented. The theoretical framework which has been used is Goffman's (1961) Total Institutions which relates to the relinquishing of one identity and the adoption of a new identity as prescribed by the institution. This chapter consists of the following sections; Introduction to the military transition, Leaving packages and entitlement for service leavers, The military culture and identity, Military transition and adjustment, Wellbeing and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and Goffman's 'Total Institutions' (1961) – a theoretical framework.

a) Introduction to the military transition

Life transitions are an area of considerable research interest, as people experience change and adapt to challenges in everyday life (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). One transition of interest is that from military to civilian life. In recent years, much of the military research has focussed on serving personnel returning from war zones such as Afghanistan and Iraq, with particular emphasis on the negative impact this has had on the individual's mental health, for both serving personnel and service leavers (Brunger *et al*, 2013). Some military research has investigated the transition from military to civilian life and the broader context of these experiences (e.g. Binks & Cambridge, 2017; Brunger *et al*, 2013; Edelmann, 2018). However, with a high number of personnel leaving the army each year (over 15,000 in 2019 [Ministry of Defence (MOD), 2020a]) there is a need to develop further knowledge and explore the transitional experiences of army personnel into civilian life in greater detail.

There are a number of reasons why an individual may choose to join the army, for example, to make a better life for themselves, for excitement and adventure, or to follow in family tradition (Tannock, Burgess, & Moles, 2013). However, some research has found that the decision to join the army could unveil pre-existing vulnerabilities (Iversen, Fear, Simonoff, Hull, Horn, Greenberg, Hotpf, Rona & Wessely, 2007). For example, it has been suggested that problems at home or childhood adversity could lead individuals to join the army to escape home environments (Iversen *et al*, 2007). These pre-existing vulnerabilities have been indicated to potentially contribute to problems when the service member decides to leave the army (Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray & Harrison, 2009). The next section outlines the types of leaving packages and support army personnel are entitled to facilitate their transition into civilian life.

b) Leaving packages and entitlement for service leavers

Over the years, the army have enhanced the support that they offer service leavers to enable them to start their civilian life successfully after leaving the army. Serving personnel are encouraged to undertake transition Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) throughout their service, and this will allow the service leaver to prepare for transition to civilian life at any point in their military career (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020a). This encourages serving personnel to seek knowledge and guidance on the various personal and professional development opportunities the army provides, such as educational courses, and familiarise themselves with the support both the army and partners provide leading up to and after discharge (MOD, 2020a). These activities are undertaken by the service personnel and it is their sole responsibility to immerse themselves in the IPPD process as it is not a compulsory activity, but proactive engagement in IPPD has been suggested to improve the service leaver's resettlement outcomes (MOD, 2020a). The army also have provision to assist the service leaver in their search for housing through the Joint Service Housing Advice Office (JSHAO), where service leavers can be offered advice and also priority on affordable housing schemes (MOD, 2020a).

The army provide extensive advice and assistance to service leavers so that they feel prepared for leaving their military life, regardless of the circumstances by which they are leaving (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2018b). As well as providing their own support through in-house resettlement advisors and the activity outlined above, the MOD have a

resettlement contract with an external body which can provide the service leaver with various support options (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c; 2018b). This is referred to as the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) and provides employment support to all of the British Armed Forces (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c). Service leavers from the army are provided with support at a level which is dependent on their time served in the army (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c). At the one end of the scale, Early Service Leavers (ESL) are classed as those who have served less than four years, and those facing compulsory discharge are entitled to two years employment support through CTP or help with securing future education (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c). On the next scale up, those who have completed between four and six years' service are entitled to the Employment Support Programme (ESP) which includes access to courses, online support and workshops aimed at job skills, and this is available up to one year prior to discharge and two years following discharge (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c). Finally, those with more than six years' service or medically discharged personnel are entitled to the Core Resettlement Programme (CRP) which provides the full array of online employment services along with extensive training and course options, and a dedicated career consultant (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c). This is available two years prior to and two years after discharge (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020c).

Based on the structure provided for the entitlement of support and leaving packages, it is clearly based on a hierarchy of provision. This is dependent on how much time and arguably the amount of energy the service leaver has invested in their army career. Conversely, reviews of the support provided by the army have suggested that Early Service Leavers (ESL; less than 4 years service) are amongst the most vulnerable of those leaving the army (Fossey, 2013). ESLs are suggested to be particularly susceptible to encountering issues when transitioning back to civilian life as a result of pre-service vulnerabilities such as low educational attainment (Fossey, 2013). Despite research arguing that this group being the ones most in need of support, ESLs receive the last entitlement. However, research with ESLs produces mixed findings. For example, Godier, Caddick, Kienan and Fossey (2018) concluded that ESLs reported very few challenges after leaving the army, and they were not likely to engage in the support offered to them. This research however can be evaluated based on the sensitivity of the tools used to assess the vulnerabilities of the ESLs. Further,

the interviews conducted were not with the ESLs themselves, but with external support providers such as Combat Stress. Therefore, the accounts are second hand based on the support provider's experience of ESLs needs and requirements.

As well as employment and housing support, the army boast a plethora of advice and support systems available to service leavers and their families alike, to guide them through their journey both before discharge and after, during their transition to civilian life (see Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b). For example, the UK Government website hosts links to a number of MOD partners and services which provide both guidance and help to service leavers and their families in areas such as finance, pension and compensation, security, welfare and education (GOV.UK, 2020). Further, as outlined in the Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report (2020) across the nation governments are advancing strategies in supporting service leavers in their transition to civilian life and investing in services and roles (such as Liaison Officers) to help army leavers overcome the challenges they face. However, many of the services available to those leaving the army are not compulsory (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b; 2020c), and therefore it is the individual's responsibility to seek out the support they might require and proactively take part in schemes and interests to help their transition into civilian life.

The guidance that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) offers to those leaving the army for civilian life appears substantial and in-depth, according to their Website and the supporting documents. The MOD boasts partnership working to provide service leavers with advice and help in various areas of their life such as housing, finance and employment. It describes supportive provision and indicates they are invested in this on the surface. However, support provision has been adapted and developed over time, which potentially indicates a greater awareness that support is required. Further, there is an awareness that the more time spent serving in the army could result in requirements for extensive support. The only way in which insight can be gained into how the support is experienced by service leavers is by speaking to them and/or their families directly.

The following section will discuss the challenges service leavers may face in relation to identity. This includes how the all-consuming military identity can create challenges during the service leaver's transition into civilian life.

c) The military culture and identity

The military culture and way of living in many ways can impact identity, and in turn this can influence the challenges each individual faces when leaving the military. Research has concluded that the transition from military to civilian life is a positive experience for many and adjustment comes with only few challenges for the majority (Dandeker, Wessely, Iversen & Ross, 2003; Zinn, 2010). This has been suggested to result from the 'distance' a serving member can have from the military culture (Zinn, 2010). For example, those who serve in military but continue to be connected with civilian culture and not completely absorbed by military identity find adjusting to a civilian life without the military less challenging, in comparison to those who identify with the all-consuming military identity (Zinn, 2010). This suggests there may be different levels by which an individual will connect with the army culture and lifestyle. On the one hand, serving personal may live their life solely through the army, adopting their values and beliefs as their own. On the other hand, an individual may associate with the military on a superficial level, maintaining their former identity and their connection to civilian life. Consideration must be given here to where the research into military transition experiences has been sanctioned. For example, the research by Dandeker *et al* (2003), which suggests that the majority of service leavers have a positive transition back into civilian life, was sanctioned by the Academic Department of Military Mental Health (ADMMH) at King's College London which is funded by the MOD. It is likely then that the positive representation of MOD will be at the forefront of the objectives of this research, along with showcasing the benefits and effectiveness of MOD support processes. There are arguably many benefits to joining the military, and there are undoubtedly a number of provisions in place to facilitate the service leaver. However, evaluation of military research must be mindful of where the research was authorised and be critical of the underlying objectives and agenda.

The military has long been suggested to be a greedy institution, placing high demands on its members and expecting a high level of sacrifice (Segal, 1986; Vuga & Juvan, 2013). Serving in the military requires far more from the individual in comparison to the majority of civilian jobs, and expects a high degree of identification, participation and devotion to the military life and culture (Vuga & Juvan, 2013). Research has found that as soon as individuals begin their army training, they are required to surrender themselves to the military way of life and

create a new identity which is representative of the regiment they now belong to, and adopt the military way of living (Lloyd-Jones, 2018). All recruits are expected to adhere to a strict routine and hierarchy, facing disciplinary action for deviating from the army's uncompromising procedures, and thus the individual creates an all-consuming military identity (Lloyd-Jones, 2018). Further, this identity is based on a shared sense of belonging where serving personnel experience a perception of collective membership and team bonding with their colleagues (Lloyd-Jones, 2018), and research has found that the military uniform helps to reinforce this identity and the feeling of being part of a new 'in' group, while civilians become the 'out' group (Brunger, Serrrato & Ogden, 2013).

Conversely however, research has found that those who view their association with the army as 'just a job' tended to internalise the military identity less and created less of a bond to military life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This tended to be the case for those whose military work role mirrored civilian work roles such as those in administrative roles (Binks & Cambridge, 2018).This being said, the divide between military culture and civilian culture is vast and many serving personnel can often struggle to balance the conflict between these two identities (Demers, 2011), meaning the most dominant and demanding identity often comes to the forefront (Michel, 2011). Further, Woodward and Jenkings (2011) have suggested that where certain military job roles are similar to civilian roles, such as an engineer, the serving personnel will emphasise how the skill and knowledge is unique to the military in the way it is applied and the setting in which it is applied, which further expresses the gap between the military and civilian life.

A large part of the military identity is also suggested to be characterised by deep emotional connections between other military personnel, with many solders referring to their friends and colleagues as family (Woodward & Jenkings, 2011). Separation from civilian friends and family is part of the military lifestyle, and an element which can cause adverse affects to both the soldier's family and the soldier themselves (Pye & Simpson, 2017). As the separation is reinforced by the introduction of strict military culture, the group identity relating to the army is strengthened (Binks & Cambridge, 2016) resulting in stronger connections to military colleagues. This research however does not account for how or why some serving personnel are able to maintain healthy civilian connections, and why others do not. This suggests that aside from the group identity created by the military culture, there

are different factors with may contribute to the connections serving personnel make in the army, such as increased communication from the civilian families of the soldiers (O'Neal, Lucier-Green, Duncan, Mallette, Arnold & Mancini, 2018).

One theory which has long been associated with the connections between serving personnel and the military culture is that of institutionalisation. In his original work on institutions and mental health, Goffman (1961) referred to what he termed 'total institutions'. Total institutions were defined as places of work and residence which are removed from mainstream society, where likeminded people live a similar formally administered way of life together. Within total institutions it is suggested that individuals are stripped of their former identity in order to re-socialise them into a formal, presubscribed, uniform and hierarchical culture (Goffman, 1961). The idea of service personnel being institutionalised is one such hypothesis which is used to explain why some service leavers fail to seek support during their transition to civilian life. The intensity and rigidity of military life moulds individuals so that as a consequence they lack a sense of agency and the ability to negotiate novel complex tasks (Kiernan, Moran & Hill, 2016).

The hypothesis of service leavers being institutionalised by the military could be argued however to be overly simplistic, particularly when investigating the challenges service leavers face upon returning to civilian life. By suggesting the problems service leavers may face lie intrinsically within themselves and attributing the blame to the military institution, this overlooks the possibility that issues may exist within the services which are available to service leavers (Kiernan *et al*, 2016). Further, by prescribing service leavers a stereotype by which to approach their needs and requirements, this provides a model for those assessing and treating the individual (Smith, 1978). Thus, creating a mental short-cut which would facilitate the prioritisation of medical resources and direct attention to where the professionals assume it is required (Smith, 1978). The process of seeking help and the activities which are part of day to day living in a civilian lifestyle can be inherently complicated for any individual. The challenges of living within a civilian society are not exclusively experienced by service leavers but can become issues for any civilian. Service leavers have the added complication of being removed from their civilian lifestyle, to certain varying degrees, for a period of time, however many of the barriers they experience are not unique to service leavers.

d) Military transition and adjustment

Research exploring individual experiences of the transition into civilian family life has noted a number of common challenges that the service leaver faces, particularly after spending a considerable time in the army. For example, when returning to a family life, the service leaver's role within the family will often change, and they may take on different and more responsibilities as a family member (Bowling & Sherman, 2008; Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid & Weiss, 2008). This change has been found to make service leavers feel they do not fit into civilian lifestyle due to experiencing a sense of inadequacy at home in comparison to the sense of significance felt in the army (Bowling & Sherman, 2008).They may also experience becoming overwhelmed by the changes in responsibility and no longer know where they 'fit in' (Bowling & Sherman, 2008). Further, research has indicated that some service members express finding it increasingly difficult and struggle to communicate their emotions and needs to those around them upon returning to civilian life (Faber *et al*, 2008). However, this is not the case for all service leavers. Research has suggested that some ex-military personnel described becoming closer to their family members, particularly their parents, who provide emotional and sometimes financial support (Worthen, Moos & Ahern, 2012). This may indicate that reintegration into a civilian family role may depend on the family structure and set up, including which members of the family play the main support role for the service leaver, and what role the service leaver is expected to fit into. For example, parents of the service leaver are more likely to identify when the service leaver is facing issues in either transition, and consequently are better able to assist them in finding appropriate support (Worthen *et al*, 2012). As a result of this, service leavers who live with civilian parents during their transition may create closer bonds with them as they become the support system.

When leaving the army behind, research has found that some service leavers experience a great sense of loss (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015; Brunger *et al*, 2013). The feeling of loss is suggested to be a result of losing the structure and the routine that army life offers, in comparison to civilian life (Ahern *et al,* 2015). Also, service leavers have expressed feeling a loss of purpose particularly if they struggle to gain civilian employment (Ahern *et al,* 2015). When in the army there are strict rules and structure where it is made clear what is expected of recruits from the very beginning of their service

through training and unambiguous instructions (Lloyd-Jones, 2018). However, having returned to civilian life, service leavers are faced with having to make their own decisions and working in jobs which may not utilise their full skill set, leaving them feeling as though they are not contributing to life in a meaningful way (Ahern *et al,* 2015). Thus, research has suggested that the military should help service leavers by translating their skills and qualifications into something that is recognised and accepted in the civilian workplace (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper & Fossey, 2018). This would make it easier therefore for civilian employers to see the potential of the service leaver and their transferrable skills (Cooper *et al*, 2018).

The feeling of losing purpose, and feeling as though they no longer contribute to life in a meaningful way could be explained as a result of the service leaver continuing their military values and lifestyles through into civilian life as a way of holding onto their military past (Brunger *et al*, 2013). For some service leavers in transition, they seek to replace what they feel they have lost in the army and see civilian life through a military lens (Grimell, 2016). Higate (2008) suggests that some service leavers seek employment that is similar to their military employment within the civilian setting. This can cause problems for service leavers as they cannot move through their transition, instead being stuck in their past military life (Brunger *et al*, 2013). However, some service leavers view their military values and experience as something which they can build upon, and they recognise that the transition to civilian life is a long process which takes time, and these individuals express facing fewer challenges in their transition to civilian life (Brunger *et al*, 2013).

Moving from a military life into civilian life has been described by some service leavers as going back to normal; however this could depend on when they joined the army and their circumstances. Upon returning to civilian life some service leavers find that not only have they themselves changed, but civilian life has changed also, and this can lead individuals to feel disconnected from civilian life and family (Ahern *et al,* 2015). Bergman, Burdett and Greenberg (2014) describe the transition from military to civilian life as a reverse culture shock where the service leaver is returning to their parent culture after a prolonged exposure to a new culture. Reverse culture shock is argued to relate to the psychological and socio-cultural adaption of the individual (Presbitero, 2016). Feeling a high sense of reverse culture shock is associated with difficulties in establishing a sense of identity,

difficulties coping with day to day social activities, and difficulties adapting to a new cultural environment (Presbitero, 2016).

The reverse culture shock is suggested to be a staged process similar to the model of culture shock. In the culture shock model, Bergman *et al* (2014) suggest new military recruits pass through the five stages of; Honeymoon, Disintegration, Reintegration, Autonomy and Reciprocal Interdependence where eventually they understand and can switch between the two cultures and identity (Bergman *et al,* 2014). Not all of Bergman *et al's* (2014) stages of culture would be relevant to reverse culture shock however. The first stage of culture shock termed 'Honeymoon' describes the initial excitement or anticipation of something new (Bergman *et al,* 2014). This is linked to the ability to begin new challenges or pursue ambition, such as a recruit joining the army (Bergman *et al,* 2014). This specific stage however would not always be relevant for a model of reverse culture shock, as it cannot account for individuals who feel negative about leaving the army and whose initial transition is characterised by dread and sadness. For example, Gordon, Burnell and Wilson (2020) found that some service leavers who were 'forced out' of the army (due to retirement or medical reasons) longed to remain serving and were disappointed at having to leave. This indicates that a model of reverse culture shock based on the culture shock model may not be appropriate for all service leavers and that individual circumstance may influence the way in which the stages are experienced. Further, these types of models present a linear progression through each of the stages, but this is likely a simplistic representation of what is a complex experience for individuals, characterised by many idiosyncratic differences.

There are elements of the model which may also be relevant. For example, the second stage of disintegration is where the individual recognises the differences in the new culture and find the unfamiliarity distressing (Bergman *et al,* 2014). Research has suggested that when service leavers are experiencing distress in response to the loss of their military life and the unfamiliarity of civilian life, they may turn to alcohol as a way to try and create new bonds (Brunger *et al*, 2013). Alcohol use is a large part of military culture and represents a bond between individuals and a way of connecting with others (Fear *et al,* 2010). Thus, where the service leaver feels alienated, they are likely to turn to something familiar to them as a way of making new social bonds (Brunger *et al*, 2013).

For some service leavers adjustment is to civilian life is hindered as a result of ineffective coping strategies. Research has suggested those who feel the civilian identity has been forced upon them face becoming stuck in a middle stage between cultures and identities (Herman & Yarwood, 2014). In an attempt to cope with this, service leavers try to take back or reclaim their past by pursuing similar employment or continuing certain practices such as fitness regimes (Herman & Yarwood, 2014). Further, coping strategies taught or encouraged in the military are maladaptive or unhelpful when adapting to civilian life (Cox, Grand-Clement, Galai, Flint & Hall, 2018), such as reluctance to express private thoughts or emotions (Davies, 2014). Conversely however, other strategies encouraged in the military such as resilience, problem solving and determination to persevere when encountering adversity, are suggest to facilitate transition (Cox *et al*, 2018). Looking critically, it may not be the type of coping strategy being implemented that is the issue for some service leavers, rather the problems arise due to the situations in which they are adopted. In some circumstances, the inability to adapt can affect wellbeing and mental health. This will be discussed in the following section.

e) Wellbeing and mental health

The Ministry of Defence suggests that they recognise and promote a healthy lifestyle for their personnel. They claim to be dedicated to protecting serving personnel's wellbeing as they understand that metal health problems are common and often concealed. Between April 2019 and March 2020, the second most common reason for an army serving member to be discharged or downgraded was due to poor mental health (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020d). Implemented in 2019, the Optimising Human Performance through Stress Management and Resilience Training (OPSMART) programme was imposed to deliver metal health training to personnel (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2019d). This demonstrates that the army communicate good intentions in response to the challenges serving personnel may face when in the army. Despite displaying a recognition of the importance of personnel's wellbeing and illustrating a proactive response to mental health, army personnel still face challenges during their service and when transitioning into civilian life.

Organisational socialisation is a theory which proposes an individual within a new employment experiences a process whereby they learn the values, knowledge and skills which are needed within their new role (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Organisational socialisation

has also been referred to as *onboarding,* and this explains the processes where individuals become organisational insiders, and learn how to be successful in their new role (Bauer & Erdogan, 2011). One study with new British Army recruits concluded that the process of organisational socialisation happens within a matter of weeks (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). During this time, new recruits expectations and social knowledge adapts and develops substantially (Thomas & Anderson, 1998). This demonstrates that the time it takes new recruits to adjust to their new organisation, i.e. the British Army, is limited. One interpretation of this is due to the intense nature of the first 14 week training period new recruits embark on. With little to no contact with the outside world during this time, the army becomes all consuming; therefore the new recruit begins to create bonds relatively quickly, connecting with the organisational socialisation.

The time it takes a new recruit to become organisationally socialised is critical when considering the experience of individuals who are termed Early Service Leavers (ESL). Before 2011, ESLs received very limited support, with the perception that resettlement support was reserved for service leavers who had earned it (Fossey, 2013). In 2011 there was a review of the support services offered to ESLs, and as a consequence the MOD implemented transition support for ESLs under the CTP (Godier, Caddick, Kiernan & Fossey, 2018). Despite receiving the minimal support available, previous research has suggested ESLs are a group who are particularly vulnerable to experiencing problematic challenges during transition to civilian life (Ashcroft, 2014; Buckman *et al*., 2013). For example, ESLs have been found to be more likely to report metal health issues during their transition, such as the display of PTSD symptoms and alcohol abuse (Buckman *et al*., 2013). Similarly, due to leaving the army early, there is the suggestion that these individuals may not have had the time to acquire the valuable skills and qualification which would be useful when seeking new civilian employment (Godier *et al*, 2018). Conversely however, literature has also refuted the claim that ESLs are vulnerable to experiencing problems during transition, finding instead that they report few concerns and do not request additional support (Godier *et al*, 2018).

Evaluating the literature on ESLs and the challenges they face during transition, there are alternative explanations which would help explain the findings presented. Firstly, the measures and tools used to identify the vulnerabilities being assessed should be questioned for their accuracy and their sensitivity. Further, the respondents may report not accessing

additional support, not because they do not require it, but because of barriers such as the stigma surrounding help seeking for mental health issues. It is suggested that ESLs are a specific unique group of individuals who require a particular set of support provisions (Godier *et al*, 2018). Not all ESLs however experience the same challenges during their transition to civilian life. It is also not always clear whether the challenges experienced by ESLs are a result of pre-service, during service or post-service factors (Buckman *et al*., 2013). Therefore, having a blanket approach to providing support for ESL would not be useful, given the variety of challenges facing ESL and the individual factors influencing these issues.

Although being in the military is often characterised by excitement and adventure, there also exists an element of risk, undesirable conditions and sometimes danger (Tannock, Burgess & Moles, 2013). Similarly, where serving personnel are part of active tours there is a risk of experiencing physical injury (Jackson, Foster, Fries & Jeffery, 2014) and mental health issues such as depression and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of exposure to trauma (Finnegan, Finnegan, Thomas, Deahl, Simpson & Ashford, 2014). Research has found that some soldiers suffer depressive symptoms which are specific to being in the military and are akin to a depressive adjustment reaction, such as emotional rigidity, anger or violence, denial of pain, and exaggerated self-criticism (Finnegan *et al,* 2014). Even among those UK army personnel who did not show signs of mental health issues, some disclosed seeking help for stress or family/relationship problems (Jones, Twardzicki, Ferout, Jackson & Greenberg, 2013). Mental health issues in service leavers have been found to hinder the individual's successful transition to civilian life and create more challenges and barriers when trying to adjust (Pranger, Murphy & Thompson, 2009). Specifically, research has suggested that those suffering from PTSD and substance use disorders will find integration into civilian life difficult and may experience a sense of disconnect from their families (Pease, Billera & Gerard, 2016). Potentially, the increase and development of service leaver's support over the years indicates recognition that poor mental health can hinder the individual's successful transition to civilian life. The army demonstrates that it understands that this is increasingly a potential issue and that they have an obligation to support personnel.

A study with UK army personnel found that among those screening positive for mental health issues, in this case common mental disorder, PTSD, and alcohol abuse, just under half

had not sought any help or support of any kind (Jones, Twardzicki, Ferout, Jackson & Greenberg, 2013). This has been suggested to be a result of stigma associated with help seeking (Jones *et al*, 2013), along with the fear of negative consequences such as being demoted or medically discharged (Finnegan *et al,* 2014). However, official Ministry of Defence (MOD) statistics revealed that only a very small proportion (33%) of the 1,043 British Army personnel medically discharged in the year April 2018 to March 2019 were released for mental and behavioural disorders (2020d). Similarly, research has also found that British army recruits acknowledge and praise the army for the health benefits it has on individuals such as, financial security, a sense of belonging, physical fitness, stability, educational opportunities, and excellent medical care (Finnegan, Finnegan, McGee, Srinivasan & Simpson, 2011). The development of better provision could reflect the changing culture which surrounds mental health and wellbeing within the UK society, with help seeking becoming more accepted and provision readily available. However, the reluctance of service leavers to seek help and take the support which is on offer might reflect a wider army ethos. Such as the value it places in being resilient and not expressing emotions or feelings.

f) Goffman's 'Total Institutions' (1961) – a theoretical framework

In 1961, Erving Goffman published his work titled 'Asylums: Essays on the Social Situation of Mental Patients and Other Inmates'. The focus of this work was the social processes which occur within institutions, more specifically; within establishments Goffman termed 'total institutions'. Total institutions are defined as 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life' (Goffman, 1961). As suggested by the title of Goffmans 1961 work, he focussed on the medical institutions and mental health in the first instance. He recognised that the majority of research which evaluated patients within mental health facilities was primarily taken from the single viewpoint of the medical professional/clinician. Goffman was critical of psychiatry and identified himself as a structuralist; therefore his work was less focussed on mental illness per se, and was more concerned with the social processes within various contexts (Goffman & Helmreich, 2007). In this sense, Goffmans theory of total institutions was not limited or

restricted to only medical contexts, and within his work he discusses military compounds, boarding schools and prisons.

A core element of the theory of total institutions is the way in which the individual's identity is formed. Before entering the institution, individuals have a distinct sense of self, and an idea of who they consider themselves to be. Upon entering the new institution, the mechanisms and structure which once supported the ideologies of self are now removed. Thus begins the purposeful 'stripping' of the identity; the rejection of anything or anyone the individual previously associated themselves with. To facilitate this break and the leaving behind of previous identity, total institutions are by nature insular and constrained, and will create a physical barrier between the individual and the outside world. In life outside of the institution, the roles and identities held by a person can coexist and assist one another. Conversely, total institutions will block the progression and performance of all other roles and identities aside from those associated, valued or assumed by that specific institution. Further, particularly at the beginning stage of entering the institution, individuals are prohibited from any outside contact and this is to establish the dispossession of their previous identity. In cases where the individual has chosen to join the institution voluntarily, the process of the detachment from their previous life begins before the individual enters the institution as the identity/life associated with the institution is desired.

Each institution is time and culture specific, and supplies its members a complete world for them to live in. They all have predetermined values, and an all encompassing culture. The barrier that total institutions create between the individual and the outside world do not just exist theoretically with regards to beliefs and principles, but also physically in the form of locked doors, tall walls and security measures to keep individuals in. This is perhaps most notable in prisons and army barracks, where barbed wire is commonly used on perimeter fencing likely with the dual purpose of keeping people in as well as out. The distinction Goffman makes between total institutions and general society is the fact that it more common than not to 'work, sleep and play' in different locations, with different people, under a variety of different circumstances without a rigid plan. However, total institutions remove the separation between these three elements of existence. Firstly, all activities are carried out under the same management/rules and in the same location; secondly, all daily activities are completed alongside a large group of others, all of these members are treated

the same, individuality is removed and they are expected to complete the same tasks; thirdly, all activities are heavily structured, timetabled, uniform, enforced and scrutinised. Finally, with this structure in place, all activity is subsequently leading to one common goal and ultimately creates a shared group identity. Although this description is not exhaustive specification of all institutions, Goffman recognises that these are all shared characteristics which help provide a representation of total institutions. Goffman also suggests that a common experience of the patients or inmates within the institution is a distinct lack of power within their social situation, and a learned heightened sense of deference as a mechanism for survival and success (Goffman & Helmreich. 2007). In this respect, Goffman terms the infantilization of individuals and the diminished responsibility that is sustained as a result of being a member of the overtly hierarchical institution. This being said, Goffman does acknowledge the role of the individual in the development of their identity, albeit in a limited capacity, where individuals may show resistance to a particular regime or demonstrate adaptation to the programme (Goffman, 1961).

Goffman argues that there are five categories of institution. First of all there are places specifically created for those who are unable to look after themselves and who do not pose a threat. Secondly, there are institutions such as hospitals for mental health for those unable to care for themselves but who may pose a threat to themselves or the community. A third institution is for the purpose of protecting the community from harm, such as prisons. The forth type of institution is created for work tasks and are argued to be of benefit to the organisation such as army barracks. Finally, there are institutions designed for religious training and retreat. These five different group types are suggested as a starting point for discussion and are not absolute final categories success (Goffman & Helmreich. 2007). However, critically evaluating these categories, it could be argued that they create an over simplistic view of total intuitions and present them as distinct separate entities. Although the culture and context which encapsulates each institution may be disparate, ultimately the ideology surrounding the total intuition as described above is shared. Therefore there is likely to be great overlap between the institutions and the way in which they operate. Furthermore, the degree to which each establishment can associate with being a ‘total institution’ can lie on a continuum with some being more ‘open’ than others.

Again, in this respect groups or categories are unhelpful as they restrict any flexibility within the institution, for example, different categories of prison or rewards for good behaviour.

Goffman's theory of Total Institutions has been evaluated by practitioners and academics over the years, with some suggesting alternative theories. In 1989, Davies conducted a review of Goffman's theory of Total Institutions taking into account previous work which had attempted to adopt the theory in their own research. Davies recognised the value of Goffman's work in providing clear descriptions of the nature of total institutions, and by offering clear distinctions between modern day living and total institutions Goffman had created a valuable tool for researchers. However, Davies argues that the way in which the total institutions are presented gives the misleading impression of a homogenous group of organisations. She suggests that while there are common characteristics which distinguish a total institution, a blanket approach is unhelpful due to the variance between institutions. Although Davies does credit Goffman in recognising that there is likely to be considerable variation within institutions, she proposes that more detail of the intricacies within different institutions would be useful. Furthermore, using research exploring ethnicity and religion Davies demonstrates how Goffman's theory of Total Institutions is overly bureaucratic and negative with too much of a focus on the oppression of the individual. This does not necessarily account for institutions which are voluntary, informal or familial authority.

In an attempt to strengthen the work by Goffman and provide a theory which would build upon some of the weaknesses outlined, Davies recommended incorporating Coser's theory of Greedy Institutions (1974). Similar to total institutions, greedy institutions demand loyalty and compliance from individuals and seek to eliminate competing demands (Mayer, 1975). The core difference between these two types of institutions is in Coser's theory, greedy institutions require total commitment and this is voluntary in its nature, whereas total institutions require total residence. These two theories overlap and can demonstrate either end of the scale; on the one hand there are the total institutions demonstrating forced regimes, coercion and locked doors where individuals are kept against their will (e.g. prisons), and at the other end of the scale there are retreats where members willingly join and comply with open doors (e.g. religious retreats) (Davies, 1989). Institutions in the middle of these two extremes then would represent an overlap between the two theories. Critically, both theories provide a platform upon which identity can be observed, most

notably, the detachment from one identity for the purpose of adopting another. The degree to which either theory is accepted or utilised should depend upon the institution being observed.

In 2010, Scott revisited Goffman's work on total institutions and introduced the concept of Reinventive Institutions. She presents the idea that due to societal and cultural developments throughout the 20th century, institutions which could be considered greedy institutions became popular. For example, therapeutic and spiritual retreats, rehabilitation centres and clinics all designed to reinvent the individual became more accepted, even fashionable. Thus, participants of these institutions often see themselves as consumers of a product and are fully committed and compliant with the programme before them. The distinction Scott makes between Goffman's theory and what she calls Reinventive Institutions is the willingness of participants to remove their previous identity in search of improvement, as opposed to feeling a sense of loss at having been forced to let go of the old identity. Thus, instead of trying to hold onto old roles and becoming defensive or defiant in doing so, individuals will embrace the change (Throsby, 2008).

Scott (2010) emphasises that where participation is voluntary, conformity is maintained where individuals internalise the prescribed values and norms of the society. This is done through discipline by authority and through the social interactions between one another. The interactions within these institutions seek to reinforce the new identity through exchanges with like-minded people who also strive for the empowerment and conversion of self the institution provides. In 2005, Lukes considered the concept of an individual's willingness to conform and the impact of this on power. He argues that power or authority over another is most effective when the participant is willing. Lukes also warns against disregarding the individual's agency, and argues that although the societal reinvention may prescribe accepted cultural norms, the individual will create their own meaning of these and interpret them in a way beneficial to themselves. In this respect, agency should not be overlooked in discussing Goffman's Total Institutions, as it is likely to be present in varying degrees.

In his observations, Goffman also recognised the importance of the social interactions between individuals in shaping identity, as well as the interactions from the institution authority. He called these interactions the Interaction Order (Goffman, 1983). Interaction

Orders are defined by Goffman as the regulations, norms and assumptions which are used by members of the same group i.e. those within an institution to inform their social interactions with one another. They are time and place specific, and allow individuals to make sense of their interactions through common shared practices (Duck & Kiefer, 2019). This Interaction Order helps to enhance the power within the institution, and thus any input or interventions made by those outside of the institution become insignificant (Duck & Kiefer, 2019).

In her discussion of Total Institutions, Scott (2010) emphasises the importance of the Interaction Order in conjunction with the power and authority. She termed this Performative Regulation. Performative Regulation presents an idea of the way in which power operates within institutions in both a hierarchical manner, and horizontally through peers. Individuals both submit to authority and monitor one another through their interactions. This provides a motivation, group cohesion, and a new shared identity which is created interactively. Each individual will demonstrate role identification and communicate obedience to their peers, and these performances will create an emergent team impression of conformity (Goffman, 1959), thus demonstrating the collective interactive identity development.

In conclusion, Goffman's theory of Total Institutions (1961) provides a framework for the suppression or abandonment of one identity for the sole purpose of creating a new one under strict regulations. Goffman's work has been subject to criticism. His ideas have been suggested to be overly negative with a disproportionate focus on oppression. Similarly, although he alludes to variation within institutions, the details of these differences are inadequate. Finally, focussing his observations mainly within the medical profession, Goffman's suggestions have sometimes been misinterpreted by researchers and applied to areas which may not benefit from the Total Institution concept without critical evaluation. That being said, Goffman provides a standard set of criteria or characteristics which can be used to define and represent total institutions. A key element of these being, the strict daily routine distinguished by the institutions culture and the physical barrier between the members and the outside world. Although within Goffman's theory there exists an emphasis on the enforcement of rules and values from authority, his concept of Interaction Order also demonstrates the acknowledgment of the role of the individual and peer interaction in the

development of identity. Through social interaction with other members illustrating shared practices and obedience, the identity as prescribed by the institution is reinforced. Thus indicating the important role of each individual in implementing the norms of the institution to which they belong.

Since Goffman's work, there has been a cultural shift within modern society towards what is considered a more voluntary institutionalisation. Scott (2010) termed these Reinventive Institutions where individuals demonstrate agency in their decision to change or alter their identity. The core feature of Reinventive Institutions is empowerment as opposed to oppression of members. Further, Scott (2010) suggested an alternative form of power she termed Performative Regulation, where individuals conform to the rules set by the institution, but also help to administer and reinforce them through peer scrutiny. By presenting their own conformity and their own interpretation of the institutions values, individuals encourage the mutual participation of their peers. In essence, both total institutions and reinventive institutions possess a degree of coercion and agency; however these will be displayed to varying degrees depending on the circumstance and the type of institution.

Goffman's work on Total Institutions will provide the theoretical framework upon which the current research will be evaluated upon. Based on Goffman's defining elements of total institutions the military, specifically the army, is one such institution which could be considered as encompassing the same characteristics. For example, one key feature of total institutions is the physical barriers which encapsulate the institution and the members within. Army personnel are provided with living quarters within a barracks which is specifically for serving members, and sometimes their families. Similarly, army facilities remain behind a secure compound which is monitored and guarded 24 hours a day. In addition to this, in the first 14 weeks of the serving personnel's career, they go through an intense training regime where they are required to remain within the institution with little to no contact with the outside world. During this time they live every minute under the order and authority of the institution. For some serving personnel, contact with the civilian society can be limited and throughout the individual's career, the institution will dictate to the individual their daily routine including when they can leave the army camp. There remains a strict all consuming culture which surrounds the army which instructs its austere

rules, regulations, values and regime. In this respect, the army can be considered a total institution.

There are however elements of the army institution which may be voluntary and arguably reinventive in nature. For example, the British Armed Forces no longer have the authority to force individuals to serve as they once did in the past. Therefore, the decision to join the army is not a result of coercion from the institution itself. Similarly, although contacted to set number of years serving personnel are able to request to leave the army at any time should they so wish, albeit with a long notice period and potential financial consequences. One selling point of the army's recruitment promotion is the opportunity for individuals to 'be the best'; serve the country; learn a new trade and skills; and generally improve oneself. Evaluating this is light of Goffman's (1961) Total Institutions and Scott's (2010) Reinventive Institutions, these factors lend themselves to the latter theory. In this respect, the army clearly demonstrates how total institutions can contain varying degrees of both coercion and voluntarism, and only the individual's unique circumstances can denote the interplay between these two components.

g) Literature review summary

The literature review chapter has set the context of the current research by presenting the literature surrounding the topic of the transition from military to civilian life. Further it also discusses the theoretical framework upon which the current research was evaluated. The theoretical framework was identity based on Goffman's work on Total Institutions (1961). This chapter began by discussing the importance of the research which encompasses the military transition. With many individuals both joining and leaving the military regularly for a variety of reasons, it is important to explore the nature of these experiences and the impact the transitions have on the serving personnel and service leavers.

This chapter also presents details of the current support provision which is provided by the army. The army provide all service leavers with the option of guidance or support regardless of how many years they have served in the army. However, the level and detail of the support provided is solely dependent on the number of years the individual has served. For example, those who have been in the army longer are entitled to a more thorough and

holistic range of support services, whereas those termed ‘early service leavers’ completing less than four years service receive the most basic package of support provision available. This demonstrates that not only does the army recognise the need and their responsibility to provide its leavers with support to facilitate their transition, but they also implement a hierarchical support system. This suggests a perception that those who have been in the army for a longer period of time are either more entitled to provision, or more in need of provision to help in their transition to civilian life. Evaluating such support is vital to ensure individuals are receiving the provision they require at a level and intensity to meet their needs. Thus, forming the justification upon which the three current research aims have been created. Firstly, the aim to examine how ex-army personnel have perceived their transition experience, secondly, to explore how ex-army personnel may adjust to a civilian lifestyle, and finally, the aim to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support service leavers.

The basis, upon which the need to provide support in the transition from army to civilian life has been recognised, is demonstrated in the research surrounding the topic area. This chapter has further provided details on how previous research has approached the topic, and how researchers have evaluated ex-army personnel’s adjustment during their transition to civilian life which directly relates to Aim 2 of the current research which is to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle. For example, one area of interest which receives much research attention is the military culture and its associated identity. The army is argued to be a greedy institution which demands a great deal of energy and sacrifice from recruits (Segal, 1986; Vuga & Juvan, 2013). The army presents a culture and a way of life which can be all consuming for recruits as they adhere to a strict routine and hierarchy (Lloyd-Jones, 2018). The recruits form a military identity which helps to create a group belonging. Further, they create deep emotional bonds with their fellow army colleagues and peers viewing them as family (Woodward & Jenkings, 2011). This creates a difficulty for the service leaver who essentially has to abandon their previous life and identity to enable them to create a new civilian sense of being.

The research presented here has found that for many, the transition from army to civilian life is characterised by a sense of loss (Ahern *et al*, 2015; Brunger *et al*, 2013), a struggle to fit in with civilians (Bowling & Sherman, 2008), and difficulties with communicating and

expressing themselves effectively to civilians (Faber *et al*, 2008). These challenges can create further barriers for service leavers, not least of all in the task of finding new employment. Mental health issues within the military and ex-military population are also well documented as a result of the trauma which can be experienced whilst serving in the military (Finnegan *et al,* 2014).

The theoretical framework upon which the current research has been considered is strongly embedded in the concept of identity. Thus, Goffmans work on Total Institutions (1961) has also been discussed and evaluated. Goffman proposes the idea of institutions where members are forcefully separated from mainstream society and stripped of their former identity. Behind locked doors these individuals develop a new prescribed identity based on the values and expectations of the institution. In his work Goffman recognises that institutions differ between one another and there also exists a variance within on the degree to which the institution is forced or voluntary. Further, institutions vary in the amount they prescribe or adopt the characteristics of total institutions set out by Goffman. In the evaluation of Goffmans work, Scott's theory of Reinventive Institutions (2010) was also discussed. Reinventive Institutions acknowledge the voluntary and empowering nature of some institutions based on the societal shift towards self improvement. In this respect individuals welcome the removal of previous identities for the purpose of enhancement. The discussion of Goffmans work on identity will underpin the evaluation throughout this current research as the army can be considered a total institution to a certain degree.

The challenges faced by service leavers, as discussed in the literature presented in this chapter, can all influence the three aims of the current research study. The previous literature delivers a basis upon which the current research develops and adds to. It does so by presenting interpretation of rich in-depth personal accounts of those who have experienced the transition from army to civilian life. It also expands upon this by using the insight to develop an in interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel in their transition to civilian life, achieving Aim 3.

The next chapter is the 'Methodology and research design'. This will present the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, followed by the research design including the analytical strategy, ending with the reflexive analysis.

3) Methodology and data collection

a) Introduction to the chapter

This chapter will present the methodological approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which was used to address the current research aim and research aims. Specifically, the core assumptions which inform the epistemology of IPA is based are discussed along with possible ontological positions. The sections of this chapter include a brief introduction to IPA and the key benefits of IPA as an approach to research. Following this the theoretical underpinnings of IPA will be presented which will outline the researcher's ontological and epistemological approach to the research. These points will be summarised to present the researcher's position as one plausible interpretation of the approach.

This chapter then goes on to remind the audience of the research aim and aims, and present details of the method which was undertaken in the current research study to achieve these. The sections are as follows; Design, Participants, Materials, Procedure and Analytical strategy. Ethical considerations will be discussed throughout in the subsections to which they relate. The design section will present the way in which the data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and why this was of benefit to the research. Following this the participant section will outline how the participants were recruited and who they were. Included here will be justification of why participants were suitable for the current research and information will be given of the interviews which were removed from the study. The materials required to carry out the research is presented after this. The procedure then outlines the interview process, beginning from contacting the participants through to follow up contact to ensure participants received their transcript prior to analysis. The analytical strategy which the researcher used to approach the analysis of the data is presented, outlining the step by step process. Although presented in this way, the analytical strategy was not always a linear process, and in practice is was a more cyclical process. Finally, the Reflexive Analysis is presented. This highlights specific critical incidents through the research process which helped shape the research including key decisions made during interviews. To begin this chapter, an introduction to IPA is presented

b) Introduction to Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a relatively new approach to qualitative research, designed by Jonathan Smith in the 1990s. It is an accessible approach to research which lends itself to the study of individual experiences and has gained great popularity, particularly in the health discipline (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008). Part of its attraction is its dynamic and flexible qualities which allow researchers to have a degree of freedom and control within their research, which is particularly valuable when conducting research into experiences that can differ considerably from one person to the next. However, it is useful to explore and understand the methodological framework and theoretical underpinnings to indicate how IPA can be a powerful and rigorous analytical tool (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). IPA is a methodology rather than a method of analysis, which means it is a perspective and approach to conducting research (Grix, 2002). With the approach there are preferred methods for data collection and for analysis of data, and these are all underpinned by IPA's focus on understanding a person's lived experience (Grix, 2002; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Although there is overlap between IPAs approach and other qualitative approaches to research, there are certain unique characteristics of the methodology and these will be discussed further.

c) Methodological theory - IPA and Phenomenology

A core assumption which forms the basis of the epistemology of IPA research is Phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of an individual's experience (Smith, 2011). Here, there is a focus on what it is like to be human, specifically with reference to things which are of importance to individuals, alongside understanding the significance and meaning of an experience to that person (Willig, 2012). It recognises individual experience as embedded within context, culture, and with the individual's overall relationship with the world. Further, phenomenology focuses on the understanding of different individual perspectives, and how people make meaning of lived experiences (Smith, 2011).

A key philosopher concerned with phenomenology is Husserl. Husserl was focussed on how an individual might accurately perceive their experiences and have in-depth knowledge of their own experience of a phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2015). He suggests that to begin to achieve this, individuals must consider their 'natural

attitude' in situations; their thoughts, values and existing preconceptions, and attempt to 'bracket' these. By putting these aside, we can begin to thoroughly examine our everyday experiences. Bracketing forms an important part of the IPA research process, as it is part of the researcher's responsibility to attempt to 'bracket' their own beliefs and feelings about the research subject in a bid to approach the data and data collection with an open mind (Tufford & Newman, 2010). This is not to say that the researcher should forget about their own assumptions, however, as within Phenomenology the notion of inter-subjectivity is of great importance (Willig, 2012). In this sense, the researcher must be aware of their own assumptions and consider the ways in which these may affect the process of understanding and meaning making throughout the research process. This practice of being aware of one's own assumptions means the researcher can become more flexible in their thinking, and challenge any previously held assumptions throughout the interpretation and analysis of data.

A student of Husserl, Heidegger, developed the phenomenological concepts of 'intersubjectivity' and 'person in context' which are of particular importance within IPA research. These concepts aim to explain how our experiences are bound by context, and how our interactions with the world are related and relational (Oxley, 2016). With this, Heidegger argues that our interactions are always perspectival and therefore, interpretation of an individual's meaning making is essential to phenomenological enquiry (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Thus, IPA is interpretivist in its nature, striving to understand the individual's interpretation of their experiences, which are context specific and subjective. In this respect, IPA has some grounding in the ontology of critical realism, where knowledge is seen to be bound by social and cultural context and is influenced by human interaction (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, this approach still strives to uncover a true reality, which is not the aim of the research or of IPA. Instead, IPA emphasises the focus of experience and the need to try and understand how participants make meaning of this (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Oxley (2016) argues that experiences can never be value free and are linked to our previous experiences, knowledge and beliefs, making them subjective. In this respect, our social reality is a product of our social interactions and cannot be objective.

d) Methodological theory - IPA and Hermeneutics

The idea that our social reality is constructed through our interactions suggests the researcher themselves has a role in the way individuals interpret their experiences, and this lends itself to a more relativist ontological viewpoint. In the attempts to understand others' perspectives of lived experiences, IPA recognises that this requires a great degree of interpretation, and this is what is termed 'hermeneutics'. In this the researcher can get to know the participants and understand their experience by analysing or interpreting what they have said. This includes looking at the 'part' (e.g. the word, the single extract) in an attempt to understand the 'whole' (e.g. the sentence, the complete text), and viewing what is being said within its wider context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Researchers can never really know what it is like to be that individual, but they can begin to understand through the text (i.e. the transcript) and psychological interpretation (Willig, 2012). This is why when conducting IPA research, it is important to fully engage with the transcript; trying to see and consider as many points of view as possible. There is considered to be a double hermeneutic within IPA research; this is where the participant is trying to interpret and make sense of their world, and the researcher in turn is trying to understand the participants making sense of their world (Smith, 2011; Smith & Osborn, 2008).

When conducting research with a phenomenological underpinning it is important to consider the level of interpretation the researcher will engage in (Eatough & Smith, 2008). According to Smith (2004) the researcher can engage in two types of interpretation. Firstly, the researcher can have an empathy centred hermeneutic where there is a focus on the recollection of meaning (Smith, 2004). The focus here is on what is actually presented in the data, and interpretation simply elaborates on the meaning presented in the data (Willig, 2012). Here, there is a need to understand the data from the participant's viewpoint, without using interpretation from outside concepts (Willig, 2012). Conversely, a researcher can be suspicious in their interpretation, taking a critical view point and suggest interpretations which the participant themselves may not be able to recognise (Smith, 2004). Thus, what the participant has said is viewed as a clue to deeper more significant meaning, and it is the role of the researcher to look further into the data to find a hidden meaning (Willig, 2012). It is, however more common in IPA research to adopt the former empathic hermeneutic initially during the early stages of analysis, and then use a critical

suspicious eye to evaluate the claims for a more complete interpretation of data later on in the analysis process (Smith, 2004).

e) Methodological theory - IPA and Idiography

The final main theoretical influence on IPA is idiography, which has two elements. Firstly, IPA focuses on the 'particular', meaning a great deal of detail and depth is required when analysing (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The second element relates to IPA's commitment to understanding an individual's or a specific group of people's experience from their perspective, within a specific context. The aim here is to try and know a lot about a little, as opposed to quantitative methods where it is more common to need to know a little about a lot (Smith, 2011]. This commitment to idiography means that generally, sample sizes in IPA research are relatively small. Further, IPA research generally involves the use of a purposive sample to find a homogenous group who have experienced a similar event, and where the research questions will bear some relevance (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

During the process of analysis the researcher is expected to move through the cases inductively in turn, treating them singularly to get as much detail and depth as possible, before moving to look across cases for convergence and divergence (Smith, 2004; Smith, 2011). This approach embraces the idiographic nature of IPA. This does mean that any conclusions drawn from IPA research can only apply to the small homogenous group taking part in the research (Smith, 2004), and is constrained by the time and context which the experience took place (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This being said, using a phenomenological, interpretative, and idiographic approach allows researchers to delve deeper into personal experience, in the hope of drawing a meaningful analysis of findings which may resonate with others (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

When analysing each case in turn, it is important for the researcher to take an inductive approach by closely engaging with the data (Smith, 2004). In this case, any inferences made must come from the data, and not from a previously formed hypothesis (Smith, 2004). There will however be a balance between the inductive and deductive approach to data as the researcher progresses through the interpretation due to the interrogative nature of IPA

(Smith, 2004). IPA is concerned with the psychological centre surrounding human experiences, and therefore it is necessary after the initial inductive interpretation, to access literature in an attempt to apply a psychological interpretation (Smith, 2004). Thus, relating to and making a contribution to previous literature.

f) IPA methodological theory summary

The current research was informed by a relativist ontological stance and a phenomenological epistemological position, which underpins the IPA methodology, and thus informed the research methods chosen for this research. The research was concerned with lived experiences of ex-army personnel, as individuals, during the transition from military to civilian life and how they made meaning of their experiences. The researcher recognises that the participants' experiences were bound by context and time. The researcher acknowledged their beliefs and values of the topic and used bracketing in an attempt to accurately interpret the participants' experiences. In light of the philosophical underpinnings, it is acknowledged that the analysis presented here is one plausible interpretation bound by time and context.

g) Research questions and aims

The purpose of the current research was to explore the experiences of ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life.

The three research aims were;

Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life.

Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

This three aims were addressed by exploring the experiences of ex-army personnel during the transition from a military into a civilian life, and exploring how they adjusted to a new lifestyle during this time. From the overarching aims, four primary research questions were initially developed for the current research. The research questions were as follows;

Question 1: How do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life?

Question 2: How do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?

Question 3: How do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?

Question 4: How do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life?

The research questions demonstrate the exploratory nature of IPA presented earlier in this chapter. They are also focused on how individuals make meaning of their circumstances and create an understanding within specific contexts. Further, they demonstrate the need for a detailed exploration of an individual's lived experience.

h) Participants

A purposive sample of 9 participants were recruited using a snowball strategy to take part in the research. A summary of participant details can be found in Table 1. Selection criterion did not restrict participants on age, gender, rank before leaving the army, time spent in the army, tour commitments, reason for leaving, or the time passed since they left the army. The only criterion enforced was that the participants had to have been in the British Army and had to have now left the forces; this was decided for a number of reasons. Each branch of the Armed Forces have distinct differences in their roles and responsibilities (Ministry of Defence, 2014), and therefore differences have been noted in the challenges each group faces during their transition from military to a civilian lifestyle (Buckman *et al*, 2012; Iversen *et al*, 2005a; Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray & Harrison, 2009). Thus, it was necessary to focus on one homogeneous group for this research, so the experiences and perspectives of a select few people could be explored in-depth.

The use of a homogenous sample also fits with the design of IPA research. Given that it was not within the research focus to recruit participants based on their age, rank etc, it was essential to acknowledge the differences between the Armed Forces, and how these may impinge on the research data creating less of a homogenous group, and divergent data. The British Army was chosen because these individuals have been suggested to voice experience

of challenges in transition (Buckman *et al*, 2012; Iversen *et al*, 2005a; Kapur, While, Blatchley, Bray & Harrison, 2009). Although the aim of the research was not to look specifically at the challenges participants faced during transition, there may be an indication in this current research as to why, in previous research, the ex-army personnel have presented more issues during transition. Moreover, the researcher had a personal interest in the British Army specifically and had a network of contacts which could be utilised in recruiting participants.

The number of interviews conducted for this research was based on guidelines provided by Smith and colleagues (e.g. Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). They propose between 3 and 6 participant interviews for IPA research, with the possibility of extending this for larger projects, or indeed reducing depending on the Research Aims. Given the size of this research project, it was decided that 10 participant interviews would be sufficient, with the option to adjust this depending on the richness of the data and the detail coming out during the interview (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In many qualitative studies saturation is also taken into consideration when interviews are transcribed. Where the same information was being repeated, it was presumed that the topic was nearing saturation (Bowen, 2008). However, saturation is not a consideration within IPA research due to the focus on unique experiences embracing an idiographic approach. Instead, where the researcher felt they had achieved a level of understanding towards the aim, and had a coherent story complete with the nuances of individual experience, only then was data collection complete (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In total, 13 people were contacted to take part in the research, and from these 11 proceeded to interview. Of the 11 interviews conducted, 2 interviews had to be removed.

The interview data from Participant 5 and participant 10 was removed from the study. Participant 5 gave full consent for the use of his data; however, it became apparent during interview that he did not meet the research participant criteria outlined in the participant information sheet (Appendix A). The aims and criteria had been explained to participant 5 and he agreed he understood what participation would involve. When interviewing began, participant 5 noted he was part of the Marines as opposed to the army. Given that the Marines and the Army are different Services with distinct identities (Moore, 2011), the researcher decided to discard interview 5.

Participant 10 completed their interview through Skype, which was a provision measure due to their distance from the interviewer. On completion of the interview, participant 10 requested a copy of their transcript and after removing several lines of transcript, later decided to withdraw from the study. This was requested by email and the reason given was due to not wanting such personal information in the public domain, where they believed they might be identified. Accordingly, the interview was removed from the data set.

Table 1. Participant demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Time in service	Transcript requested	Reason for leaving	Interview length
1. Alpha	M	37	5yrs	N	Medical discharge	38 mins
2. India	F	26	5yrs	N	Medical discharge	1 hour 9 mins
3. Bravo	M	49	17.5yrs	Y	Personal	2 hours 10 mins
4. Charlie	M	44	13yrs	Y	Personal	55 mins
5. N/A	M	N/A	N/A	N	N/A	N/A
6.Mike	M	45	6yrs	N	Personal	23mins
7. Oscar	M	69	22yrs	Y	End of service	1 hour 5 mins
8. Juliet	F	46	11yrs	Y	Personal	32 mins
9. Romeo	M	67	30yrs	N	End of service	1 hour 30 mins
10.N/A	F	N/A	N/A	Y	N/A	N/A
11. Victor	M	42	8yrs	Y	Personal	38 mins

i) Method of data collection

This research utilised an IPA methodology. Individual, semi-structured interviews are the most prominent method of data collection within this approach as they allow the researcher to gain insight into the participant's lived experience (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This interview format is flexible, permitting the researcher to adapt their questions and questioning style to suit the participant and the flow of the conversation (Langdridge, 2004). The format also provided space for the interviewer to explore areas of interest as they arise and for the participant to lead the discussion (Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008), while still allowing the researcher to direct the interview if it goes off track (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A semi-structured format lends itself to the social constructionist view of interviews being a process of exploration; a chance for the interviewer to delve into how the participant is making meaning of the research topic and the construction of their reality (Qu & Dumay, 2011). In this respect, semi-structured interviews lend themselves to phenomenology and the focus on individual experience. The interview is thus the construction site for the participant to begin to make meaning of their experiences through the interaction with the researcher (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This method of data collection allowed the participants to explore meaning and reflect upon their experience of their transition from army to civilian life. In this respect, it facilitates the achievement of the three aims in examining how participants perceived their transition, exploring how they adjusted during that time and gaining insight into the support process they entered, including their feelings about the provision provided.

It is important for any research interview to consider issues surrounding sensitivity and the relationship between the researcher and participant (Corbin & Morse, 2003). By maintaining an informal air about the interview, the researcher attempted to build rapport with the participant in the hope of encouraging them to share more about their experiences (Willig, 2012). Similarly, this helped the participant feel more comfortable in talking about topics which are sensitive, private and personal to them, especially when the researcher worked at the beginning of the interview to develop a strong rapport with the participant**.** Thus, interviews were an effective data collection technique for this research which delved deeply into sensitive topics, such as transition experiences, and explored the subject area in rich detail. Discussing military experiences with ex-army personnel can be emotive for the

participant for a number of reasons. For example, they may have left the army due to unforeseen circumstances, and/or they could be experiencing several physical, mental and social conditions as a result of their service (Banks & Albertson, 2018). Therefore, semi-structured interviews were the most fitting method of data collection.

Before carrying out this research, permission had to be granted by the University of Gloucestershire's Research Ethics Sub-Committee (RESC). Alongside this, a thorough risk assessment was conducted. The main concerns of the risk assessment focussed on the safety of the researcher and the participant when talking about topics which had the potential to be sensitive in nature. Not only could it have been distressing for the participant to relive negative experiences they had had in the army and during transition, but the researcher could also have found listening to and coding such accounts distressing for themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

To develop the interview schedule which would facilitate the interviews, a preliminary literature search enabled the identification of key topic areas that were relevant to the broader research questions (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The interview questions were further developed using the criteria suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013), further supported by Robson (2002). For example, questions were short and unbiased, and the researcher avoided leading questions with unfamiliar jargon (Robson, 2002). The sequence of the interview sought to flow logically, with an opening section to build rapport and a closing section to signal the conclusion of the interview. Therefore the interviews followed the sequence of; introduction, warm up, main body, cool off, and closure (Robson, 2002). The questions were also checked for face validity to ensure they were measuring what was intended and to ask if they looked right in the context of the topic (Robson, 2002). The final research interview schedule was further reviewed by the research supervisors to confirm its appropriateness for the task (Appendix C).

The first interview conducted with Alpha was used as a pilot interview. Alpha volunteered himself to take part in the research after hearing about it from the researcher during a presentation. Alpha's interview would gauge the appropriateness of the questions in the interview schedule, and indicate whether the interview schedule required revisions, and enlighten any other issues with the data collection process. Upon completion of Alpha's interview, the researcher reflected upon it with initial thoughts and feelings. Following this,

a meeting was arranged with all research supervisors to discuss the interview and whether materials needed to be adapted for the succeeding interviews. Very minor amendments were made as detailed below, thus, it was decided due to the only minimal additions made, that Alpha's interview would be included as a main part of the interview data and analysed as such.

As previously stated, following this first interview, the interview schedule was reviewed to ascertain whether the questions were eliciting an appropriate response (Smith & Osborn, 2008). Here, it was not the aim to remove any questions, but to add to the schedule with prompts or questions in areas which could be discussed further in the upcoming interviews. Based on the pilot interview one question was added to the schedule. The question tapped into something which was discussed with the first participant which was seen as important to the research questions. The question that was added was: *can you tell me about the time leading up to you leaving the army?* (Appendix C for Interview Schedule).

To record the first three interviews, a Dictaphone was used which displayed the time and length of the interview, and had a download function and playback for ease during transcription. Using a Dictaphone allowed the researcher to playback the interviews a number of times and allowed good quality recording which is vital for such research (Al-Yateem, 2012). During the third interview the recording device failed, and therefore the decision was made to use two Dictaphones to record the remainder of the interviews.

Initial contact with potential participants was made through the researcher's own contacts, and then further participants were identified through snowballing. This is where the researcher identified an initial network of contacts who fit the research criteria and invited them to become research participants (Geddes, Parker & Scott, 2017). Then, the willing participants from this group were asked to suggest potential other individuals who may be suitable for participation (Geddes, Parker & Scott, 2017). In turn, these participants then recommend other potential participants.

Participants were required to provide the researcher with an email address so that the *participant information sheet* (Appendix A) could be sent to them to read. If the participant then agreed to take part in the research, a mutually convenient time and place was agreed. For all participants this was arranged via email, apart from Oscar who preferred

arrangements to be made by phone call. Oscar provided his landline number which was called by the researcher using a withheld number. At no point was a contact telephone number given out to participants for researcher safety reasons.

Given the potential sensitive nature of the research topic and the way in which the research was to be carried out; the safety of the researcher was also an important issue that required consideration. The location of the interviews had to be thought through carefully. Participants would need to be comfortable in their surroundings, with privacy, little noise and interruption, and where both researcher and participant would be safe (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It was decided to give the options of conducting the interview at the University of Gloucestershire, in their own home, or in a different suitable convenient place which they would feel comfortable. This final option was given due to the fact that some participants may prefer to meet away from their home for privacy reasons but would not feel comfortable attending a University. Therefore, this option allowed the participants to suggest an alternative location. Out of the 9 final interviews, 3 were conducted at the University of Gloucestershire, and 6 were conducted at the participant's home. Interviews were conducted between the dates July 2014 and June 2015.

Although a time frame of 40 minutes to an hour was given for the interview, it was made clear to the participants that the interview would last as long as they wanted it to. If they felt they had a great deal they wanted to talk about, they were not restricted to a time limit. Similarly, if they had very little to say, it was entirely their choice what they decided to talk about and all information was deemed important to the research. There was variance in the length of the interviews as can be seen in Table 1 above.

Of the three participants attending their interview at the university, 2 used the university car park charged at £1.50. Therefore, the researcher reimbursed those 2 participants with the £1.50 they had paid. This was decided due to the time, effort and money the participants had spent on attending the interview at the University.

Upon meeting with the participants time was spent reiterating the information they had received in the *Participant information sheet*, and details of the researcher's background leading up to the research was provided. For example, it was explained to the participants that although the researcher themselves did not have personal experience of being in the

Army, they have friends and family who were in the Army and had left, and therefore had a vested interest in the topic. This assisted in building rapport with the participants and indicated a degree of understanding on the researcher's part, as to the experience the participant had gone through. Up until this point, all participants were reminded in every contact made that they could ask questions about the research or withdraw from it, up until 2 weeks after they received the transcribed interview. At this point, the research would have obligations and deadlines making it difficult to remove the participant's data from the research.

Before beginning the interview, the participants were given the *Participant consent form* (Appendix B) to read again and were asked if they had any questions. After discussion of any questions, they completed and signed the consent form. In the consent form, participants were asked if they would like to receive a copy of their transcribed interview. The purpose of this was to ensure they were happy with the content prior to analysis. They were given the option to omit anything that on reflection, they felt uncomfortable sharing.

Although this was asked at the consent stage of the interview, the researcher realised that the participants tended to change their minds about receiving a copy of the transcript after the interview. Therefore, the researcher asked both before and after the interview. Five participants asked to see a copy of their interview. Where possible this was given face to face to ensure the anonymity of the participant, and to protect their unedited data. On one occasion it was necessary to send the transcript by email under a password protected file, and on two occasions the transcript was posted through the participant's door with their permission. This was due to the complexities of arranging another meeting. The two participants receiving the transcript face to face were required to sign a form confirming they had received it, and the other three were required to email the researcher to confirm they had received it (Appendix E).

To ensure participants were protected throughout the research process, guidelines provided by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2009) were followed. As previously discussed, participants were given full details about the research, its aims and what participation would involve to allow them to make an informed decision about taking part and to allow them to provide full consent. It was made clear to them that steps would be taken to keep data anonymous. This was done by omitting names, place names and any data which may

make them identifiable, and ensuring data could not be traced back to the participant. There were limits to the confidentiality that could be maintained and this was clearly outlined to participants. Data could be accessed by the supervisors and selected pseudonymised interview quotes would be included in the written analysis to demonstrate a particular theme or point being made. Written work would be accessible to examiners, fellow University staff and students and potentially the public, including in papers available within the academic community. Throughout the research, documents were password protected and stored securely, and participant names/identity were kept separate to the data and pseudonyms.

The interviews were recorded using digital voice recording equipment. These devices were placed on a table between the research and the participant; this intention was explained to the participant beforehand (Smith & Osborn, 2008). All participants agreed to the voice recorder being used for the interview. The recording equipment was only turned on and off with the participants permission, thus before the interview started the participant was asked if they were ready to begin. Similarly, at the end of the interview, participants were asked if they had spoken about everything they had wanted to and then the recorder was turned off. The use of the voice recorder in this way was to ensure the participant felt in control of the interview and was made aware of when the beginning and the end of the interview was, and when they were being recorded.

The participant's state was monitored throughout the interview; both through verbal and non-verbal communication (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). In the event of a participant becoming distressed during the interview, it was decided that the participant would be given options. For example; to stop the interview, to move onto another topic of conversation within the interview, to move onto another topic but return to the matter causing distress later in the interview, or to continue with the interview e.g. Allmark *et al,* 2009, Smith & Osborn, 2008. Furthermore, towards the end of the interview a 'closing' section was introduced to take the focus of the interview away from the more in-depth questions (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

At the end of the interview, participants were thanked for their time and given a debrief form to take away and keep (Appendix D). The researcher also explained that there was contact information on the form should they feel they need to be in touch about anything.

Some participants then had further questions regarding the use of the research and the researcher's academic background, which were answered to help close the interview.

With 6 out of the 9 participants opting to conduct their interview at home, the researcher was aware that they might come across some situations which may hinder the interview, and this may be out of the researcher's control (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In a University setting it is easier for the researcher to control aspects such as noise, interruptions, and anonymity. Whereas in a participant's home, this is completely out of the researcher's control, and sometimes out of the participant's control also. These issues became apparent in some of the interviews and will be discussed further. As the researcher was going to be off University property when conducting some interviews, it was important to think about the researcher's own safety. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013) a 'safety buddy' system was utilised, where the researcher contacted their 'buddy' before and after the data collection to ensure they were safe.

During Bravo's first interview there was a family member present. They were aware of what Bravo was doing and asked if they should leave. The researcher said that although it was preferable to conduct the interview in private, it was Bravo's choice. Bravo opted to keep the family member there. Unfortunately, there was an issue with the recording device for this interview, and although the interview took place, no data had been recorded. Bravo agreed to do the interview again on a separate occasion. During the second interview only the researcher and Bravo was present. Bravo spoke about things not previously talked about in the first interview, which could have been as a result of the interview being conducted in private. Similarly, the first interview could have acted as a prompt to otherwise forgotten memories, or as a reinforcement for the rapport and trust between the researcher and participant (Willig, 2008). Thus, encouraging more depth to the accounts given.

j) Analytical strategy

As previously stated, an integral element of IPA is the attempt to gain a deep understanding of a participant's account and to appreciate the complex meaning of what is being said (Smith & Osborn, 2008). For this to be achieved it is necessary for the researcher to engage with the transcripts using interpretation to learn about the participant's experiences, where sometimes meaning can be less than clear (Smith, 2011). These are shared principles which

underpin the analytic approach in all IPA research, and influence the researcher's process of analysis, for example first concentrating on the 'particular' and descriptive, moving through to the 'shared' and interpretative (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This approach to analysis helps to maintain the idiographic nature of IPA (by dealing with each case separately) whilst also considering the shared nature of experiences through a systematic and in-depth process (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Although the complexity of meanings and experience is not ignored, the complexity of the data is reduced by using a step by step guide through analysis (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). This guide through analysis it not a set process all must follow, but a flexible set of suggestions developed by Smith and colleagues to advise on how an IPA analysis can be approached based on what has worked for them (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith & Osborn, 2008). It is for this reason that the guidelines provided by Smith and Osborn (2008), along with those discussed in Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) were utilised in the present research. Both sets of guidelines are closely related and can be mapped onto each other. Together, they provide a more comprehensive guide to be utilised, where the analytic method can be transparent. Although presented as a step by step process, the analysis was not as linear as this would suggest. The researcher moved through these stages however regularly moved back and forth through the steps to reflect on the analysis. The steps taken in analysis were as follows:

i) Step 1: Transcription of the data

The researcher transcribed each interview soon after they took place while they were fresh in the interviewer's mind. Although nonverbal communication was not analysed as a separate data set in this research, it was considered an important element in understanding the meaning making process for the participant (Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013). Therefore, transcribing the interviews soon after the interview took place meant that any nonverbal communication could be noted and taken into consideration.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher using the guidance by Braun and Clarke (2013) as a rough outline. The recording was played via the Dictaphone and no additional transcribing tools were used, so the researcher could begin to get to know the data.

ii) Step 2: Familiarisation (via immersion in the data – transcribing, reading, and listening)

For the first stage of the analysis, the researcher read over the transcript a number of times (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Jarman & Osborn, 1999) to further familiarise oneself with the content (Smith, 2004; Smith, flowers & Larkin, 2005; Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher became immersed in the data, focussing on the flow of the interview, recognising each stage of the interview from the rapport building to the closing of the interview (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). This phase was not about breaking down the transcript into component parts, but was about putting the individual participant at the centre, and the researcher engaged with the content to produce a full picture of the participant's story (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Therefore, at this stage, the audio copy of the transcript was listened to whilst reading through to maintain the 'realness' of the data (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014), and to pick up any voice intonation which might help the interpretation. As researchers, it is inevitable at this stage that ideas of interpretation and interesting elements of the interview will come to mind. As a result, separate notes of initial ideas were kept and put aside for later inspection so that the researcher's first thoughts and perceptions were documented (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

iii) Step 3: Initial coding

The initial coding element of analysis can be seen as an extension of the first stage, where further familiarity with the script is developed, and the first comments are written (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Here, there are no strict guidelines on what or how the notes are written, only the intention to produce detailed and extensive comments on the text (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). As with step 1 the researcher had more than just comments about the transcript, and therefore it was important to make notes of any reflections and ideas of importance alongside the initial coding (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014).

There were three distinct elements of the initial exploratory coding which helped guide the comments that were developed in this stage of analysis (Braun & Clark, 2013). Firstly there were descriptive comments. These were words or phrases which were of some importance to the participant, and comments included a description of what is said, or simply just single

words that held some meaning (Braun & Clark, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). A second type of noting which was utilised was the use of linguistic comments. This involved looking at the way the participant used language and words to demonstrate their experience and impose meaning; this was for example, through the use of metaphors, repetition, pronoun use, as well as elements such as pausing and tone of voice (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The third method of coding used was conceptual comments and involved more of an interpretative focus where the meaning of the speech was considered (Smith, 2004). There was an element of interrogation here, where the researcher questioned and suggested possible meanings based firmly on what was being said (Smith, 2004). This level of interpretation relied on the researcher using their own experiences and knowledge to impart meaning onto the text, however, the key element with conceptual comments was their closeness to the text (Smith, 2004). Any interpretation at this stage was traceable from descriptive/ linguistic comments through to conceptual comments (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005).

These were not the only comments made (Smith & Osborn, 2008). There are no strict rules about what should be commented upon in this stage, therefore, anything of interest was noted, including similarities, contradictions, and patterns when moving through the transcript. It was the plan to write these initial comments in the left-hand margin of the transcript, however due to the richness of the data and the volume of initial thoughts, the whole document (left and right margin) was annotated (Appendix F).

iv) Step 4: Development of emergent themes

At this stage the focus shifted from the transcript to the exploratory comments made in step 3, where the researcher now attempted to condense the initial comments into succinct phrases which summed up the content and the importance of the initial comments (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The aim was to ensure that the interpretation stayed grounded in the initial comments, and the emergent theme echoed the essence of the exploratory comments to display an understanding. Although there was closeness between the comments and the themes, there was also an element of psychological importance here as the researcher interpreted the comments in terms of what the participant said, but also in terms of what was of psychological interest, or from an alternative point of view. Therefore, analysing the participant's experiences at this stage required a double interpretative

position; firstly with an empathic stance, and secondly through a suspicious lens (Braun & Clark, 2013; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The empathic interpretation meant the researcher stood in the participant's position and saw the experiences being discussed from the participant's perspective. The suspicious or critical interpretation saw the data from an alternative perspective and instead of standing as the participant the researcher stood alongside them and questioned why the participant was making sense of their experiences in a certain way, and tried to search for potential assumptions which may underpin their expressions. Throughout this stage the researcher attempted to maintain a middle ground position, using both empathy and suspicion to capture a full and thorough understanding of the data (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). However, upon reflection, the lens more prominent throughout was the critical lens, where the researcher was often asking themselves why the participant was expressing themselves a certain way. This is likely due to the relationship the researcher had with the topic and their own feelings towards the army. This is explored further in the Reflexive Analysis chapter.

Further, there was repetition of themes throughout the transcript, and the number of themes differed throughout depending on the richness of data and the initial exploratory comments (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The emergent themes were written in a separate document as this felt more accessible to the researcher (Appendix G).

It must be noted that at this stage, some of the initial coding was not used and taken into the emergent themes. This was because a small number of the initial comments had very little bearing on the research topic and were simply minor observations of little or no importance. For example, Bravo's interview became descriptive at times and occasionally moved off topic. Where these instances were of importance or interest, the comments were maintained, however where these occurrences bore no relation to the topic, they were dropped.

v) Step 5: Connecting emergent themes

Working from the transcripts, the researcher listed the emergent themes in chronological order. The researcher sought to make connections between the themes and understand how they could fit together to demonstrate the most important elements in the participant's story (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Emergent themes were literally

rearranged/cut and grouped together electronically into a table which captured the clustering (Appendix H). Once superordinate headings had been decided upon for each clustered group of emergent themes, these were then represented in the table alongside the emergent themes to clearly show the superordinate themes for the participant. Although there were clear connections between many of the emergent themes, this was not the case for all emergent themes across all participants. In these circumstances the groupings were re-evaluated and revisited.

Three methods were used to cluster the emergent themes: abstraction, polarisation and subsumption. Abstraction involved identifying emergent themes which were very similar, grouping these together and developing a new superordinate theme title for the group (Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Polarisation allowed differences in themes to be grouped. For example one theme focused on positive mental health and wellbeing, and another theme had a more negative feel about this (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Using subsumption, an emergent theme itself became the label for the superordinate theme to enable a number of other emergent themes to sit within in (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). All emergent themes were clustered and fed into a superordinate theme; none were dropped at this stage.

vi) Step 6: Moving to the next participant

After completing stages 2 to 5 for one participant it was then necessary to then repeat these steps with the next case. It was important for the researcher to set aside the ideas and emergent themes from the preceding participants (as can be seen in Appendix G) so that they could capture the idiographic nature of IPA in the analysis, and treat each case on its own merit (Smith, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). The researcher tried not to be too influenced by the previous cases, but instead focus on the transcript at an inductive level.

vii) Step 7: Looking for patterns across cases

Once the researcher had complied a table of superordinate and emergent themes for each participant, the next step involved looking across cases to identify connections across superordinate themes, with the intention of joining these together (which required a rewording of some superordinate themes labelling) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). The superordinate themes were listed horizontally across the page for each participant

(Appendix I), but only when there was a new superordinate theme was it added to the list to avoid repetition of superordinate themes. Then, similar superordinate themes were moved to sit together in a vertical list based on the best fit. These were themes which related to the same construct or themes which told a story when grouped together. Although there were some clear groupings, there were occasions when superordinate themes could sit within more than one grouping. When this occurred, the original transcript was revisited to understand the context of the superordinate theme, and to find its best fit within a master theme. The researcher then discussed this with the supervisory team to explore alternative suggestions and to devise a clear justification for the theme placement.

These new groups became the master themes and were given appropriate headings to represent the new construct. At this stage the researcher created a description of these new groupings and a line of argument to establish distinct master themes (Appendix K). The constructed master themes were: Support, Army Life, Personality, Control, Identity, Civilian Connection, Perception of the Army, Wellbeing and Civilian Lifestyle.

Although presented as a step by step process, it was sometimes necessary for the researcher to return to previous stages. This was to ensure the interpretation throughout the stages had not moved away from the original narrative. Also, during the first 5 stages of the analysis the researcher wanted to ensure they were fully immersed in the participant's data.

k) Summary of the methodology and data collection

This study explores the transition from army to civilian life using the analytical approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). In summary, this chapter began by presenting the analytical approach of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) which was used to address the current research aims and research questions. In order to do this the core theoretical underpinnings of IPA were introduced, these included Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography. In discussing this analytical approach, the researcher's ontological and epistemological perspective to the research was also outlined. Communicating the researcher's ontological and epistemological position at this stage is important as it impacts upon the development and presentation of Master Themes which are presented in the next chapter. An interpretative and phenomenological epistemological position was adopted through the research. The ontological position adopted was

relativism, as this was in keeping with the analytical approach and the research aims and questions.

Following this section, the participants were then introduced. This included discussion around the purposive and snowball sample which was adopted, and the broad criteria for participant inclusion. For example, participants were a homogenous group due to having all been in the army, however the sample was not restricted based on age, gender, rank in the army, time since leaving the army, time in the army, or number of tours. In total, there were 11 participants however 2 were removed, leaving 9 participants whose data was analysed and is presented in the next chapter.

This chapter also gave details of the method which was taken in the current research study to address the research aims and questions. The data collection section discussed the use of semi-structured interviews as the method of data collection. This was seen as most appropriate due to the flexibility of this method in allowing the researcher to explore the topic of interest with the participants, and not being restricted to the interview schedule if something of interest is brought into the interview. This lends itself to IPA research as the researcher is free to explore the unique experiences of the individual. It also allowed for the research questions to be answered and the aims to be met, providing the participants the freedom to explore the meaning behind their transition experiences. The materials which were used to carry out the research were then presented, such as the use of the Dictaphone. The procedure of data collections was also outlined here to demonstrate the process taken to conduct each of the interviews. This started with the contacting of the participants, through to the follow up contact that was made by the researcher to ensure participants who requested a transcript received their transcript.

The analytical strategy which the researcher used to approach the analysis of the interview data was then presented. This section gave a step by step process that the researcher adopted which will have assisted the audience in understanding the process the researcher took to develop themes. The themes which were developed from the data are presented in the next chapter, chapter 4. The data and analysis presented in chapter 4 is then used to inform the discussion of Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways

in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. In relation to Aim 3, the unique experiences that the participants shared helped to inform an interpretation of how ex-army personnel could best be supported in their transition, based on the thoughts and meaning communicated by each participant. The next section will present the 'Reflexive analysis' which highlights key incidents in the research process.

l) Reflexive analysis

i) Introduction to reflexive analysis

Reflexivity has been described as the researcher's act of critically reflecting on their research process and their own position as the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is concerned with both the impact of the researcher's own knowledge and experience on the research, and how the researcher's decisions shape the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is used to acknowledge the power and control of the researcher over the whole research experience, and explicitly present the researcher's awareness of the part they play in the co-construction of knowledge (Finlay, 2002). Through their reflective accounts, researchers are also attempting to give the reader insight into how the researcher's subjective thoughts, feelings, decisions and beliefs have influenced the final product, and how the researcher recognises themselves as a contributor to the final product (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). There are broadly two types of reflexivity. These are personal reflexivity where the researcher reflects on their values, belief and experience and how this may have impacted the research, and vice versa (Willig, 2008). Then epistemological reflexivity, where the researcher reflects on the assumptions made about the world and knowledge, and how this has shaped the research (Willig, 2008). I will present both of these types of reflexivity in this chapter where they are appropriate to the chosen critical incident.

Within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis research, the key aim is to centralise each individual participant to understand how they interpret their own experiences to make meaning of them (Smith & Osborn, 2008). However, to enable this to happen the researcher plays an important role (Biggerstaff & Thompson, 2008) in firstly allowing the participants a platform upon which they can explore their experiences, and then within the interpretation of the data (Finlay, 2002). Within IPA this is recognised as the double hermeneutic. This refers to the two stages of interpretation, Firstly, in the participant's recollection and

reconstruction of their own experiences, the participant themselves are interpreting an event (Smith *et al*, 2009). Following this, I as the researcher then attempted to assign my own interpretation to the participant's interpretation of their experience. Hence the phrase 'double hermeneutic' meaning the two stages of interpretation. Making meaning of data in this respect however is not a simple two step process. Smith and colleagues (2009) acknowledge how the interpretation of data is a dynamic relationship and this should encourage researchers to also be open in their own stance. For me as the researcher, this meant examining the parts of the data, research approach and analysis in light of the whole. Similarly, looking at the 'whole' in light of the 'parts'. This is not a linear process, but instead I as the researcher was required to move between the parts and the whole to identify relationships and meanings within the data, and explore how my context would influence my interpretations and approach (Eatough & Smith, 2017).

Heidegger (1962) detailed how with each new encounter, the way in which we experience it has already undergone a degree of interpretation. Gadamer (1975) explained this further suggesting that each individual will have their own beliefs and presuppositions which contribute to our 'horizon' of understanding. An individual's horizon will overlap with someone else's upon meeting and conversing, and it is with this that individuals both make themselves understood, and how we understand one another (Gadamer, 1975). Therefore, trying to make meaning of experiences and actively having the ability to try to make sense of one another is part of human existence (Bruner, 1990), however this is inhibited by time and context. IPA acknowledges the researcher's horizon and how this can influence interpretation both in a positive and negative way (Shaw, 2010). This is relevant to me as the researcher for my own awareness of how each participant would interpret their experiences differently. But also, how the meeting of our two horizons would influence both the interview and my understanding of the participant.

As previously stated, concerned with interpretation IPA attempts to understand what is being said, firstly at the individual's level and then within the wider context (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Part of this involves the researcher's acknowledgement that their own interpretations of the participant's narratives are bound by context, knowledge, understanding and personal experience. It is within our social interactions that meaning is

co-constructed, and both the researcher and the participant are suggested to play an equal role in this (Shaw, 2010). However, I saw my role within the interview process as a facilitator and attempted to give the control to the participant to allow them to explore their interpretation and meaning making. This is discussed further within the critical incidents which I will go on to discuss.

Within the stages of analysis, I adopted two lenses by which to conduct my interpretations, as is discussed by Eatough and Smith (2017). Firstly, an empathic lens where I attempted to understand the participants experience from their viewpoint. Here, I tried to put myself in their position and understand how they were making meaning of the events being discussed. Secondly, the critical lens. With this lens I considered alternative viewpoints, and searched for meaning in ways in which the participant may not have considered. This critical lens formed the basis for many of my interpretations and became most dominant in my analysis. This position will be explored further in the critical incidents which follow.

Taking a relativist ontological stance, lived experience is bound by context, time and the interactions individuals have, which makes reality fluid, interconnected and intersubjective (Shaw, 2010). It is important therefore that I, as the researcher consider my own presuppositions and how this may in turn effect the interpretation and execution of the research (Shaw, 2010). Further, it is important for me to consider how taking this stance may shape my research and how my position has influenced the nature of the research, including the resulting analysis and write-up. In addition to this, the reflexive analysis is an opportunity for learning; about oneself, the research and analysis process, and a chance to consider alternative viewpoints (Vicary, Young & Hicks, 2016). Further, it can highlight how the research process and my encounters with new participants can change my horizons, providing a new look at the way in which I approach future similar experiences.

The following sections include the reflexive analysis of five critical incidents. These broadly include the researcher's reflections of the interviews which were conducted with participants, the process of coding, and the development of themes. The prominent events, thoughts and feelings which the researcher considered an important or influential part of the research process have been identified. The critical incidents chosen for reflection must

be those most important to the research experience and interpretation, and important or prominent to the researcher (Ghaye & Lillyman, 2006; Hilliard, 2006). To help identify these incidents, the researcher kept a diary of events, thoughts and feelings throughout the research process. At the beginning of each reflexive analysis incident, the critical incident is briefly introduced, and a fuller discussion of each incident follows within the remainder of the section.

The five critical incidents are: Critical Incident 1 – Personal negative perception of the army and the impact of this on my research, Critical incident 2 -Failing to build rapport by giving the role of the 'expert' to the participant, Critical incident 3 – Pre-existing personal relationship with India; the effect of the relationship on the interview, and how the interview changed the relationship, Critical incident 4 – Lack of qualitative research experience and the negative impact this had on the creativity of the current research, Critical incident 5 – Participant 10 withdrawing from my research and how this changed my outlook on conducting the research.

ii) Critical Incident 1 – Personal negative perception of the army and the impact of this on my research

The focus of my research topic was broadly the transition from army to civilian life. This specifically included elements relating to identity, adjustment and support as outlined by the Research Aims and research questions. My approach to this topic was neutral, neither focussing on negative transitions or positive transitions, instead it was more concerned about the experience of the participant. However, reflecting on how I felt about the army I realised I took a negative viewpoint and felt as though the army treated its recruits poorly both during service and after service. There were several reasons why my perception of the army was particularly negative and specific times in the research process in which this had an impact on the way I approached the research and my expectations of the participants.

My initial knowledge and perception of the army was partially created by the media and what was portrayed in the news in the time leading up to beginning my research. In 2014, during the beginning stages of developing my research, British soldiers were being brought out of the war in Afghanistan. They had been part of the war since it started in 2001. At this time the media was portraying the soldiers who had been on tour in Afghanistan as 'heroes' and detailing the trauma that they will have experienced. With this came an air of concern

which was voiced by the media about how those returning to Britain following combat would now cope, and how their experiences abroad would negatively impact on their mental health. My personal opinion is, and always has been, anti-war and so when faced with this media I realised I had sympathy for the soldiers. I also blamed the army for putting the soldiers in such adverse situations. Reflecting back, I now see how counterintuitive this opinion is as combat is part of the role of being a soldier and it is an expectation of that profession. I was at the time, what could be considered an outsider as I had not known anyone who had been in the military. In this respect I could distance myself from the events taking place.

Further shaping my preconception of the army, was the media surrounding the Iraq war, and my societal upbringing of the topic. In 2003 British troops invaded Iraq in a coalition with the US, and they were removed in 2011. The decision to invade Iraq saw political and societal unrest. My pacifistic nature and disbelief in violence and war as a solution meant I naturally opposed the political decision to engage in combat. This was emphasised by my political upbringing. Coming from a predominantly Conservative family, the Labour party's handle on the political situation and their decision to support the US in the invasion of Iraq was unpopular in my household. This opposition to Labour enforced my negative views of the army.

I was aware of my opinions and feelings towards the army before I embarked on my research journey, and the aims of my research remained neutral in the sense that it allowed participants to explore their experiences without emphasis on either negative or positive elements. However, moving through my interviews I acknowledged how I was potentially influencing my research with my opinion and how each participant was feeding into my bias. I will attempt to explain this further using my first four interviews as examples.

My interview schedule had been approved by my four research supervisors to ensure it met appropriate guidelines (e.g. Harrell & Bradley, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2008). It contained open questions which did not lead the participants. In interview 1, Alpha discussed how he was medically discharged. During the interview with Alpha, I interpreted his experience of leaving the army as having a sense of lacking in agency and it being enforced upon him. During analysis, I supported this initial interpretation. Despite Alpha having a negative experience of leaving the army and feeling pessimistic towards the support mechanisms

they offer, he sought after the army lifestyle. Although Alpha felt the army was a good career and he enjoyed his time serving, his negative experience of leaving the army fuelled my negative opinion of the army. This therefore confirmed my deep seated beliefs about the army. When reflecting on this exchange with Alpha, my horizons had hindered the interview process, as I did not explore further some of the more positive aspects of Alpha's experience where there was opportunity to. Instead, I used his negative experiences to confirm my own bias.

Reflecting back on the interviews, I can identify how my personal opinions of the army shaped the interviews with India and Bravo in a similar way. India explained partaking in military exercises which she termed 'horrific'. During the stages of analysis, I interpreted India's feelings when she was medically discharged as her being victimised. Bravo also described experiences of trauma and feeling that the provision for service leavers was inadequate. Alpha's, India's and Bravo's experiences of transitioning into civilian life could be characterised as problematic, and they communicated facing a number of challenges. These first three interviews confirmed the knowledge and understanding I had of the army; that they expose recruits to unnecessary trauma and do not look after their welfare proficiently enough as they are expendable. Interview 4 with Charlie represented a turning point in participant experiences and led me to recognise the impact my fore-understandings of the topic were having on the interviews.

Charlie was an upbeat character who was open to sharing his experiences. He demonstrated feeling positive about his experiences in the army and in his transition to civilian life, and even explained his tours as being 'great fun'. The one quote from Charlie which made me question my position in relation to the army was when he said:

> "I can't really remember any real bad times in the military ''m sure there were but I kinda probably put them all to the back of my back of my head" (Charlie, p9, lines 494-496).

I then responded by asking him about his tour in Ireland. I remember how Bravo's tour in Ireland had been particularly problematic for him and I had used this information to prompt what may have been a difficult time for Charlie. To my surprise, my question about Ireland was met with elation and further expression of fond memories. When reflecting on our conversation, I can see how Charlie may have felt compelled to try and find negative

experiences, as I myself were also searching for them in his narrative. My reactions to his story may have suggested that his answers were inadequate and prompted him to explain why he had no negative memories. Further, I can also now see how my feelings informed the direction of the research in the first instance. For example, my fourth research question asks; 'How do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life?'. The way in which this question is phrased suggests that the support offered by the army is inadequate and requires redirection.

At this point in the research process, after four interviews and prompted by Charlie's response, I made a conscience note that participants feel they must have a bad experience to discuss. I recognised the part I had to play in this. To ensure I was not hindering the process by influencing participants to discuss only negative aspects of their experience, I made note to ensure I tell participants I have no agenda and that their experience is important, no matter what form that took. Although I attempted to manage how my understandings of the army may have influenced my research (following my acknowledgement of the effect I may have been having), participants experience which refuted my preconceptions did not affect how I ultimately felt about the army. I made a conscious effort to bracket my beliefs, so they did not hinder my interpretation of data, exploring alternative viewpoints, but I noticed a disparity throughout with my opinions of the army, and the participant's opinion of the army. This informed my second incident.

As a consequence of doing this research and being exposed to the narratives of those who have experienced being in the army first-hand, my negative opinions of the army have not changed. Interestingly, the one thing that has altered is how I view those who are current serving personnel or have served who have a positive opinion of the army. Before conducting the research, I had not meaningfully considered individuals who speak highly of the army, or thought to interpret why they feel this way. I now acknowledge that many individuals consider the army to be a good career. I do not attribute this however to the provision the army offers. Instead, I see this opinion as a product of a match between the lifestyle the army offers, and the expectations and personality of the individual. In essence, the positive appraisal of the army is not due to anything the army have done 'right'. It is a

result of the individual approaching their army career with a certain attitude. I still feel negatively towards the army, and do not believe the 'one size fits all' approach it takes to living and support provision is adequate. Those who struggle while serving and those who face many challenges when leaving the army, do so in my opinion because of failings of the army.

iii) Critical incident 2 -Failing to build rapport by giving the role of the 'expert' to the participant

When approaching my participant interviews, I made the decision to take the position of the novice in the interaction, positioning the participant as the expert. This was based on guidance by Jonathan Smith who designed the IPA approach. Smith and Osborn (2007) state that the participants are experts of their own experience and therefore should be given the platform to communicate this effectively. For example, through the use of semi-structured interviews, the researcher should be flexible and allow the participant to explore different areas of the topic and not be restricted by the interview schedule. Although I did have some previous personal knowledge of what it is like to be in the army (which I will go on to discuss), I wanted to put this experience aside so it did not interfere with the interview process allowing me to focus on the participant's experience. In the co-construction of making meaning through the social interaction of the interview, I wanted the participant to have control. In my mind, this would give them the ability to explore their interpretations of events.

In my personal experience, I had been the girlfriend of someone serving in the army for 8 years and this coincided with the start of my research. During this time, I had experienced how being in the army could impact family life, insofar as it dictated the serving personnel's movements. Throughout the 8 years, I also avoided media reports based on military topics as I was receiving information first-hand. I also experienced the support offered to service leavers, or, what was in my opinion, a lack of provision. The negative personal experiences I had encountered during this time have understandably shaped part of my perception of the army as a whole. I did not have experience of being in the army myself, so it could be argued that I had an outsider's viewpoint. But, the decisions the army made and the way in which

they operated directly affected my life. Any negative experience the service member had was shared by me. I did not favour the army as a career as I felt serving personnel sacrificed a lot of their life to be in the army, and the rewards were not worth the sacrifice.

My personal experience meant I could relate to and empathise with the families of serving personnel. It also meant I had some knowledge of the army with regards to how it operated i.e. leave entitlements, relocation processes, rank structure, training and elements of daily production. I did not however impart this knowledge and experience onto the participants. I did not disclose this as I did not want to influence their account of their own experience, and I did not want them to ask me questions about my experience. I wanted the focus to be on the participant. If I had discussed some my own personal experiences of the army, I felt I might have been overly negative. Also, if my opinions were different to those of the participant, I did not want this to stop them expressing their feelings. Upon reflecting back on this decision, I realised that I may have missed an opportunity to use this to successfully establish rapport, especially in the interviews where I felt I struggled to build rapport.

I also felt I was deceiving the participants when introducing myself by withholding this information. At the beginning of each interview I made it clear to the participants that I had not been in the army myself and had limited knowledge of the topic area. In doing so I hoped to put the emphasis on the participant as the expert. I had also hoped that by admitting my lack of experience in the area that this might encourage the participant to go into further detail about their own encounters. Unfortunately, looking back I feel it may have had the adverse effect of creating a further disparity between myself and some of the participants which in turn impacted negatively on the rapport. Research has suggested that researchers may struggle to build and maintain rapport with participants if they are perceived as an outsider (Williams, Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2020). In not disclosing that I had some experience of knowing what it is like to be in the army, I may have unintentionally positioned myself as an outsider in the eyes of the participant. Potentially, the fact that I was a young, female, civilian researcher with a background of education and no personal military service experience would have already positioned me as an outsider. Williams *et al* (2020) stated that this is common in research where the participants are male ex-military personnel. Therefore, the researcher will only ever be able to accomplish a superficial

acceptance from the participant due to status and unfamiliarity, regardless of the process the researcher takes to build rapport (Gurney, 1985).

In the first interview with Alpha, I felt that the lack of rapport and the researcher and participant position had a negative impact on the interview. During the interview I felt I struggled to maintain the conversation and felt Alpha was reluctant to open up to me. I had placed the blame on myself for failing to make Alpha feel comfortable and instil trust. However, three factors have subsequently challenged this initial perception. Firstly, building rapport is a collaborative process between two people which relies on both parties. The relationship was therefore dependant on both Alpha and me. Secondly, on conclusion of the interview after the recording had been turned off, Alpha began talking further about his experience. He supplied additional detail and opinions which he had not expressed earlier in the interview. Potentially, this demonstrates that Alpha realised he had not communicated part of his story and felt it was important to do so. Finally, when listening back to the interview, I realised the formal and clinical feel to the interview that I had experienced was not reflected in either the content or the flow of the interview. Alpha had valuable and detailed experiences which he had communicated which subsequently formed part of the analysis. The formal and clinical feel I had noted may have been in part due to nerves, as I had recognised feeling nervous throughout this first interview.

It is only upon reflection that I realise I was sometimes slightly intimidated by some of the participants, particularly by Alpha. This was because in placing them as the expert in the subject area, and minimising my own knowledge, I made myself feel inferior to the participants. I was also worried as I did not want to patronise or offend the participants by appearing ignorant or ill-informed. Reflecting back on all the interviews, I do not feel that I let this affect all of the interviews in a negative way. Instead, I think these feelings encouraged me to try and build a stronger rapport with the participants by asking more questions and exploring topics in more detail. Conversely however, I did note that during Alpha's interview I felt the conversations were forced and I did not explore some of his admissions fully. Again, as previously stated, I was nervous with it being my first interview, and I had not gained the practice of conducting the interviews. This again could have contributed to both the feelings of the conversation being forced and my failure to explore some of the more interesting points raised by Alpha.

The interplay of positions between the researcher and the participant has clearly shone through in my research. At times, I felt the outsider position I took initially inhibited the relationship and the interview. However, I did not feel this way in all of the interviews at all of the time, and as the interviews progressed, I felt I could place myself as more of an insider having attained the knowledge of the previous participants. I felt his helped me connect with the participants more. The one participant where the relationship between us was different was India, as I already knew India personally before the interview. This will form the discussion in the next critical incident.

In terms of the learning I have gained throughout the interview process, I have realised that in my experience of being an interviewer there were rarely clear insider and outsider positions. Braun and Clarke (2013) refer to having an insider position, and multiple outsider positions. In my experience as a researcher, it is possible to have varying degrees of each position. The position which one takes is a more fluid process which will adapt and change dependant on the participant and throughout each conversation.

iv) Critical incident 3 – Pre-existing personal relationship with India; the effect of the relationship on the interview, and how the interview changed the relationship

India was the only participant I knew personally before the interview as she was a friend who I had met the previous year. I feel this pre-existing relationship affected the interview in a number of ways. Firstly, the rapport between myself and India had already been established due to our friendship and, in this respect, I had anticipated that the interview would flow and feel like a natural interaction facilitated by our relationship. If I look back and compare India's interview to the other interviews, then this would be a correct assumption and evaluation of the interview. However, particularly at the start of the interview, it felt like an uncomfortable interaction for myself. The friendship India and I had built was based on mutual disclosure and balanced interactions. Within an interview situation this balance was shifted somewhat. For example, the interviewer is in control of the interview insofar as they steer the conversation and provide the participant with opportunity to speak. The participant then has their own platform, thus the majority of the interaction should be filled with narrative by the participant with limited input by the

researcher. As a positive reflection, I felt I had achieved this balance in my interviews and was able to maintain a mutual position. This meant not agreeing or disagreeing with the participants, not giving my opinion or trying to lead them in anyway. This is contrary to how I present myself in an interaction with a friend.

In informal interactions with friends I would be open and honest, offering my opinion where appropriate and showing my emotions for the topic of conversation being discussed. This was particularly the case with India. We had a friendship based on trust and mutual disclosure. We were able to rely on each other and express feelings and opinions without judgement. In this sense we had a balanced friendship. The interview scenario then was an unusual situation for us to be discussing a personal topic, and there were times that I struggled to step out of my role as India's friend and resume the role of researcher. This is evident in one of our interactions:

> "India: yeah things I (.) guess you had to do but to the certain extent that they did it I don't think it had to be as bad as it was (..) but (..) and like when you're on um (…) ok (.) ''ive gotta admit I was very accident prone (small laugh) (.)//
>
> I: //(small laugh)"
>
> (India, P.7, lines 360-366)

India was discussing how the army were to blame for her injury, but then began to admit some of the responsibility by being 'accident prone'. This is the exact situation where, as a friend, I would reassure her that it was not her fault that she was injured and express solidarity by agreeing with the army being to blame. This, as a researcher, would have been an unacceptable and unprofessional response. In an attempt to communicate my feelings of sympathy and solidarity I consciously mirrored India's laugh. I know that in this interaction I was feeling particularly frustrated at not being able to share my thoughts on the situation. This I think I managed to hide from India and by not being explicit about how I was feeling, I did not hinder the interview process. I know this as the interview continued to flow and India continued to be open in her disclosure.

India was open throughout her interview and conversed about topics which were private and clearly caused her distress to reflect upon. From my interaction with India I can conclude that she had never explored her feelings about leaving the army before, and it is likely that she had always hidden how she truly felt. There are two reasons why I have since come to this conclusion. Firstly, India became upset during the interview and stated that she did not understand why she was crying. This suggested to me that she herself had not explored how she truly felt and was surprised at her reaction. The level of trust and rapport that we had built prior to the interview had clearly created safe and secure conditions for our interaction, making India investigate her feelings further and feel comfortable in revealing elements of her past which were personal. The second reason I think India had never disclosed her true feelings about her army past before is due to her nature. This insight is only available to me because of the friendship we have and because I know India personally. India is a private person and often does not discuss her troubles through fear of burdening others. She minimises her feelings so as not to impact other people and always puts other people first. The interview platform allowed India to disclose how she truly felt without the consequences which would usually occur by telling a friend. This reassured me that not only had we established a positive rapport, but I had also created the interview environment effectively in the way I had introduced the research at the beginning of the interview.

India's disclosure and expression of emotion however had an unexpected impact on myself. Based on textbook guidance on interviewing, I had already decided that in the event of a participant becoming distressed I would give them four options; to stop the interview, to move onto another topic of conversation within the interview, to move onto another topic but return to the matter causing distress later in the interview, or to continue with the interview. I offered these options on a number of occasions; however India chose to continue each time. When India began crying this made me feel hurt and upset also, and I felt responsible for making her cry. I had not anticipated this reaction from India as she had not discussed this topic with me previously as a friend in any detail. Therefore, I had approached the interview feeling confident that I could establish a distance between my feelings as a friend and the need to remain professional as a researcher. Within the interview process I was unable to either comfort India or partake in mutual disclosure which

would have taken place in ordinary interactions between us as we knew each other. As I was conducting research and needed to remain consistent through the interviews, I had to maintain my role as researcher and forget my role as friend. For this reason, when giving the afore mentioned option to India, I was hoping that she would want to end the interview, and this would break the research barrier and enable me to comfort her.

At the time I had not anticipated the effect the interview may have had on our friendship. However now, some five years later, I am able to reflect back on the impact. Since the interview, India has always had a vested interest in my research. She continues to enquire about its progress and expresses an interest in reading it. The interview was a shared experience between myself and India, and one which has created a unique bond. Research has found that closeness and companionship between female friends can be characterised by emotional competence and self-disclosure (Sears & Mcafee, 2017). In this respect, I believe that in India's disclosure she was allowing herself to be vulnerable and placing her trust in me as a researcher but also as a friend. As a consequence of this I believe our relationship grew stronger. She began to communicate more about her daily challenges, particularly in relation to the injury she suffered in the army. As a result of the information and knowledge gained in the interview, I felt better prepared and equipped to offer my opinion and feelings of the matter.

The way in which I handled this situation by giving India the four predetermined options was the best course of action available to me as a researcher. Choosing to end the interview myself would have been unbeneficial to both India and I, as she may have been left feeling let down. The way in which this incident has prepared me for future incidents of this kind is by giving me the knowledge and experience to know that there are times during research that the researcher has to act in a way that is not natural to them. Preparing for these kinds of occurrences by preparing interview procedure and anticipating these events can help mediate the effects and ensure the researcher is not taken by surprise when they happen. I have learnt that the feelings of others that are close to me are of great importance to me, and that this might be a problem if I consider interviewing individuals I know in the future. Further, I have experienced the positive impact of what having a pre-existing relationship with a participant can have on the research interview with regards to establishing rapport

and participant disclosure. This is often an option which is unavailable to researchers as having lengthy contact with participants before interviews is temporally challenging.

v) Critical incident 4 – Lack of qualitative research experience and the negative impact this had on the creativity of the current research

My previous research experience has helped develop who I am as a researcher including my strengths in conducting research and the approach I take to research. Having completed a BSc in Psychology and an MSc in Forensic Psychology, I had already created a researcher identity which had been shaped by the way in which my previous studies were presented to me. I remained at the university in which I began my higher education to complete all of my post college studies. My approach to research therefore is very much a product of the university's ethos, teaching practices and their governing bodies. This had a clear impact on some of the choices I made in my research, most notably my creativity through the analysis. This will be explored further in relation to the challenges it caused me.

The university which I have always belonged to arguably took a positivist approach to psychological research in the main. It favoured the teaching of quantitative research methods and assumed the position that the researcher should, and can remain detached from the participants and the analysis process. Further, it was restrained by governing bodies both in higher education and those which oversee accredited courses in psychology. In this regard, the method often preceded the research topic of interest, and shaped the approach to data collection. My decision to embark on qualitative research therefore challenged some of my knowledge of psychological research, and it did not lend itself to what I had discovered as my strengths over the years, that is conducting quantitative studies. My reasoning behind this was simply that my topic of interest, and the type of information that I wanted to find out was not an appropriate fit with a quantitative approach. The topic of interest is not something which can be measured and was a more complex phenomena which required the merits of qualitative methods. The challenges I faced here were twofold. Firstly, I faced some criticism by the university, and secondly, I had to challenge myself as a researcher with predominantly quantitative experience.

When presenting my research proposal to the university I was faced with opposition since some felt I had suggested too few participants. The number of participants I had suggested was based on guidance provided by Jonathan Smith and colleagues who recommended between 3 and 6 participants, with the possibility of more or less based on the type of research project. This demonstrates where there had been movement in my own horizon of experience, from a quantitative researcher to adopting a qualitative approach, and how this conflicted with the horizons of academics at the university. Many researchers have preferred methods which would have been strongly grounded in how they believe research should be carried out, how knowledge is created and what they believe exists to be studied. Thus, any research which refutes their position, such as the research I was proposing would potentially cause a threat to their beliefs. Therefore, my approach was questioned. It was clear to me that they had not only misunderstood my phenomenological interpretivist position, but they also had no intention of considering my approach as a viable perspective. I knew this because even when being supplied with the justification and reasons for the participants chosen, they continued to suggest this was insufficient. Further, they attempted to strengthen their argument by comparing my research to another successful student's research project which, using quantitative methods, had recruited a few hundred participants. In being open minded about my approach to research I had gained new knowledge and experience which gave me a different vantage point. This clashed with the vantage point of some others. However, I feel this enhanced my performance as a researcher as not only had I willingly adopted a new approach to research, I was also quickly forced to defend this approach against an alternative viewpoint which I had previously held myself.

The challenges I faced in adopting an approach to research were mostly due to inexperience of the process as opposed to misunderstanding the approach. One specific incident during analysis demonstrates this. When following the advice on completing the initial coding and emerging themes, guidance suggests widening the margin of the transcript and writing the initial coding on the right hand side and the emerging themes on the left hand side. I began by doing this but struggled with space. When reviewing my progress my supervisor suggested it might be beneficial to use the whole transcript for initial coding and a separate document for the emerging themes. I was surprised at this suggestion as it refuted the

guidance. This demonstrates how my pre-existing knowledge and viewpoint had been brought to the current research study and this had hindered my performance, namely my creativity.

Coming from a positivist stance conducting quantitative research, the structure and process for research studies is mostly rigid. In this respect, the majority of guidance will provide a set step by step criteria and procedure by which the data should be collected and analysed. IPA however does not adhere to these principles; instead the guidance provided is advice on how IPA research could be conducted. It is not prescriptive and prides itself on being flexible to a certain degree. I had therefore taken the guidance as rules which needed to be followed for the research to be valid, and this had inhibited my ability to be creative and flexible. Realising this had a positive impact on my research. Using one document for the initial coding meant I could explore more ideas and code the data to a fuller extent. Further, when creating themes, the way in which I had seen this done in the past was by using a mind mapping format. This had never appealed to me and the format would often confuse me. In light of the new knowledge surrounding the flexibility of the analysis, I decided to structure my themes in a list. This ordered the vast amount of information I had in a more manageable and accessible way for myself.

Throughout the stages of my analysis I noted a change in the way in which I was approaching the data. From the very beginning of my research journey I understood how my adopted philosophical position would influence the nature of my research including my analysis of the interviews and the themes which were developed. The epistemological position relating to phenomenology and hermeneutics meant I intended to emphasise the individuality of experiences, and acknowledge the varying degrees of interpretation available. I recognised however that this position became more embedded overtime throughout my analysis process. During the analysis of Bravo's data, I gave a section of my emergent themes to my supervisor to ensure my progress and consistency of my approach. My supervisor responded to my analysis with a small extract of Bravo's interview which provided my supervisors own interpretation and analysis. On seeing someone else's interpretation I realised how my interpretative position was both restricting the resulting analysis but also had the potential to provide a deep and meaningful analysis.

The incident had shown me that I myself needed to develop my interpretative lens in a more critical way, but it had also demonstrated my relativist ontological view point. It had demonstrated how I had created my interpretations based on an empathic lens based on my own knowledge and experiences. From this point in the analysis I began to adopt an increasingly interpretative lens by being critical of the data and challenging what was being said by each participant. My reading of the data also developed at this point. I began revisiting the original transcript more frequently to ensure I was being deductive in my interpretation and staying true to the participant's experience. Although I wanted to be thorough in my approach to the analysis I realised how time consuming this could be and how the interpretation for anyone extract could potentially be endless. This again emphasised how my interpretative position could be limiting as it is bound by my own view of the data. IPA recognises the influence of the researcher in the research process and emphasises their importance in the co-construction of meaning making within the interview. This would not have been the case however if an alternative method such as Grounded Theory had been adopted, as this aims to limit the influence of the researcher. Analysis is therefore assumed to be a product which emerges from the data and is descriptive in nature as opposed to exploratory. As a result, Grounded Theory looks to create theory from arising categories which are bound by the data, and research questions are narrow in comparison to IPA.

My position also influenced how I presented my resulting themes. Due to my past research experience, my initial instinct was to look for similarities across the participants. I wanted to present the resulting themes by showcasing the commonalities across my participant's experiences. This reflects how my positivist research background may have influenced the research; I was searching for a common universal explanation to explain behaviour which could be extrapolated to others. Again, it was only when this was brought to my attention by my supervisor that I realised that recognising the unique idiographic details of each person's experience was as valuable as presenting the shared experiences. This was during the writing up my themes, and thus, I subsequently ensured I was capturing the nuances of each narrative by presenting individual accounts, instead of only emphasising the commonalities between participants.

The way in which I had approached my research was partly affected by my previous experience as a researcher. Although I had educated myself in new approaches and considered alternative points of view, my existing knowledge provided me with a predetermined understanding which I had incorrectly attributed to my current situation. This experience taught me the value in being flexible in my approach to analysis when using IPA. The next incident will discuss another new situation that I encountered whilst conducting this research, and how this too changed my outlook on research.

vi) Critical incident 5 – Participant 10 withdrawing from my research and how this changed my outlook on conducting research

As standard practice, I offered each participant the opportunity to withdraw from my research to comply with ethical considerations. In all of my previous research experiences I had offered this option to participants, but I had never had a participant request to be removed. Similarly, I had never encountered this happening to anyone I knew or indeed read it happening in other research papers. In my mind, it was just something that had to be offered for ethical reasons. Therefore, when participant 10 asked to redraw from the study I was surprised, and also concerned about the valuable contribution I was going to lose.

I had provided participants the option to withdraw from my research and given them a date by which to do this. I did this based on advice given to me by my supervisor as a way to avoid having to remove data which had been through the analysis stages of the research. Upon reflection, the inclusion of a deadline was a significant and important decision which I can give credit to the experience of my supervisor for. Without this, I may have spent a considerable time analysing the interview. I was however disappointed because during the interview the participant has discussed some interesting topics and given valuable insight. I was keen to include this as it would have provided a fascinating angle in the research. This however was out of my control, and although I had felt a sense of control through the duration of the interviews, this made me realise that my research lay at the hands of my participant's willingness to participate.

Being a participant in previous research conducted by other students, I had not ever anticipated the prospect of withdrawing from a study. After I gave my consent and completed the research I often forgot about. Therefore, I had assumed other people felt the same and did not expect anyone to withdraw from my research, particularly participant 10.

Participant 10 was friendly and open, often discussing topics at length. This I felt was an indication that we had a good rapport and that she was comfortable taking part in the research. My previous experiences of both being a participant and a researcher, and the positive exchange I had with participant 10 had not prepared me for her decision to withdraw. This is also likely to be due to the type of research I had taken part in. For example, all but one university research study that I had taken part in had been a quantitative research study. Therefore, there was little detail and personal characteristics included in the data. My current research was different and participant 10 felt the detail included may reveal her identity.

I feel I conducted the research interview ethically and according to procedure, and therefore there is very little I would change about the situation. The one thing I may have done differently is suggest removing any information relating to the participants rank or role in the army. This may have encouraged her to continue with the research. However, participant 10 had already removed a significant amount of data from the transcript on two occasions and still felt uncomfortable with the data; therefore it was most beneficial to remove the data from the study. Having this experience has prepared me for future research as I can now fully prepare for the possibility that participants may want to remove themselves from the study. The one thing I did do well here is I gave participants a deadline by which they could remove data, and another deadline by which they could withdraw from the study. In this situation, it ensured that I kept to my own deadlines and I got prompt responses from participant 10 in relation to her requests.

vii) Reflexive analysis conclusion

Reflexive analysis is an important element of qualitative research as it can reveal the impact that the researcher has had on their research and the decisions and interpretations that were made. This is important for IPA research as it recognises the position of the researcher and the co-construction of knowledge within the interview. For this chapter, five critical incidents were chosen for analysis. The five critical incidents were: Critical Incident 1 – Personal negative perception of the army and the impact of this on my research, Critical incident 2 -Failing to build rapport by giving the role of the 'expert' to the participant, Critical incident 3 – Pre-existing personal relationship with India; the effect of the relationship on the interview, and how the interview changed the relationship, Critical

incident 4 – Lack of qualitative research experience and the negative impact this had on the creativity of the current research ,Critical incident 5 – Participant 10 withdrawing from my research and how this changed my outlook on conducting research.

Each of these incidents has highlighted an event which took place during my research process which was imperative to the way in which the research was approached, or it was an unexpected event which will impact my approach in the future. When discussing these incidents, I have attempted to interpret some of my own and the participant's actions, behaviours and feelings using my own knowledge and experience. However, it should be noted that these interpretations are that of my own which are bound by context and time, and therefore alternative interpretations may be available for the incidents.

It should be noted here that the one incident that stands out the most to me is Critical incident 3 – Pre-existing personal relationship with India; the effect of the relationship on the interview, and how the interview changed the relationship. This incident had a significant and lasting effect on me and prompted me to write a separate personal reflection piece titled 'Ethical issues in qualitative research: considering yourself. The importance of protecting researcher wellbeing during interviews: researcher's experience.' The learning and knowledge associated with this incident is imperative for future research and researchers who intend on interviewing individuals whom they know personally.

The next chapter is the 'Presentation and examination of master themes'. This chapter will discuss the nine master themes which were developed through the analytical process. These themes begin to answer the four research questions and address the three research aims.

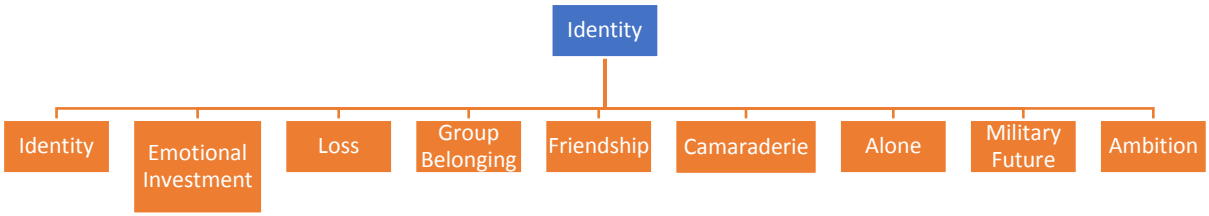
4) Presentation and examination of master themes

Using IPA and the analytical strategy discussed in the previous chapter, nine master themes were identified, and these are: Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the army, Wellbeing, Civilian lifestyle, Civilian connection, Army life, and Support. Together, these themes help to capture how the participants each perceived their transition from military to civilian life, including experiences of adjustment and changing identity. In this chapter, each of these themes are explored in turn below using relevant quotes from participant's narrative, interweaving pertinent psychological theory, research and policy. Further the idiosyncratic nature of the participant's experiences is explored in relation to each theme along with the occasional similarity between participants experience of their transition. As each theme is presented the map of the corresponding master theme is inserted to show the superordinate themes discussed within the section. Following the presentation of each of the nine themes, the themes will collectively be discussed in relation to Goffman's theory of Total Institutions.

At the beginning of each master theme an organisation chart of the master theme and its corresponding superordinate themes is presented to provide a visual summary of what is encapsulated within the themes. The rationale and line of argument for each master theme is given in Appendix K.

The nine participants who will feature in this chapter here are: Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, India, Juliet, Mike, Oscar, Romeo and Victor.

a) Identity



The theme of Identity demonstrates how and why participants identified with the army at different stages of their career. At the beginnings of army careers Mike explains how new recruits are broken down in an attempt to make them unlearn their civilian behaviours and attitudes. This provides a blank page by which the army can impart their own values, attitudes and beliefs to form the individual's military identity. With it, this brings a sense of

belonging, camaraderie and teamwork as outlined by Juliet. Within the military identity, Mike expresses how there are different groups to which individuals feel a part of and associate with based on the departments or corps to which they belong, reflecting an in-group out-group membership. Romeo shows how this identity remained part of who he is even when establishing a civilian role. For some, like Charlie, the army identity is strong, but he was still able to maintain healthy civilian networks and connections outside of the military. This represents a different part of Charlie's identity set aside from the military. When leaving the army, each participant had a unique personal experience which was associated with how connected they felt to their military identity. For example, Juliet began to feel a lack of attachment to the army and a sense of reduced emotional investment to her army identity. She was therefore considering a new identity and was ready to part from the military way of being. However, other participants felt a deep sense of loss when moving away from the military identity, particularly if it was it of their control as in the case of Alpha and India.

Two participants who talked extensively about loss are Alpha and India. Both participants were medically discharged and became emotional when retelling their experiences of army life. India shared a period of grief associated with the loss of her army career.

> "it's took me about 3 years to properly like (.) get over it (.) so now I'm at a stage where (..) I am I'd look on it fondly and I did enjoy it (.) but it's taken me a long time I think to get to that stage"
> (India, pp.5-6, lines 296-299).

One interpretation of India's experience is how she had to go through a stage of bereavement upon unexpectedly losing her career. She explains needing time and space to reflect on it and identify with it in a more positive light.

Feelings of grief occur naturally for humans as a result of an individual losing something of significant importance to themselves, no matter how big or small (Smith, Robinson & Segal, 2019). As discussed in the original work by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1973), and still used to date in loss therapy (Smith, Robinson & Segal, 2019), feelings of grief can transpire as stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. These stages however are not a

prescribed pattern that individuals go through, but rather universally common emotions which people may experience in varying degrees and order (Stroebe, Schut & Boerner, 2017). The negative feelings of grief have been reflected in India's narrative above, and it is evident that for her it took time to reach acceptance.

Research has suggested that individuals experiencing grief as a result of losing their career, will experience more severe and life effecting feelings of grief if they are not given an adequate notice period before the end of their career (Brewington, Nassar-McMillian, Flowers & Furr, 2004). This lends support to the pattern in the feelings reflected by the participants, in that those who were medically discharged/left unexpectedly voiced a more traumatic and difficult transition in comparison to those whose choice it was to leave the army, suggesting that situations where there is a lack of control and foresight could contribute to the intense feelings of grief. This is illustrated in Alpha's situation, who emphasises the severity of losing his army career by suggesting his life had been taken from him.

> "a very gut-wrenching time (.) they were taking away my life my my career"
> (Alpha, p.5, lines 258-259)

This quote not only suggests a lack of control in the way Alpha describes his life being taken from him, but it also catastrophises the feelings of lost identity. Alpha feels that his whole being has been taken and his life compromised, not just his job. This suggests that Alpha feels the army played a large part in his life, and in essence was a very large part of who he once was. He exhibits a strong sense of powerlessness and a lack of agency in the way he describes the army taking his life away from him, and as such taking away his identity and taking the control away from him.

For many, the army supposes a way of life offering a type of lifestyle and a home (Ministry of Deference [MOD], 2020e). It has been termed a 'greedy institution' in much literature, as it demands a lot of time and effort from its employees (Brummond, 2015; Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006), to the extent of it being the surrender of the individual's life when they join (Vuga & Juvan, 2013). With soldiers needing to invest a great deal of their time into

army work and activities they are likely to take on the beliefs, values and goals that the army encourage as part of social identification (Haslam, 2004). Therefore, the individual will assume a strong military identity where they hold the army ethos as their true sense of self (Johansen, Martinussen & Kvilvang, 2015). However, within a professional setting, Social Identity Theory combined with Self-Categorisation Theory suggests that in-group association does not just happen on one level but is multi-faceted and therefore individuals can connect on different levels; an individual level, a group comparison, or as human beings (superordinate) (Van Dick, Wager, Stellmacher, Christ & Tissingtin, 2015).

For example, Mike emphasises the different groups within the army, and the level of treatment:

> "so when we used to get our money we used to err (..) all had to line up down a corridor (.) and then march in and then they'd count out your money and then you'd march out again and because I was RMP[1] they'd make me crawl in on my hands and knees oinking like a pig or hanging off the doorframe as a monkey you know there was quite a lot of bullying (.) and there was thirty six of us joined in the January at RMP and six of us went to (OMITTED BY RESEARCHER) (..) all the rest of them fell out"
> (Mike, p.2, lines 99-106).

Mike demonstrates here how there are in-groups and out-groups within the army. He was part of a distinct group of people training in a certain department and therefore, he was perceived to be different and thus treated differently to the others. Where the army is concerned, identification with different groups could refer to a number of facets at each level, to give one example; comparison of own fitness performance against a fellow peer (individual), rank or corps fitness performance in comparison to others (group), or the outcome of a rugby game between the army and the navy (superordinate) (Johansen, Martinussen & Kvilvang, 2015). These varying levels of connection to the identity of the military mean that the individual can change and adapt their identity to what is most salient

[1] RMP – Royal Military Police.

at the time (Johansen, Martinussen & Kvilvang, 2015). Thus, an individual maintaining more of an individualistic sense of self would challenge the military identity and not exhibit as much of an investment in the lifestyle (Johansen, Laberg & Martinussen, 2013). This could lend support to the differences in the participants and their experiences of leaving. Those who have made a choice to leave and are in the process of getting ready to leave become less invested in the army way of life, focusing more on their individual needs. Whereas those who are unexpectedly told to leave the army, still fully associate with the identity and find it more difficult to dissociate themselves.

Juliet describes how she was ready to leave the army and move on with her life:

> "there was no job that I really fancied y'know there was no job that I thought d'y'know what (.) I really wanna that's the job I want to do y'know of all the things in the army that's the one I want to do and ''m gonna really look forward to doing that' there was nothing (.) there was absolutely nothing (.) and um (.) and (.) I just felt that it was time to move on (.) and I don't regret moving on"
> (Juliet, pp.5, lines 263-269)

Further, she describes leaving as a positive experience where she had made the correct decision:

> "I could see the light at the end of the tunnel (..) obviously (..) um (.) but I had no regrets y'know I didn't have any wobbles before the end thinking have I made the right decision or anything no it wasn't it wasn't like that at all so (.) just y'know (.) did the job then left really" (Juliet, pp.5, lines 295-299)

Here, Juliet is describing how she no longer felt being in the army was fulfilling for her, and there was nothing left for her in that career. She saw leaving the army as a clear decision in which she had agency and displays a lack of emotional investment and attachment towards the army in her decision to leave. In essence she had already considered a new identity and no longer associates with her old identity.

Many ex-army personnel leave military life to embark on new careers and new life opportunities, and with this comes a great change not only in the work environment, but also socially and culturally for the individual (Herman & Yarwood, 2014). When an individual has complete control over a transition, adapting becomes far easier and therefore the change in identity, particularly work related, is expected and welcomed (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). Similarly, during this period, a steady network of support outside the organisation such as friends and family, can also help during a change in identity and allow the individual to feel more in control of their life (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012).

For example, Charlie talks about a social group he has outside of the military:

> "because I'd been playing rugby at (OMITTED BY RESEARCHER) anyway (.) I had a social network there (.) not like I had to make new friends (.) I already had a social scene to drop onto"
> (Charlie, p.12, lines 692-694)

Here, Charlie is expressing a different part of his identity that is set aside from the army. He sees himself as part of a civilian sports team and as such identifies with his fellow civilian team members, thus demonstrating identification with a civilian social group that is different from his army associations.

Identity has been argued to be fluid, based on circumstance and location, and as such it is possible for individuals to hold a number of identities, to adapt and change identities based on the situation they find themselves in (Herman & Yarwood, 2014). Thus, adopting a different identity upon leaving the army is part of a normal shift due to changing circumstances (Herman & Yarwood, 2014), and can be done more easily for some of the participants based on their readiness to do so. However, when an individual joins the army they are encouraged to let go of any civilian identity and create a new military identity, with very fixed and rigid practices and beliefs (Herman & Yarwood, 2014; Woodward & Jenkins, 2011). This point is emphasised by Mike who explains how the army encouraged a new identity:

> " yeah great (.) I loved every minute of it (..) it was like a challenge always pushing you (.) and always um (..) trying to break you (.) and its it's a game isn't it (.) its they try in basic training is all about breaking the person and then building them back up isn't it"
> (Mike, p.4, lines 137-140)

Mike suggests here that the army breaks new recruits down as a means to unlearn certain behaviours or characteristics so that they can mould them according to established military ideals. In a sense, the army is creating a blank canvass to then impart their own values and norms onto.

Charlie makes a similar point, explaining how it is a whole different culture to adapt to:

> "(.) well (..) bit of a culture shock really (.) because as much as you think you know what the army is about (.) and even though I went through an apprenticeship (mumble) boy soldiers and stuff like that (..)//
>
> Int: // ok
>
> Charlie: it was still quite (..) harsh (.) all the way"
> (Charlie, p.4, lines 209-216)

The way in which Charlie remembers his first experiences of the army gives the impression that he felt no matter what expectations and assumptions he had anticipated about the army and army life, there is a specific mindset that soldiers are expected to adopt and inherit upon arrival, and he gives the idea that nothing can quite prepare you for the lived perceived reality.

Upon leaving the army, the routine and masculinity associated with this military lifestyle and identity remains with the individual, meaning they are now required to find a place for this identity within a new civilian life (Atherton, 2009). For some, this becomes problematic and they struggle to find a meaning and identity in their new less structured lifestyle, as they

cannot relate to it (Atherton, 2009). This can become more complex as there were are a number of living arrangements available to soldiers when in the military, such as living on married quarters, having a private civilian home, or living in camp accommodation, and therefore the experience of adapting to a wholly civilian home life is unique (Atherton, 2009).

Throughout the interviews there is a strong sense of group identity, born from teamwork and camaraderie. Juliet reflects on this feeling:

> "I've y'know I've I really enjoyed (.) when I look back at my time in the army I I really enjoyed my operational tours and I really enjoyed (.) the teamwork really and the camaraderie"
> (Juliet, p.4, lines 233-235)

Here, the sense of team cohesion and togetherness was seen as a particular highlight of the experiences Juliet had in the army, and it defined her career. Belonging refers to how connected an individual feels to a specific group and the extent they identify with it (Bryan & Heron, 2015). A sense of belonging within a certain group can benefit an individual's psychological wellbeing by acting as a social support system where individuals have a strong connection (Hatcher & Stubbersfield, 2013). This is underpinned by social identity, and the positive actions and emotions of an individual towards their in-group; a group that they are associated or connected to (Mickael, Diane & Xavier, 2019). An individual will therefore hold perceptions of themselves which reflect their social group (Haslam, 2004; Tajfel, 1978), which are often positive (Mickael, Diane & Xavier, 2019).

This group identity is reflected further in Romeo's narrative where he is describing the difference between soldiers and civilian staff working within the army.

> "I knew I would be the last regular officer to have that job (.) and that at the end of my time (.) it would convert to (.) what's described as a permanent staff admin officer (.) so effectively you're a civilian you live in your own house (.) you don't get posted anywhere (.)
>
> Int: yeah

Romeo: you keep your rank (.) you wear your uniform you keep your ID card (.) um but it's not quite the same as being a regular"
(Romeo, p.6, lines 276-287)

Describing the equivalent civilian post as different from the regular soldier's post emphasises the connection Romeo feels with his army identity. The in-group and out-group feelings are prominent in this quote. Similarly, where Romeo is describing elements of his army experience to the researcher, he eludes to the researcher not being able to understand. There were two instances in Romeo's interview where this was apparent. For example:

"and the other jobs are a bit technical to describe"
(Romeo, p.4, lines 163-164)

"I got promoted to (DETAIL OMITTED)

Int: right

so that's a big fancy badge"
(Romeo, p.4, lines 192-197)

These quotes suggest Romeo has a connection with his military identity and continues to see himself as part of that group. Therefore, the researcher, not having had military experience, is in Romeo's mind part of the civilian out-group. This is an example of social categorisation, where individuals define groups by certain reductionistic attributes which each member of the group shares (Mickael, Diane & Xavier, 2019). The in-group is then viewed more positively than the out-group in order to protect and maintain the individual's self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Van Bavel, Packer & Cunningham, 2008).

However, some participants deviated from their in-group association as is evident in a quote by Victor.

"there's more to life then (.) then the army"
(Victor, p.7, line 364)

Victor is expressing a need to leave the army and experience an alternative life. This could be due to the army not having anything more to offer him, for example if he had reached his career goals, or due to a potential negative experience within the army or seeking a different lifestyle. For example, he explains where he became angry with the army for not reappointing him in his current position when reviews of the system required soldiers to re-interview:

"he shouldn't have been interviewed coz he didn't meet the criteria' (..)

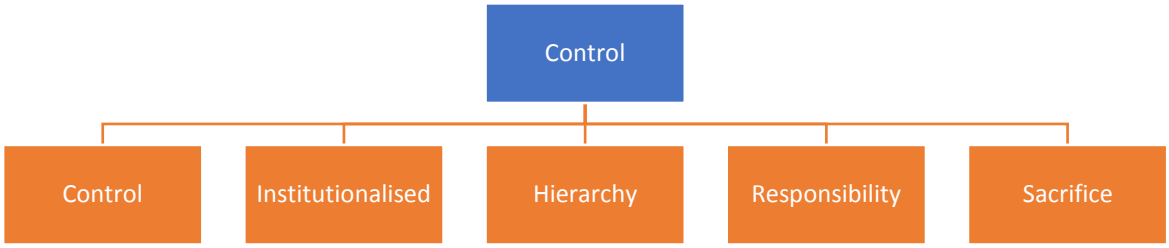
Int: mmm

um (..) at the time I didn't know that really (.) I was A I was angry (.) because I thought I'd been shafted basically (.) and B (.) I was conscience that I needed a job (.) and there was no point me wasting all my energy (.) arguing with these people (.) they'd made up their minds you (.) you've heard the expression you can't beat the system (.) if the systems decided that's what's gonna happen well (.) so be it (..) 'I've gotta get on with this' (..) and so I turned my attention elsewhere"
(Romeo, p.16, lines 813-828)

As a result of what Romeo viewed as unfair negative treatment by the army, he decided to distance himself from this in-group, as he had lost his status and role within that group. Literature suggests that the group with which one identifies with can become less attractive and less positive to that individual (Mickael, Diane & Xaver, 2019) if the group's status is threatened in any way (Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). If the individual has less of an emotional investment with the group and they identify less with the other members, when faced with negativity towards that group they are more likely to distance themselves from the group membership and move on to an alternative group identity (Spears, Doosje & Ellemers, 1997).

For all of the participants the army became a big part of their identity while they were pursuing their military career. For some, it became their life and their whole sense of worth due to the fact that being in the army demands a lot of an individual's time and effort (Brummond, 2015; Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006). In this sense, they became consumed within the army identity. This reflects ideas of in-group membership and group belonging where an individual has positive and strong feelings towards the group they associate with. Therefore, leaving the army was associated with a sense of loss and grief. Some participants however, showed varying degrees of association with their army identity, and as such demonstrated a readiness to move away from that in-group and take on an alternative group identity.

b) Control



There are two key elements that make up the theme of control: the control the individual perceived the army to have due to its hierarchical nature; the individual having control over their life, situations, and decisions which need making. This theme also includes the level of responsibility the individual feels they have. This encompasses responsibility both in the army and in civilian life, which acts as a potential measurement of the amount of control they feel they have over their lives and others around them. There are close links between this theme and the theme of Identity. For example, coming from a military family Charlie has experienced how the army can control life from a young age, dictating social surroundings and the connections individuals make. He suggests the army controlled who he was to the point that he felt he could not be a good father to his children due to the demands of the army. Juliet concurs by arguing that the army must be the number one priority and control the direction in your life. To be successful in the army career an individual must relinquish their control. However, this can be to the individual's detriment, as is demonstrated by Alpha when he expresses not having acquired the skills necessary to survive in civilian life as a result of renouncing his control of his own life over to the military.

This being said, Charlie expresses a feeling of taking back control of his life when he made his own decision to leave the army. Further, this is important for being successful in civilian life also, as is voiced by Romeo when suggesting taking control of life by having structure and routine in the way he approached civilian life.

For Charlie, being part of the military started at a young age, as he came from a military family. Therefore, he explains that when deciding what to do with his life the most obvious choice was to go into the army.

> "purely didn't know what I was gonna do (.) erm (..) had no idea about anything outside of the army based on the fact that my dad was in there and I'd lived that life so long (.) un (..) y'know all our socialin socialising was always around military people (.) until we went to Chichester at the age of thirteen we met this um family down there who we're still friends with now I'm friends with their sons my mum and dad are friends with their (.) parents (..) up until that point it was all civvies er er um military people that we socialised with so (.) it was kinda sort of (.) I I just real (.) I just really didn't have a clue what I was gonna do so it was just like well im just gonna join the army I wanted to join the infantry initially"
>
> (Charlie, p.3, lines 137-147)

Charlie explains that military life was the norm for him; it was all he had known from a very young age and throughout growing up. It was being part of this military culture which meant Charlie's life had been potentially controlled by the army, as it influenced the friends his family had and his social surroundings. His social network then was constrained by membership within this group. For the families of service personnel, the army can shape and dictate their life, as traditionally the families were required to accommodate the serving member (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003). Families have the provision to live in accommodation provided by the army wherever the serving member is relocated to and are able to use the camp facilities including welfare support (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). Additionally, the army can further infringe on families as the rank of the serving member can also reflect the socio economic status of the family, with lower rank serving members families having a lower socio-economic status (Everson, Herzog, Figley & Whitworth, 2014),

and can put pressure on the family to behave and conform in a structured environment (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003).

Juliet explains the pressure that being in the army can impose upon families and those in relationships:

> “it's difficult to hold a relationship down in the army when you’re both in the army (.) it’s even worse when one of you is out and the other is in because if you’re y’know you can be posted here y’know (.) anywhere (.) because they always y’know they always always say and y’know it’s a fair one the army is very upfront about it (.) in that y’know your (.) the army comes first (.) and if they can accommodate your personal wishes y’know with your home life then (.) great (.) but the army will always come first on postings y’know (.) and like I say if you don’t want that then don’t be in it y’know because they’re always very upfront about that”
> (Juliet, p.5, lines 277-286)

Juliet viewed being in the army as coming at a cost. When in the army, your work is the number one priority whereas everything else, including family, is sacrificed. In terms of control and hierarchy then, the solder is married to the army and they must be considered first and foremost. The army will accommodate families where possible, however ultimately the army comes first. For example, the army place high demands on soldiers and as such, this requires the individual to make many sacrifices (Vuga & Juvan, 2013). The army then has a great deal of control over the individual’s life, and requires great commitment (Brummond, 2015).

Charlie demonstrates how the army affects the family, and can have a negative impact on family life:

> “it was a to get out there was a reason for getting out but (.) had I’d stayed had I done that course (.) I think I’d probably stayed in (.)//
>
> Int: // mmm

but that might have been at the detriment to my kids"
(Charlie, p.8, lines 470-476)

Charlie emphasises that it was his decision to leave the army which would propose he felt a sense of power. He took ownership of his life and took charge, choosing to put his family first above the army.

Again, he emphasises how being in the army was affecting his ability to be a Dad:

"I'm gonna get out wanna be a good dad to me kids' and that's why I took the decision to get out (.)//

Int: // mmm

coz I wanted to see me kids (.) and I'd done thirteen years I'd done thirteen years but in adult service I'd done twelve years coz obviously from seventeen to eighteen you don't class as adult service so (.) yeah that's the reason I got out (.) wanted to see basically wanted to see my kids growing up (.) and be a good dad"
(Charlie, p.11, lines 606-616)

For Charlie, being in the army meant that he could not see his children or be a Dad to them in the way he had intended, as the army controlled his life, and dictated how he lived. Particularly for those who are deployed away from their family, trying to maintain a quality family life can become problematic (Meadows, Tanielian, Karney, Schell, Griffin, Jaycoz, Friedman, Train, Beckman, Ramchand, Hengstebeck, Troxel, Ayer & Vaughan, 2017), and this can cause the family of the serving member a great deal of stress (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003). Not all families of serving members have difficulties, however. For example, spouses of serving personnel who have been deployed can mediate the stress effects of employment if they remain positive, flexible and have adaptive coping styles (Patterson, 2002), which suggests they require a particular mindset to enable the family environment to thrive and survive the stresses that army life can inflict on families, as Charlie demonstrates.

The focus is on the spouse partner to accommodate the demands of the army, again demonstrating how it exerts control over not only the serving personnel but their wider family also.

For many, army life becomes all-consuming to the point that soldiers can shows signs of being institutionalised. For example, Charlie explains how upon leaving the army his financial situation changed in the respect that he had control over his finances.

> "it was just the (.) sort of (.) day to day stuff like (.) paying rent (.) bills (.) d-dental care your like (.) 'bloody hell (.) ''m spending my own money here what's all that about"
> (Charlie, p.12, lines 700-702)

Although Charlie would have had to pay for rent and bills while in the army, this would have been taken from his pay before he received it, therefore the money he received into his bank account he saw as his own disposable income. The way Charlie is taken aback at spending his 'own money' on bills as a civilian suggests he has the misconception of not having had to pay for it while in the army and having a distorted sense of control over finances. This potentially removed any sense of agency as it was managed for him.

Individuals who choose to live in army accommodation while serving in the army often do not have the opportunity to be financially independent, as the army caters for all their needs and does not teach them the skills required to manage their finances effectively (Grand-Clement, 2017). Therefore, when leaving the army, ex-service personnel often find budgeting problematic and struggle with financial factors (Elbogen, Sullivan, Wolfe, Wagner & Beckham, 2013), so the army is setting them up to struggle as they are not prepared for life outside of the army.

Similarly, Alpha explains how he had issues with booking a hotel during his resettlement period:

> "my most my most memorable thing is um there was er a WO1 an RSM a regiment sergeant major (.) who was on the same course and he was like 'what you doing getting

> the train into London every day from (OMITTED BY RESEARCHER)' he said 'why don't you get a hotel in town?' and I was like ' well I don't know how to' (…)
>
> Int: yeah
>
> I haven't been taught y'know (.) no-ones told me how how I go about doing this"
> (Alpha, p.6, line 332-343)

From being in the military from a young age, Alpha lacked the skills necessary to carry out tasks which, for civilians, would have been taught at a young age. He also puts emphasis on the fact that the army has not taught him how to do it, further demonstrating how reliant he had become on the military to do things for him. This further demonstrates the lack of sense of control, not just around finances but with making decisions, making sense of situations and gathering information.

Research provided by the armed forces charity SSAFA, supports the idea that soldiers are not fully prepared when transitioning into civilian life (SSAFA, 2018). For example, serving personnel often enter civilian life with a distorted view of the cost of living, and without the routine, structure and hierarchy of the army life, many fail to create a successful civilian lifestyle without struggling or needing to seek additional help and support from external agencies/charities (SSAFA, 2018). This would require the service leaver to admit what they do not know or understand about civilian living, which ties in with the notion of agency, as the individual would have to relinquish a sense of control and self-sufficiency in order for them to retain it later in life when they have been given support. Being in the army creates a degree of institutionalisation within many soldiers and with this comes limited decision-making skills and self-resilience (Grand-Clement, 2017)

However, the idea that ex-service personnel are institutionalised, controlled and rigid in their mindset has been argued to be a common misconception (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). This misconception means people overlook the positive attributes ex-soldiers possess such as determination and reliability, and by others failing to acknowledge the positive attributes of the service leaver, it can make the transition to civilian life more challenging

(Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). This point is illustrated by Bravo's struggle to find regular employment when entering civilian life:

> "so in the first twelve months of being out from ninety eight through to ninety nine (.) ''d had four jobs and been made redundant four times (.) and it was like 'phew can't be doing with this (.) can't be doing with this"
> (Bravo, pp.23-24, lines 1377-1381)

As suggested by Ashcroft (2012), ex-military personnel often feel that employers will overlook them due to the misconception that they are difficult employees. This view however was not shared by all participants, with many taking control and being proactive about beginning a civilian life in a new career, as is demonstrated by Romeo:

> "you needed to treat getting a job like having a job
>
> Int: right
>
> so get up in the morning (.) get yourself you know not ten o clock and slouch around but (.) you know get up get washed and shaved and get ready for the day (.) looking at adverts following up contacts (.) err applying to go and visit"
> (Romeo, p.17, lines 844-853)

Romeo shows that in order to secure a new career, he had to take control of the situation, and continued to implement the structure and routine army life offered him into his approach to finding new employment. Taking control as an individual is not always approved of in the army, as group cohesion and team work is viewed as more valuable attributes (Bury, 2017). Oscar shows how the military controlled his career progression due to his defiant attitude:

> "I was hoping at one stage that I might have got commissioned (.) to be as an officer
>
> Int: yeah

> but (.) I didn't (.) and I know why (.) because I opened my mouth (.) they didn't want people who opened their mouth they want people who just toe the line and (.) didn't make waves (.) and if I saw something I didn't like (.) or didn't agree with I would say so"
> (Oscar, pp.7-8, lines 410-418)

Here Oscar is indicating that the army did not allow for individual opinions, particularly opinions which were contrary to army decision and functioning. He further suggests that those who do voice their opinions or their individuality are managed to limit the impact this may have on others. For Oscar, he sees this as the reason for him not being promoted.

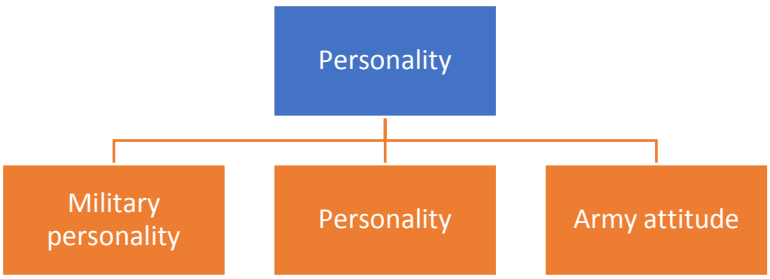
Alpha further emphasises the control the army implement over soldiers:

> "y'know (.) I I was kind of (.) quickly knocked off my perch and put in my place"
> (Alpha, p.2, lines 108-109)

The army is firmly based on a rank structure and it is this system that dictates your place in the army (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020h). The army's success is based on having a sound group cohesion through the ranks which is created through strict routines, training and discipline (King, 2009). Therefore, as demonstrated by Oscar and Alpha, the chain of command is there to represent a power hierarchy and social network which service members must respect and adhere to (Atuel & Castro, 2018), and therefore, they will be managed in order to maintain conformity to army values and opinions.

The control the army has over soldiers is of a hierarchical nature, and is enforced to ensure group cohesion and conformity among the service personnel. However, in some cases the result of this can lead to those leaving the army struggling due to the lack of structure, and they may find themselves unable to successfully integrate into civilian life.

c) Personality



The theme Personality includes both the traits demonstrated by the individual as a veteran, and traits which appear to be present in individuals during their time serving in the army. There is the suggestion here that army personnel demonstrate a 'get on with it' attitude as seen in both Juliet and Victor, which is arguably due to their military training and the need to react a certain set way to the conflict situations they can often encounter. This idea links the theme of Personality closely with the theme Identity and Control. For example, this theme eludes to the idea that the army encourages and attracts certain traits within individuals, such as aggression which ex-army personnel then find difficult to change or adapt when moving back into civilian life. Similarly, one quality specific to the army which was identified by Romeo and Bravo is an 'army sense of humour' which, according to the participants, appears to be a unique characteristic of soldiers which is often misunderstood in civilian environments. This theme differs from the other themes slightly as it identifies common traits across participants as a means to find consensus as opposed to how they uniquely identify with a certain trait. It is important to note the different approach of this theme as IPA is commonly associated with individual meaning and not collective, however, this theme was prominent across many of the participants narratives and demonstrates an important contribution to how each individual experiences their transition.

When reflecting upon the experiences that he recalls missing the most when he left the army, Romeo mentions missing the sense of humour in the army:

> "these are all people who have had similar experiences to myself (.) so the sense of humour the camaraderie the whole thing is there (.) in a different way but like-minded people" (Romeo, p.33, lines 1664-1668)

Similarly, Bravo also emphasises how the sense of humour in the civilian workplace was very different to that in the army, so much so he had to be careful what he was saying in the civilian workplace so as not to offend:

> “it’s like at work um where I work now (..) if I (.) if I’m cracking a joke with somebody (..) then that’s fine they understand that but then I'll say something and they’ll look at you and go ‘what what (.) you can’t say that’ (.) and it’s like oh (.) right (.) ok (.) coz they’re not on the same wavelength as what I'd come from (.)
>
> Int: // mm
>
> so then I have to check myself of what I'm doing”
> (Bravo, p.6, lines 316-326)

Both Romeo and Bravo have identified a difference in the sense of humour of those who have served in the army in comparison to civilians. For Bravo especially, there is a feeling that he is misunderstood in the civilian workplace and an outsider where he describes himself as being on a different wavelength. This suggests the traits and the humour that are associated with being in the army and the familiar way of ‘being’ are unique to the army setting and part of army culture, and thus there is a disjuncture when they transition into civilian life. Again, this further emphasises the outsider position Bravo is taking in this narrative, as he perceives himself as different to other civilians.

The charity SSAFA (2018) note that veterans can often feel that civilians do not understand their sense of humour, which can leave ex-service personnel feeling unappreciated and alienated. Humour in the military has been identified as an important tool, one which facilitates group cohesion and one which emphasises rank, hierarchy or power (Godfrey, 2016). It is therefore a common communicative device used and understood by service members, and a type of humour which differs to that used in civilian situations (Godfrey, 2016).

Another quality emphasised through the narrative is the ‘get on with it’ attitude displayed by army personnel while in the army. Juliet mentions this on a number of occasions:

> "it was a case of getting through it y'know (.) so (.) yeah (.) and some some of the staff were were generally nice if you know what I mean and some were just very (.) y'know it was like good cop bad cop (.) y'know and it was just a case of keep your head down and get on with it"
>
> (Juliet, pp.3-4, lines 179-184)

The idea of 'just getting on with it' is evident throughout a number of transcripts. This quality could be a learned way of coping with the day to day strains of being in the army, and a trait that presents a strength within individuals to push through adversity and get the job done. If this attitude were to be deconstructed, the qualities could be described as hardiness, which is made up of a sense of three perceived elements: commitment, control and challenge (Maddi, 2004). An individual demonstrates a commitment to getting the job done, a sense of control over one's actions, and views any issues or barriers as a challenge and opportunity to progress (Maddi, 2004). Hardiness has been found in military personnel to be a benefit to the individual (Dolan & Adler, 2006). Serving personnel with a higher level of hardiness have been found to have lower levels of deployment stress and lower levels of depression (Dolan & Adler, 2006; Skomorovsky & Sudom, 2011). Similarly, hardiness in the military has also been found to be related to motivation and adaptiveness, suggesting that the 'get on with it' attitude is a beneficial trait for serving members of the military (Bartone, Kelly & Matthews, 2013). It is also however linked to a perception of having control (Bartone, Kelly & Matthews, 2013) and could reflect how individuals may create a false sense of control. For example, in the quote above, Juliet describes a scenario where she is being instructed what to do by senior officers and in this sense, she has little control over her actions. However, she presents a sense of control with the way in which she approaches the situation, that is, by exhibiting a 'get on with it' attitude and a commitment to getting the job done, thus maintaining a false sense of control.

The sense of hardiness has also been demonstrated to remain with participants after leaving the army, as illustrated by Juliet:

> "life just moves on and you just gotta get on with it and adapt with it rather than 'oh I wish this or wish that' it's pointless having regrets y'know so"
>
> (Juliet, p.9, lines 528-530)

Again, Victor further emphasises the point made by Juliet:

> "get my head around the different (.) organisational ethos and realise that um (.) you know you've just gotta get on with it"
> (Victor, p.1, lines 603-604)

Upon leaving the army, both participants here show a sense of hardiness when faced with adversity or barriers. They both talk about moving forwards, and how when things may not have been going to plan, they choose not to regret their decisions but try to overcome any hardship and issues in civilian life. Victor recognises the need to acknowledge and manage the differences within the civilian climate in comparison to the army, and the ability to be self-sufficient in his approach to this.

As previously suggested, hardiness is a trait which is beneficial to army personnel and one encouraged by the military (Maddi, 2007). It appears to be a trait which has been created through social experience such as military employment and continues to become a part of the individual through their life and when entering other occupations (Dolan & Adler, 2006). The motivation to progress as demonstrated in the above quotes, has been associated with an increased level of hardiness within the individual (Maddi, 2007). Thus, ex-army personnel who possess a higher leve-l of hardiness will be more motivated to succeed and adapt in civilian life (Maddi, 2007).

Further to this, there is also a suggestion that only a certain type of person joins the military (Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Ludtke & Trautwein, 2012). Victor emphasises this point:

> "I think I'm quite adaptable so (.) um I didn't find it too (.) I didn't find it too arduous I get (.) tend to get on with most things"
> (Victor, p.3, lines 181-182)

Victor is suggesting that by nature he perceives himself to be an adaptable and resilient person, so when he first joined the army he did not struggle or have to compromise his personality and sense of self. He perceived himself to be resilient and well able to adapt to whatever challenges he faced in the army. Research suggests that a certain type of person is

attracted to a military lifestyle and traits such as openness to new experiences and a low level of agreeableness (Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Ludtke & Trautwein, 2012). These personality traits have been suggested to be beneficial to those in the army and remain constant upon the individual leaving the military and entering civilian life (Jackson *et al*, 2012).

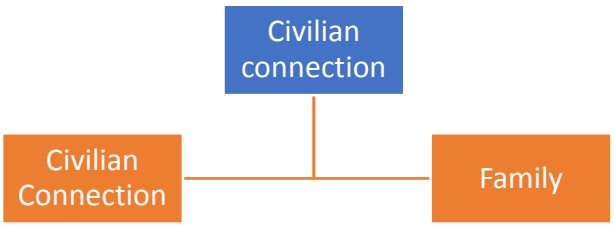
Juliet further highlights an element of the personality which was evident while she was in the army which she describes as professionalism:

> "everybody just kinda got on with things there was a lot of professionalism and stuff like that" (Juliet, p.4, lines 238-240)

Linking to previous comments made about resilience and adaption, Juliet brings focus to the idea of professionalism in the military environment. Juliet uses this in comparison to civilian life, where she felt there was a lack of team cohesion and professionalism between colleagues. Military professionalism in unique as it relies on a huge amount of commitment and dedication to the cause, which includes commitment to their country and not just the set task at hand (Johansen, Laberg & Martinussen, 2013). It also requires a commitment to each other and a trust and belief in the peers you work with (Johansen, Laberg & Martinussen, 2013). Thus, the professionalism and motivation Juliet talks about might be distinctive to the military environment and army personnel.

All of the participants discussed an element of personality that appears to be unique and common to those who have been in army. There is emphasis on qualities such as a certain type of sense of humour which seems to set ex-military personnel aside from civilians, and make them feel misunderstood. Due to the nature of the commitment and work required in the army for example regular relocation and dangerous situations, not only does this attract a similar type of person for example those who can adapt easily, it also encourages recruits to develop further resilience traits and a sense of hardiness, indicated by a 'get on with' attitude towards adverse situations and challenges.

d) Civilian connection



This theme captures the friendships and connections to civilian life the individual maintained whilst in the army. This theme links closely with identity, in that individuals who can relate to civilian life whilst still in the army experience a more positive transition when leaving the army behind due to the associations they keep, and the perceived separation from the army. For example, Oscar chose to keep his family and home life separate from the army, so they held in essence, two separate lives with distinct roles. He was able to balance his work and home priorities. This in turn assisted him in his transition back to civilian life. Victor disagrees that this is a possibility as the all-encompassing military identity does not allow for civilian connections if you want to succeed in the military. Oscar does recognise that this is the case for some others due to the intensity of army life, but further indicates that civilian connections before joining the army can also accommodate the transition to civilian life after the army. Joining the army later in life and then being able to compartmentalise the army experience upon leaving, allowed him to slot back into the civilian life they had left behind before joining. Their transition was then facilitated by the experiences they had had prior to joining the army and civilian life was familiar to them, in contrast to those who joined the army at a younger age. Much like India who moved away from any civilian connections at a young age due to her focus on becoming part of the army. This left India feeling isolated and alienated when leaving the all-consuming military life and upon returning to civilian life.

When in the army, soldiers and their families have the option of living on the barracks within the army community. Oscar explains how he decided against this option for himself and his family:

> “we never lived on a (.) quarters patch as such (.) on a pure quarters estate (.) we were always out in little smaller areas (.) so it meant that we could integrate more with the

> local population (.) um which we enjoyed and I think (NAME OMITTED) enjoyed it as well (.) um (..) we weren't institutionalised so to speak"
> (Oscar, p.11, lines 630-635)

Oscar states how he purposefully chose to live outside of the army community and was able to integrate with the wider civilian community. Further, he explains how his family also preferred this, as they were not from an army background. He makes an interesting point and suggests that this was a conscious effort to protect himself and his family from becoming institutionalised, and recognises a notion of 'us' and 'them' in relation to the army and civilians. In this situation, Oscar held two separate roles; he had his army life and his status in employment, and then in his home sphere, he had his role within a civilian family as a husband and father. By maintaining this civilian element to his persona, Oscar could find a healthy work-life balance which meant he maintained his civilian connection and could turn to that part of his life when he transitioned out of the army. His civilian connection was always there as an aspect of his life that was familiar to him, but it moved into the foreground during his transition.

Oscar's experience supports the literature which suggests that the more separate the individual feels from their civilian life during their service, the more conflict the individual faces between their two identities, and therefore the civilian identity becomes more distant (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). During Oscar's time in the army, although he kept his civilian life separate from his army life, he was fully engaged with it and maintained a balance between this and his army life. Where there are competing demands due to different identities, this can result in tension due to the need to negotiate multiple roles simultaneously (Creed, 2010). Similarly, if the individual has a demanding career, such as being in the army, this identity takes president not allowing any attention for other identities (Michel, 2011). This however does not appear to have been an issue for Oscar, and he was able to negotiate and maintain both his army life and civilian life.

Conversely however, Victor believes that having a civilian family while in the army is not possible:

> "just the the main thing was just I don't think it's a (.) I don't particularly think it's a job you can do well with with a family

(Victor, p.6, lines 354-355)

Victor suggests that having a family and maintaining civilian connections while in the army is not possible if you want to do a good job. This opinion gives insight to how Victor feels about the demands of the army and family life, and gives an understanding of his attitudes and values. He indicates that both the army and family are demanding responsibilities requiring a lot of time and attention, this is in line with research, which suggests they are both 'greedy institutions' (Drummet, Coleman & Cable, 2003). Similarly, he conveys a need to apply 100% effort to these responsibilities to be successful and perform them well. Here, Victor recognises that maintaining civilian connections while in the army is detrimental to his success in the army and is thus a conflict of interest. Further, this suggests that Victor feels that the demands of each of these spheres are incompatible, therefore those who do engage with both would potentially perform more poorly and do an inferior job, indicating there is a hierarchy in terms of quality of job performance based on other commitments.

Research has found that having a military spouse can impact on the rest of the civilian family, often in a negative way (Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006). Due to long working hours, time away from home during deployments and the stress of the risk associated with the work, military personnel can often find romantic relationships a struggle (Keeling, Wessely, Dandeker, Jones & Fear, 2015). However, this depends on certain circumstances such as an unsupportive partner, being unmarried, lack of army support for the family, and being deployed for an extended period of time away from civilian family (Keeling, Wessely, Dandeker, Jones & Fear, 2015). Thus, maintaining relationships and being part of civilian family life is very much an individual experience where some personnel continue civilian connections successfully throughout their service.

This difference in family experiences is picked up by Oscar who, although had no family issues himself, recognised that others did experience problems which caused them to leave the army:

"…and there were quite a few people left (..) because of family problems (.) because they never saw their families (.) they were just goin from one dashing from one one disaster to another basically (Oscar, p.10, lines 548-551).

This emphasises how distance away from families can affect serving personnel and their civilian connections. He explains how army life can be characterised by moving from one energy consuming event to another, and this intensity does not allow space or time for family and civilian connections.

India further expresses how there was a clear divide between her army life and her civilian life which caused her issues when transitioning:

> "you don't want to talk to your parents (.) I didn't have any friends (..) although I did but I didn't really see them coz I left when I was 16 (.) and now ''m 22 (.) so that's 6 years (.) so all my friends were in the army (long pause) (audible sobs) yeah was just (…) s hard (.) but I was lucky that I had like my mom and my dad (..) to like (.) help me sort of through it (long pause)"
> (India, p.16, lines 898-904)

Reflecting back to when she left the army, India is visibly emotional and explains a distinct move away from her civilian connections, although she had not experienced an adult civilian life before joining the army. She gives the sense of being isolated when she left the army as she no longer had civilian friends to reconnect with, and she was leaving her only friends back in the army. This suggests India had only ever intended to remain in the army and had set this as her main goal and aspiration; not considering alternative life options and leaving her old civilian life behind. This resonates with the dedication and commitment army life demands of recruits (Allen, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2010), and the rigid thinking trait which army recruits often possess (Jackson *et al*, 2012). India's lack of civilian connections and rigid thinking meant that India felt that she had been left without options having had her army life taken away.

The visible upset makes it clear that India still carries a lot of pain in relation to leaving the army and the difficulties she faced when transitioning. The loss of emotional security due to the removal of friends and colleagues has been found to have a significant negative impact on personnel leaving the military, specifically those who leave immediately and unexpected through medical discharge (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). This loss of community can leave individuals feeling isolated (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). For India, losing her friends had a significant impact which left her without the collective bond she had in the

army. Similarly, she notes she could no longer find this unity outside the army within civilian life, as her friends had moved on without her, and therefore she felt alone.

On the other hand, Oscar suggests that having an adult civilian life before joining the army was beneficial to his transition when coming out the army as it was familiar:

> "Int: did you find that a particular challenge?
>
> Oscar: no I didn't (.) um (..) I think possibly because I'd done it before I joined the army (.) with being older when I joined up (.) id been through that as a as a um y'know as I say um (..) when I was in my early twenties (.) so I knew that we needed to find school for the kids and sign up with the doctor and the dentist and (.) y'know sort out the council tax and (.) all this that and the other (.) and bank accounts and what have you (.) so yes I think I was a bit more prepared so to speak yeah"
> (Oscar, p.20, lines 1180-1189)

Further, Oscar compares his experience to others who joined the army at an earlier age:

> "with having been in civilian life before I joined the army (.) I knew what had to be done sort of thing (.) um for other people who joined when they were young or younger (.) um never experienced civilian life (.) I think they as I said they were a bit let down because there wasn't the (..) um infrastructure in place to tell them what needs to be done or how to go about doing it or to help them doing it"
> (Oscar, p.22, lines 1282-1288)

Throughout Oscar's narrative, he maintains a balance between his army work priorities and his civilian priorities. This is further emphasised above, when he explains that having a civilian life before joining the army helped him in his transition, as he knew what his responsibilities and expectations were as a civilian and compared this to those who do not have any past civilian adult experience. This suggests he held on to his civilian connection and experiences and in turn, this eventually helped him adapt back to civilian life. Others had not experienced this and therefore could not compare, it was unfamiliar and strange for them which created more of a challenge, as opposed to those for whom it was familiar. For those who had already experienced a civilian life beforehand, it was easier to adapt and was

less demanding. Oscar emphasises this by suggesting those who had not had a civilian adult life before the army were let down as they had not been 'taught' how to be a civilian by the army. Previous research has supported this idea, where individuals who had meaningful contact with a group before transitioning such as civilian employment, are better able to integrate back into civilian life with minimal challenges (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). Conversely, those without prior civilian adult experience lack the skills needed to be successful in civilian life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). However, learning of culture and socialisation is very much something that is developed through time and experience (Garcia, Aluja & Barrio, 2006). It is an interesting split in Oscar's idiosyncrasy, which sees him have a civilian self, and an army self, and this is unique to Oscar's army experience.

Juliet explains how any frustrations or struggles she experienced during her transition could be shared with her husband who left the army not long after herself:

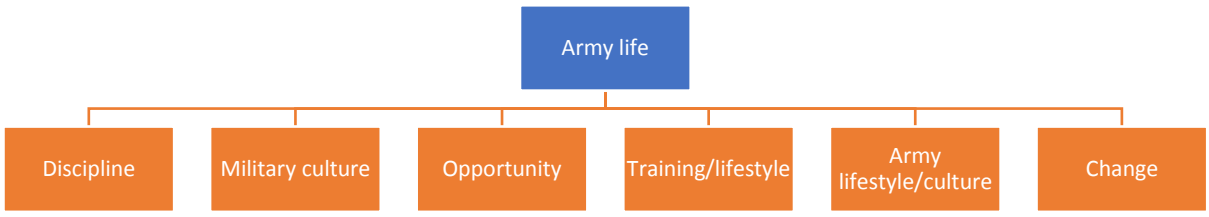
> "Int: ok (.) how do you feel your experiences compare to others experiences of leaving the army?
>
> Juliet: um (..) similar to my husband's (.) yeah he's y'know but then we can chat about it so I know that he's he's had that similar experience of you know the (.) not finding it hard to readjust but just (.) feeling as though certain jobs lack in certain aspects if you see what I mean"
> (Juliet, p.4, lines 474-480)

For Juliet, her husband was in the army at the same time as she was, and they both left the army to begin a family together as civilians. Juliet is in the unique position where she could share any struggles and frustrations she was experiencing in civilian life with her husband, and feels that he could genuinely empathise and understand when she does not connect with civilian life. This would feed into increasing resilience as she was not alone in experiencing challenges and they could face it together. This type of support, termed peer support, can help individuals in situations where they might find themselves feeling socially isolated (Hundt, Robinson, Arney, Stanley & Cully, 2015).

The theme *Civilian Connections* identifies how individuals maintain or develop an attachment with civilian life during their service or after, during transition. For some

participants, being a civilian adult allowed them to transition back into civilian life successfully after the army as they had the skills, experience and knowledge associated with being a civilian. Similarly, they were able to continue a civilian life alongside their army life which helped them keep a balance throughout their service, making transition less challenging. However, for others, creating a new civilian life came with its challenges due to the distinct separation between their army life and civilian life. Shared experiences helped one participant through some of these difficulties, suggesting the key to overcoming challenges in civilian life and increasing resilience is to share those problems with individuals experiencing similar issues or concerns.

e) Army life



This theme encompasses how participants perceived their lives within the army and captures the lifestyle they felt they led. This includes examples of how the participants experienced military culture and what day to day living looked like for them and their families. Within this theme, army training is also discussed, along with the travel opportunities the army offers its recruits. Both Oscar and Romeo mentioned how their experience of army life consisted of regular travel, and this was further reflected in Charlie's narrative when discussing regularly moving location becoming the norm. Mike suggests that the day to day routine of army life is one that is most suited to a single male. Army life was full of opportunity for some participants such as Juliet who took advantage of the educational chances she was given. Further, the day to day routine gave Oscar a sense of purpose and ambition, which closely links with Charlie's feelings within the theme of Perception of the Army. The intense nature of day to day living in the army is also demonstrated here with mentions of the adverse training methods experienced by Alpha, and the way in which the army can become an individual's family such as in India's

experience. Note, this theme links very closely to the theme Perception of the Army, however this current theme is more involved with what day to day army life was like for individuals as opposed to attitudes towards the army, which is discussed in the next theme. There will however be close cross overs.

Being in the army is often characterised by travel, not just within the UK but overseas also. This element of army life was not particularly unique as it was noted by more than one participant. Oscar explains how he relocated every couple of years:

> "yknow (…) in a corps (.) unlike a regiment (..) you move round every two and three years"
> (Oscar, p.1, lines 54-55)

Again, Romeo expresses how his experience was characterised by travel:

> "I travelled extensively"
> (Romeo, p.2, line 88-89)

Both Romeo and Oscar indicate that army life for them consisted of regular travel opportunities, whether that was a complete relocation every 2 – 3 years as demonstrated by Oscar, or a posting lasting for a few months before returning to base as described by Romeo. One of the army's unique selling points for individuals signing up, is the vast travel opportunities it offers recruits within UK territory and across the world (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020e). However, regular relocations and deployment have been suggested to have a negative effect on serving personnel and their families, as regular separations can cause strain on relationships and be harmful to both the psychological and physical wellbeing of all involved (Burrell, Adams, Durand & Castro, 2006). This point is emphasised by Charlie. He demonstrates how even though moving to a new house was part of army life, it was still an upheaval:

> "you didn't have to do anything because you would just say (.) 'ok I'm going from here to (PLACE OMITTED)' (.) and the movers would come in and they just start from like this and wrap it (..) professionally (.) so things changed over all that time (.)

Int: mmm

Charlie: and moving house became (.) less of a drama but a drama non the less I mean moving house is next to divorce and death in the family I think its (.) one of the most traumatic things you can do (..)

Int: mmm

Charlie: but you get used to the idea"
(Charlie, pp.7-8, lines 358-375)

Charlie expresses how moving to a new location was viewed as 'business as usual' and all part of the army lifestyle which recruits sign up for. He describes it as essentially something which has become the norm and an accepted part of the process. However, he also recognises that while it is something army recruits learn to expect, it still remains a traumatic experience and something that caused him stress. During regular relocation, a number of issues can arise for service personnel and their families, such as any costs associated with the move, adjusting to the new environment, problems in the timings of the move, and their partner finding new employment (Croan, LeVine & Blankinship, 1992). These issues are also present regardless of the number of times the individual has moved, suggesting relocation does not get any easier with time or frequency (Croan, LeVine & Blankinship, 1992).

As well as travel opportunities, the army can offer options surrounding education. Juliet was one such recruit who benefitted from the education the army offers:

"so I ended up doing an MSc in the army (.) and in defence technology and that allowed me to go and do nuclear biological and chemical warfare roles and things like that"
(Juliet, p.1, lines 17-19)

Juliet is one participant who endorsed army life and viewed her experience in the army as a positive one, full of opportunity. As such she made the most of the educational options that recruits are provided with to enable them to progress in their career and partake in professional development. The army offer and encourage formal education to allow service

personnel to build professional development and support their army training (Gleiman & Zacharakis, 2016). This is one characteristic that makes Juliet stand apart from the other participants. Juliet effectively adapted within and outside of army life, and utilised the opportunities the army provided and used them to her advantage, for example to gain civilian employment after the army.

For some, just the experience of being in the army is an education in itself. Victor explains how he took part in pre-training before joining the mainstream army to prepare himself for military life:

> "um (..) sort of knock I dunno knock the corners off (.) if you know what I mean um (.) whether we whether we needed it or not I don't know you will never know will you but (.) you know didn't do me any harm (.) um (.) it was just around um bits and bobs of drill and education and (.) um a bit of culture and that sort of thing (..) most of the most of people on that course had regional accents so maybe maybe that was it I don't know (.) and I was the son of a bin man so perhaps they thought (.) 'right better teach teach him to eat with a knife and fork rather than his hands' (.) off off we went so that was (..) interesting got to do a load of things that I wouldn't have done otherwise um"
> (Victor, p.3, lines 154-164)

The way in which Victor shares the reason why he had to take part in training before joining mainstream army suggests he felt inadequate for the role and responsibility. Even before joining the army, the aspect of hierarchy and rank was already being set, with the feeling that if you were from a certain background or region you were considered inferior, and in need of training to be at a suitable standard for joining the army. So, from the very beginning, Victor perceived army life to be about thorough training, hierarchy, and setting standards. Although Victor presents this as an idea for why he had to do the training, he consequently feels it was of benefit to him. He saw it as an opportunity to take part in activities that he would not have been able to take part in otherwise. From the beginning of their career, service personnel are expected to adapt to a new organised culture, characterised by intense combat training within a masculinised environment (Stevenson, 2020). Similarly, running through the core of the military is a strict hierarchical structure

where the army's values are enforced upon service personnel, and they are expected to conform to military norms (Atuel & Castro, 2018), which Victor reflects above.

Individuals joining the army experience a tough training regime at the start of their career to prepare them for any situation they might face in army life, such as combat. This training continues to a lesser intensity throughout their army life. Alpha describes one aspect of the training he experienced during the first weeks of joining the army:

> "I really enjoyed it (.) I really enjoyed the training and (.) it was it was quite (.) certainly nothing Id experienced before (.) um (…) y'know we were (…) back then definitely kept up till 2 3 o clock in the morning and we were always up before y'know (.) around about 5 or 6 so we didn't have a lot of sleep"
> (Alpha, p.1, lines 154-159)

Alpha shares that army life at the beginning was a unique experience characterised by extreme methods of training such as sleep deprivation. He does however, express a deep enjoyment of the whole training experience. This could be an attempt to downplay how difficult it could be in the army in an effort to reflect positively on his army experience. At the time of the interview, Alpha was struggling to come to terms with the loss of his army career which is a common struggle for many service leavers (Binks & Cambridge, 2018), and therefore his narrative could reflect a romanticised view he held of what army life was like. Research has suggested that those who internalise the army culture will often face a bigger challenge when transitioning into civilian life, particularly if they attempt to hold on to their army life when leaving (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This would help to explain Alpha's positive biased view of the army.

When joining the army, individuals can make deep connections to the people they are with, and the institution itself. India expressed how the army became her family:

> "you develop like a family sort of (.) instinct when you're there (.) which felt like my home (.) and so I was with my friends all the time (.) I always had someone to speak to and everything and there was a point where (.) I (.) when I first started I didn't want to go back home"
> (India, p.4, lines 194-195)

With the intensity of army life, India felt that the army had become her home. She described it as her family, where she always had support and felt safe to the extent that she did not want to return to her civilian home. This suggests India was truly invested in her army life and that for her, army life was characterised by a sense of belonging and attachment. Army life was a perfect environment for India as she notes being around her friends all the time, contributing to a sense of safety. When joining the army, recruits are relieved of their civilian connection and this is replaced with a unified military identity, and therefore, army life becomes the only life the individual knows and lives (Demers, 2011). This would explain why India became completely immersed in the army way of life. However, this was not the case for all the participants in this research, for example, Oscar who maintains a civilian connection throughout.

For Oscar, the army gave him a focus in life:

> "Int: did you change how you viewed yourself at all when you started in the army?
>
> Oscar: um (..) yes I think I had a (.) I had more of a purpose in life (.) I think (.) I had a goal to aim for (.) as just opposed to getting up for work everyday (.) yknow because I went in with the idea that (.) 'yes im gonna make this my career and im gonna do everything I can to (.) get as far as I can (.) in it' (.) yeah so yeah (.) I think I did (.) mum said it made me uncouth she said I was a lovely boy before I joined the army became uncouth"
> (Oscar, p.6, lines 305-314)

Oscar suggests that the army instilled in him a drive that made him more ambitious and gave him a sense of purpose and achievement. This reflects how Oscar had internalised the army values and beliefs, and this consequently meant he would strive for success in his career, so his life had meaning. Army life for Oscar is what gave him a purpose; a way of living his life which made him feel valued as an individual. Conversely however, upon leaving and looking back on army life, Charlie explains how he felt undervalued, as the army were more concerned with replacing Charlie than helping him in his transition:

> "it was kinda they gave you the t-the tools to go out there they'd they'd say yeah (.) 'there you go there's your resettlement' excuse me (.) 'resettlement courses' (.) and just

fire you out there (.) and that was it (rubs hands together and replicates a throwing movement)

Int: mmm

Charlie: and look to recruit the next one (.) fill your gap"
(Charlie, p.17, line 988-992)

This quote demonstrates how Charlie was made to feel expendable. Upon working his last few months, and preparing himself for civilian life, Charlie explains how the army completed their mandatory tasks for service leavers and then left him to fend for himself in civilian life. Although army life was meaningful and important to Charlie, this narrative suggests he did not feel the same appreciation in return when it came to leaving; the army's priority was not to support Charlie during his transition, but to find someone to replace him as soon as they could. Many army personnel like Charlie and Oscar, see army life as giving them a sense of purpose and ambition which they take pride in (Binks & Cambridge, 2018), therefore when Charlie was leaving and did not receive the appreciation and respect he felt he had earned, he felt undervalued and replaceable.

Not everyone believes that the army is suited to everyone. Mike states how army life is most suited to single males:

"it's a great life but it's a great single man's life really"
(Mike, p.3, lines 157-158)

Similarly, Charlie enforces this opinion by suggesting there were no female recruits at one stage in his career:

"you sorta like muck in with all the lads that you you joined coz there wasn't any (.) females (.) er up until sorta like four years later doing the trade I did"
(Charlie, p.4, lines 222-225)

Both Charlie and Mike emphasise how the army is a male environment, and for Mike, he viewed the intensity and demands of the army life as more suited to a man who was single. This reflects the busy lifestyle individuals face in the army, suggesting the masculine culture

and the requirements of army life does not lend itself to those with families or female personnel. There is a masculinity that resides in the army characterised by an aggression and willingness to overpower others (Hinojosa, 2010). Traditionally, the army was a male only environment, however, with the increase in equal rights, the potential for females to take on more roles within the army also increased (Gemmell, 2002). However, as alluded to by Mike, initially females struggled to meet the demands of some of the army role criteria, triggering a rework of the military training and role requirements to make it more inclusive (Gemmell, 2002).

Alpha explains how army life for him was characterised by substance abuse:

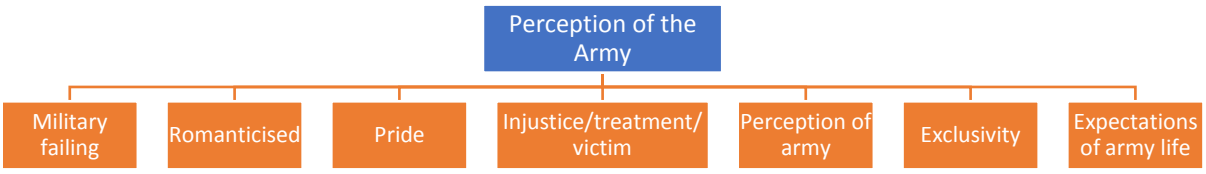
> "to a certain degree it was because the doctors had told me that it was due to my excessive drinking of alcohol"
> (Alpha, p.8, 447-449)

When Alpha was medically discharged, he was told that the reason for the issues he was experiencing was the large amount of alcohol he was consuming. In this instance Alpha blamed his own actions for the loss of his career, as his problems stemmed from something he could control. However, there remains a well-documented culture of alcohol use in the military, which is associated with solidarity among recruits, and represents a sense of togetherness (Fear *et al,* 2010). Alcohol misuse is also commonly reported behaviour in the army with those who are younger, male, lower ranking and who have been deployed at most risk of misuse (Fear *et al,* 2007). Alpha would have fitted these criteria and it is likely his attitude towards drinking stemmed from the typical army lifestyle.

Reflecting upon army life, all participants depicted a very different story. Army life could be characterised by countless opportunities to travel the world on tours and a number of postings requiring house moves. However, multiple environments require the person and their families to continuously adapt; there is no permanent base. Similarly, the army offers opportunities for education where recruits can make the most of the formal higher education courses provided by the army which was undertaken by a minority of participants (only one). Further, army life provided individuals with a sense of purpose and worth, goals to aim for, and a reason to get up in the morning. However, army life is structured by idiosyncratic norms, characterised by demanding environments, masculine ideologies, and a

drinking culture, which for some was problematic. Above all, the army becomes the recruit's family, making army life an important part of each person's life.

f) Perception of the army



Throughout the interviews, participants reflected on how they felt about the army. This theme has been termed Perception of the Army as it encapsulates the participants' attitudes towards the army as a career, how they felt personally about the army, and what they had expected it to be like. There is a great deal of conflict and disparity within this theme, with participants simultaneously describing very negative feelings about the army, but also conveying a positive view of the army. For example, India expresses how she enjoyed the army and found it fun, but when exploring her perception of the army further she describes being victimised and treated poorly when in the army and when leaving. Conversely however, Bravo begins by conveying positive reflections of the army and emphasises his feelings further by indicating that he would recommend the army as a career. Charlie perceives being in the army as making a difference and having an impact, therefore providing a sense of purpose and pride, whereas Juliet perceives the army as a distinctive institution surrounded by an air of mystery. Both perceptions feed the idea of exclusivity and eliteness.

When reflecting on a conversation he had after leaving the army and joining civilian life, Victor explains how civilian life is dull in comparison to army life:

> "I mean I remember having a conversation with (NAME OMITTED) 'well this is' you know whinging to her how how dull it was and saying life this is the army was life in technicolour and this is this is life in black and white (.) but we sort of made our bed and we've gotta lie in" (Victor, p.11, lines 605-608)

Victor uses a strong metaphor to explain how army life was exciting and how it was in 'technicolour' in comparison to his new civilian lifestyle. The way in which he describes the army in comparison to civilian life comes across as though he had made a mistake in leaving the army, and now has to live with this regret. One of the army's unique selling points is the varying trade opportunities, locations, and the sense of adventure it can offer service personnel (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020e; 2020f; 2020g).

When recalling autobiographical memories, individuals have been shown to remember the details of positive memories in more detail than negative experiences (D'Argembeau & Van der Linden, 2008). This positivity bias has been suggested to be part of a protective psychological process which enables individuals to uphold a positive self-image when the recall involves self-reflection and evaluation (D'Argembeau & Van der Linden, 2008). Therefore, memories of one's own military experiences could be recalled in a positive manner. However, this is not the same when recalling information about others when more negative details then become more salient (D'Argembeau & Van der Linden, 2008).

Bravo also paints a positive reflection on his time in the army:

> "yeah I thoroughly recommend military life it is fun"
> (Bravo, p.38, lines 2238-2239)

Bravo does not just reflect positively on army life here, but he also says how he would recommend it to others because he viewed it as enjoyable. This is an interesting reflection shared by Bravo, as he had been medically discharged from the army and thus had a difficult transition. However, army life for Bravo was recalled as being fun, and a valuable experience.

This potentially romanticised view participants have when reflecting on their time in the army could be a consequence of nostalgia. Nostalgia has a self-serving effect by making positive self attributes more accessible and raising self-esteem (Vess, Arndt, Routledge, Sedikides & Wildschut, 2012). Therefore, when recalling memories, positive bias will come to the forefront (Vess, Arndt, Routledge, Sedikides & Wildschut, 2012). However, this was not the case for all participants.

India recalls enjoying being in the army however, when thinking about all aspects of her experience she realises that it was not a positive experience:

> "I enjoyed it all but then you're looking at all of the um (.) the good things (.) whereas if I truly truly looked back um (.) quite a lot was horrific (small laugh) (.) some of the stuff they make you do (.) they don't make you do it anymore because of like health and safety and (.) things like that (..) and um (.) realistically (.) I think I got treated pretty badly (.) um especially when I left"
> (India, pp.5, lines 289-295)

Again, India reflects more deeply on her poor treatment in the army, and the treatment of others around her:

> "I feel more respected in the job im in now then (.) when I was in the army (…)
>
> Int: mmm (…) can you tell me more about that?
>
> um (..) well when you're there you're kinda like treated as (.) the lowest of the low (..)
>
> Int: //ok
>
> and um (..) no matter what you could do (..) even if you tried your hardest it was never good enough (..) and I know they're trying to like train you and whole idea is they're meant to (..) get you down so low that they can build you up to how you want to be (..) but um (…) I dunno the environment that they made that you were too scared and it wasn't just me there were lots of people you're too scared to admit that there's something wrong"
> (India, p.13, lines 753-736)

India describes how she feels she was victimised in the army. She begins by talking about herself, and how she suffered injustice and poor treatment at the hands of the military. However, she then goes on to say how everyone is treated badly, and she further supports her feelings by suggesting a number of other people also felt the same by feeling disrespected and degraded. She explains a culture of bullying where recruits are too frightened to speak up and admit when something is wrong. India was eventually medically discharged from the army after a long period of struggling with an injury. She feels the army

did not treat her fairly after obtaining her injury, which is likely to be the origin of her negative expressions above and her feelings that she was failed by the army.

Although bullying in the army is thought to be quite contained and not a widespread problem, with the hierarchical nature of the army some cases of unfair treatment do typically still exist (Wither, 2004). That being said, many have argued that it depends on the definition of bullying (Kirke, 2007). Senior service personnel are expected to be assertive and sometimes display aggressive towards their lower ranking colleagues to encourage conformity to strict boundaries and regulations, and to assist in the disciplined culture of the army (Kirke, 2007). Within the organisational construct of the military, this type of behaviour is inherently accepted and expected, however this is context specific and many would consider the threats of discipline and oppressive culture unnecessary persecution (Kirke, 2007).

An environment where serving individuals could thrive in a structured disciplined context is during combat, as is described by Charlie:

> "um I used to love going on tour to um Ireland (.) um (..) because that's when I felt like we were doing our real job when we was in sort of like in an environment where (.) there were people that were willing to sort of like (.) harm ya"
> (Charlie, p.7, lines 387-390)

Further, Charlie explains the pride he felt in the army as he was making a difference in his role:

> "so when you were (.) doing your job (..) it meant something that you were out there"
> (Charlie, p.9, lines 512-513)

When put under pressure in a combat situation, Charlie felt that was when he was at his best and doing the job that he had signed up for, that is, military combat. He feels that is where he was making a difference in the world and felt a sense of pride and meaning in what he was doing, even though he was in inherent danger.

Research has supported this sense of pride veterans hold and express when discussing their army experience (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015). This is suggested to be a continued expression of the individual's military belonging as a veteran-civilian, and a positive reflection on their

perception of the army and their contribution to the serving cause (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015). Indeed, as part of the army values and standards it encourages and expects soldiers to be proud to serve their country (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020i). This viewpoint is proposed to support the service leaver in their transition to civilian life, and their new civilian life thereafter (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015).

This sense of pride can be closely associated with the perception that the army is an elite special employment which differs from civilian employment, which is described by Juliet:

> "you never saw any uniformed personnel out on the so (.) the army y'know the army was very like a secret kind of thing really"
> (Juliet, p.3, lines 164-166)

Juliet explores the army's uniqueness further:

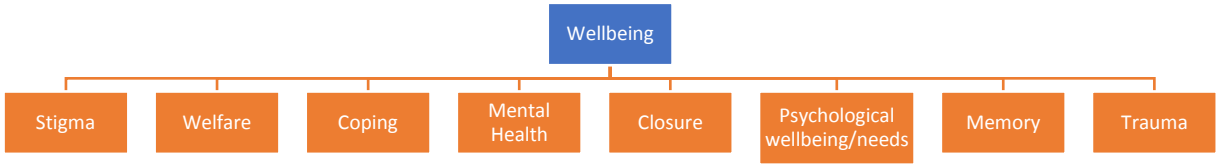
> "even now he's been in the police for ten years (.) he still says its nothing like the army"
> (Juliet, p.7, lines 385-386)

Juliet reflects on how the army can be perceived by others as a secret and distinct organisation surrounded by an air of mystery and exclusivity, which feeds an idea of excitement. The army convey a perception of their service personnel being the 'elite' and a separate entity (Simpson, Gray & Florida-James, 2005), and this is made evident by their use of the tag line 'be the best'. Recruits are put through a series of both physical and psychological tests before they can officially become part of the army, and only the most 'elite' are accepted as being able to deal with the demands that work in the army entails (Simpson, Gray & Florida-James, 2005). Although the army used to be an exclusive profession demonstrating unique specialisms, many of these tasks can now be allocated to civilian companies making the army a less specialised profession (Heinecken, 2013).

Many participants reflecting on army life recalled it being fun and exciting, while feeling a sense of pride and exclusivity for being a serving member of the military. They felt the work they were doing was making a difference and they felt a sense of purpose and meaning in their life. In contrast to this however, when reflecting on some similar experiences, other participants (Alpha and India) realised that some of the tasks and work they were made to do were dangerous and degrading. They also felt that they were treated badly and felt a

sense of injustice in the way the army attended to their needs and changing circumstances. This conflict is interesting as all participants described having to endure similar experiences and training processes while in the army, however many appear to have a romanticised view of army experience, positioning the poor treatment and extreme negative training practises as fun and exciting.

g) Wellbeing



The main elements of this theme surround mental health and coping. A number of individuals reported experiencing ill mental health during or as a result of being in the army. Thus, this theme is constructed around the individual's army experiences, which are sometimes expressed as being traumatic, and the serving personnel's ability to cope with the trauma they have suffered. Similarly, there were a number of discussions around basic needs being met and being fulfilled in the army which is an important contributory factor to general welfare. For example, Romeo stresses the importance of having a safe and secure environment as a priority after leaving the army to enable individuals to attend to their health and wellbeing needs. Having these basic needs met facilitates the individual in adapting to a new civilian life and adopting coping strategies to move forwards while maintaining military roots. However, for others like Alpha, the focus was around help-seeking behaviour and the stigma attached to this which created a barrier to a positive wellbeing during transition. India expressed a unique experience with regards to wellbeing as she was injured, and for her the acceptance of responsibility and blame played a big part in her ability to move on. Conversely, Bravo had a struggle with mental health and explains how this impacted on his life.

Mental health, or more specifically ill mental health, is an issue which has been explored with in military populations (Sharp, Fear, Rona, Wessely, Greenberg, Jones & Goodwin, 2015). For Bravo, this was a theme that featured heavily throughout his narrative. He

explained how an event during the army contributed to a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) diagnosis after leaving the army and joining civilian life:

> "we weren't allowed to go in (.) so we had to just sit and watch it (.) and that was quite harrowing (.) um (.) yeah it-it started something that (.) didn't come out for years later (.) um (.) which (..) is to what that's-that's what part of whats caused what I call (.) or what I've been diagnosed with is PTSD (.) and that's one of the causes of it (.)"
> (Bravo, p.6, lines 353-358)

For Bravo, being in the army was characterised by trauma which he perceives is to blame for his PTSD. He can vividly pinpoint a time during the army which he has identified as one of the main causes. Bravo shares that he observed a traumatic incident where a colleague was being attacked, for him, the most traumatic part was being told he was not allowed to go and help. This feeling of helplessness, no agency, feeling like his views were being overridden, and being unable to carry out his loyalty to his fellow comrades after he had specifically asked if he could go and help, was enough to cause Bravo a deep pain which later manifested into a mental health condition.

Bravo's experience is what researchers have termed 'moral injury' (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016). This is where the soldier has been made to do something, or in Bravo's case, not to act upon something during combat, which opposes the individual's beliefs and values about what is 'good', causing feelings of guilt or shame associated with PTSD (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016). As a result of this, an individual may question their moral values, which causes moral stress and subsequent deep psychological issues (Belrose, Duffaud, Dutheil, Trichereau & Trousselard, 2019). Therefore, reintegration into life after this experience, both army life and civilian life, can be more of a struggle (Belrose, Duffaud, Dutheil, Trichereau & Trousselard, 2019). Interestingly, Bravo was the only participant to vocalise an element of moral injury as a result of his time in the army, making this unique to -Bravo's experience.

When dealing with PTSD and depression, Alpha explains that when leaving the army, he found it difficult to seek help:

> "and I found that (.) hard to go and see somebody about (.) even your local doctor its I found it hard (…) so I think (…) for those people that coming out of the army y'know (.) the services now (.) erm (…)

Int: mm-hm

Alpha: because (.) a long time ago it was a stigma (…) (inaudible) with y'know (.) being a weakness to go (.) and talk to somebody about your feelings (.) I think that I think that stigma (…) I think it still goes on (…) so I think (.) w with regards to y'know PTSD and that sort of think people are afraid to go and (.) talk to the likes of combat stress and help for heroes or whoever's out there"

(Alpha, p.16, lines 924-938)

Even though Alpha recognised he needed support and help for his mental health, he explains how he found it difficult as he perceives there is stigma around help seeking within the army. He quickly shifts the attention from himself to say that it is not just himself who would have found it difficult, but anyone seeking help after leaving the army would experience barriers. This wider generalisation could be seen as an attempt to not look 'weak' or in any way different to others struggling to ask for help, suggesting he has internalised the wider stigma of help seeking. It places the root cause on the long-standing pervasive stigma which creates further problems for those needing support for mental health issues.

For many like Alpha, literature has explored the failure of ex-serving personnel to seek medical help due to the connotations of weakness and the stigma still attached to help-seeking in the army (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Both internal (within the self) and external (from others) stigma has been demonstrated to act as a key barrier to help-seeking behaviour in ex-serving personnel with PTSD (Murphy & Busuttil, 2014). Internal stigma in particular, has been found to effect army personnel's help seeking behaviour and views of mental health (Murphy & Busuttil, 2014), but this is perhaps inextricably linked to external stigma and it is impossible to separate the two. Also, where individuals believe it is largely an internal issue, the blame is then located within the individual, therefore drawing attention away from the wider social issue at play. Greene-Shortridge, Britt and Castro (2007) suggest that negative perceptions held by the public about mental health and the armed forces are internalised by the serving member, these then create their own negative beliefs which become prevalent in the result of the experience of PTSD symptoms. As a result, help seeking behaviours are avoided (Greene-Shortridge, Britt & Castro, 2007).

Romeo acknowledges that individuals leaving the military must have their basic needs met:

> "how do people (..) trans (..) transit (..) transition from the military to civilian life (..) well (.) I mean the key elements (..) forgetting being injured wounded or sick are you wannna job and you wanna place to live (.) would be (.) the key elements to (.) moving on (..) if you over lay and and all the you know and that sounds simple but it certainly isn't (..) then overlay somebody with um an injury a severe injury (.) or a sickness (..) then makes it even more difficult"
>
> (Romeo, p.27-28, lines 1398-1407)

To enable an individual to transition successfully, Romeo recognises that ex-soldiers must have their basic needs met first. He identifies that for those who have been injured it must be more difficult during the transition, as it is challenging even for those who are not injured or sick. Therefore, there is potentially a hierarchy of perceived difficulty based on the level of needs required. Romeo suggests that to move on properly, however that might look to the individual, these basic needs must first be met, such as having a home, before ex-soldiers can then seek individualised support for other issues. Thus, a safe and secure space needs to be prioritised before the service leaver is willing to address any further health and wellbeing issues they may have. This can be difficult for those experiencing trouble transitioning to civilian life as the military promote a culture of self-coping and self-efficacy (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013), which arguably act as a barrier to those needing support.

The UK Armed Forces have tried to encourage service leavers to take responsibility for their own transition by introducing the *Transition Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD)* scheme, where soldiers develop their skills and knowledge to enable them to live a successful civilian life after the army (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b), thus giving them the tools they need for their basic needs to be met. By introducing this, the army have recognised and acknowledged that this is the preparation required. However, the onus is on the soldier to proactively take part in IPPD activities and it is not a compulsory scheme (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b), meaning many may miss out on the opportunities it presents. The responsibility therefore has been shifted from the army to the service leaver to ensure they are fully prepared for civilian life, and the blame does not lie with the army if the transition does not go smoothly for the service leaver.

Victor explains how different things would sometimes negatively affect him in civilian life, however, he learned to live with these things:

> “instead of getting annoyed with it (.) you sort of (.) learn to learn to live with it for the better” (Victor, p.11, lines 614-615)

When embarking on a new civilian life with different employment, Victor identifies that certain things would annoy him. However, he was able to adjust his mindset by remaining positive about the situation. Victor’s priority was his family, and therefore this was his main focus, and he was positive about securing employment. This focus during his transition could potentially have been his drive and motivation to adjust, and therefore was beneficial to his wellbeing.

Romeo also discussed how he adopted ways of coping in the army and when transitioning to civilian life:

> “the army is a way of life you know its (.) institutionalised in its broadest sense (.) you are you are part of and if you’re not you wouldn’t fit in you ba you’ve gotta fit in (.) with with the military to be successful (.) and so (.) yeah I was I was struggling with the idea that (..) people on the outside didn’t really (.) you all you’ve gotta prove yourself really (..) you’ve really got to prove yourself (.) um without really knowing how (.) what their values were its quite simple when you’re in the army you knew what the values were (.) coz you’d done it for thirty years and (.) you knew (.) what was good and what was not good and so on (.) but I I (.) I just applied my values (.) I I figured well I'm not gonna ’Im not gonna try and change me (.) for them I I’ve (.) I've obviously got to adapt (.) but my values are my values”
>
> (Romeo, p.21, lines 1046-1063)

To enable him to cope with civilian life, Romeo expresses a contradiction in his narrative. He explains that during his transition to civilian life, he recognised that he would need to adapt but it was not always clear what was wanted or expected of him, unlike in the army where values and expectations were made explicit. However, Romeo remains grounded in his opinion that his values would remain constant as that is what he believes in and it is perceived as core to his identity. His ability to cope in the army was explained as recognising what was expected from him and being able to fit in as the army made it clear what their

values and expectations were. Therefore, Romeo was able to meet these successfully. Romeo appears conflicted in his ability to cope with civilian life which could show a struggle between his military roots and his new civilian life. He is living by his old rules which have become internalised, but these may not fit with expectations and values held outside of the army in civilian settings.

Research has suggested that those who have been out of the army the longest adapt over time so that they see their experience in the army as an important element of their life course, and are able to build on this in the civilian environment (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). They recognise transition as a long drawn out process, but are continuously moving forward without living in the past (Brunger *et al*, 2013). Although Romeo showed a strong sense of moving forwards and getting on with his life, he also still recognised his army roots which would remain part of him.

In contrast, for those who are living with an injury from the army, transition into civilian life and moving forward can be more difficult due to the financial ramification of not being able to work, and not being able to partake in civilian activities (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper & Fossey, 2018). India left the army through medical discharge and thus had to find ways to cope in civilian life. India expresses her ability to cope with aversive situations by the displacement of blame, as can be observed in her conversation:

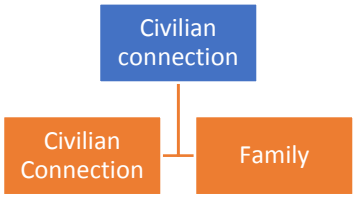
> "I'd also injured my hip at that point (.) and um (.) I told them that (.) I could do the run back and they just like shouted at me and made me do it (.) and then (…) that led to all sort of problems as well (…) so //
>
> I: //mmm
>
> India: yeah things I (.) guess you had to do but to the certain extent that they did it I don't think it had to be as bad as it was (..) but (..) and like when you're on um (…) ok (.) I've gotta admit I was very accident prone (small laugh) (.)//"
>
> (India, p.6-7, lines 352-364)

In this narrative, India battles backwards and forwards with who is to blame for her injury and subsequently to blame for her having to leave the army. India appears to have bad memories of being in the army, and also experienced a challenging transition as she was

medically discharged and did not want to leave. To deal with these feelings, India's way of coping can be observed in her attempt to make meaning out of the situation where she fights between self-blame and external blame. By blaming the army, she is escaping any negative feelings about herself, protecting her self-esteem. Thus, demonstrating a self-serving bias where external factors are to blame for her problems (Forsyth, 2008). However, India still bears a fondness towards her army past, and therefore tries to share part of the blame to protect her army connection.

This theme demonstrates the intricate differences between each participant when it comes to the wellbeing of the individual when transitioning to civilian life. For some, mental health issues are at the forefront of the problems they faced, and this paired with the stigma attached to mental health and help seeking played a large part in their ability to cope with civilian life. For many, the ability to adapt came down to employing coping strategies which would protect one's own wellbeing, allowing the individual to successfully be part of civilian life while maintaining their army roots. This could be facilitated by having basic needs met such as housing, which would allow the individual to focus on building a new life for themselves and developing and maintaining positive wellbeing.

h) Civilian lifestyle



This theme focuses on the participant's perception and experience of civilian life. This includes their personal experience of how they felt leading up to leaving and their expectations, along with how they felt during their transition out of the army. This time period posed both challenges and opportunities for the participants with regards to new civilian family lifestyles and employment changes. For example, Charlie had secured a civilian job before leaving the army and so this helped him transition into his civilian role as he was aware of some of the expectation placed upon him. Similarly, the relaxed nature of civilian life brought a welcomed contrast to the intense pressurised environment of the military for Juliet. However, Juliet also acknowledged how the lack of structure and routine of civilian life caused her to struggle, much like Bravo who explicitly says civilian life sparked

the beginning of his problems. Further, role uncertainty was a problem for Oscar who found family roles and responsibilities a struggle having been used to the hierarchical nature of the army.

Oscar was the only participant to explain how his role within the family changed after he left the army and joined civilian life:

> “instead of being the one who’s telling everybody what to do (.) I've got to all of a sudden be (.) on a level playing field with (NAME OMITTED) and (.) be part of a team (.) are you with me” (Oscar, p.16, lines 952-955)

In the army, Oscar had a role of seniority and was responsible for a team of people upon whom he was required to assert his authority. In his narrative, he is comparing this role in the army, to being at home with his civilian family, and no longer holding the same authoritative role. Contrary to previous comments Oscar made about the positive element of group belonging and teamwork in the army, he now singles himself out as a figure of authority in the army who is having to be part of a team in the civilian home. This suggests that on some level his status while in the army was carried through to his home environment, where he still saw himself as the one responsible for his family and potentially the one running the home as an authoritative figure. Upon leaving the army, Oscar lost this status and began civilian life on a level playing field with his family, no longer the one solely responsible, but now part of the team.

For many leaving the army, the transition experience is a cultural shift where their army instincts and responsibilities must be replaced with attitudes accepted within civilian environments, such as the family home (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper & Fossey, 2018). Depending on the individual’s role and responsibilities within the army, this can mean experiencing a loss of status when entering civilian life, which can be particularly challenging for the service leaver (Williams, Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2018). This loss can mean individuals feel unfulfilled in their new civilian life and feel a sense of disconnection from society (Connelly, 2020). For example, Juliet demonstrates this disconnection to civilians in the workplace when she describes feeling like her army background is not understood or appreciated by civilians:

> "I also found that um (..) people didn't really 'oh you're in the army ok' y'know (.) big deal (.) do you know what I mean not that you made anything out of being in the army but but y' know they (.) if you met people they'd say 'oh what did you used to do?' (.) ' I was in the army' (.) 'oh right' and that would be it d' y' know what I mean (.) people aren't interested really I find I it always struck me that it was people were never interested in what you did (.) at all" (Juliet, p.7, lines 367-374)

Upon telling people that she used to be in the army, Juliet explains being faced with a lack of interest and apathetic responses from civilians. This suggests she felt they were oblivious to the sacrifice and importance of the army role. The fact that Juliet points out that civilians appear uninterested in her army past contrasts sharply with the perceptions discussed in the theme 'perception of army life', where the army was viewed as mysterious, specialist and exciting. Despite the value and respect some civilians place on the military, research has suggested that the public place a distinct lack of interest in individual army experiences (Zoli, Maury & Fay, 2015). Juliet has experienced this and feels that people should be more interested or more invested in her past army life. This could be a continuation of her status in the army and the hierarchical rank structure that remains the backbone of the military. Juliet clearly places great value on her army experience and what she had achieved. Therefore, there is an expectation that others will also share this enthusiasm and interest, and place similar high commendation on Juliet's army experience.

For many serving soldiers, civilian life poses a number of uncertainties, even for those who had had civilian lives before the army, and even for individuals who have secured new employment. Charlie explains his anxieties in the time leading up to him leaving:

> "Int: what was the time like leading up to you leaving?
>
> Charlie: I was a bit nervous about that I gotta be honest because (.) I'd I'd gone and done this two weeks um job experience with OMITTED down at OMITTED (.) and um (.) they (.) they basically offered me the job (.) and that's why I ended up sort of paying to get out (.) um (.) but b-b-b as opposed to coz I'd already signed off anyway (.) and I hadn't even got a job then I just knew I was gonna go but then as it got closer I sort of got this (.) work

> experience (.) and um (..) yeah they offered me the job (..) but I didn't know how it was gonna pan out I didn't really know how Civvy street was gonna go I didn't know er everything was everything was provided for you in the military (.) dental care (.) medical care (.) sports facilities (.) clothing (.) bed (.) breakfast everything was just (.) it's like they wipe ya backside for ya and (.) you didn't you're left you just had to concentrate on your job so everything was around you in place (.) and then you could just be a squaddie (.) get on with your trade (.) civvy street I was like (.) 'argh ''m gonna have to pay bills ''m gonna have to do this ''m gonna have to do that (.) where am I gonna live' (.) so I started getting myself in a bit of a tiswas before I got out"
>
> (Charlie, p.11, line 622-641)

Charlie had an awareness of his new responsibilities as a civilian, and he had secured full-time permanent employment even before leaving the army. Having links to civilian society and preparing for the transition to civilian life in a positive proactive way has been suggested to facilitate the transition to a civilian lifestyle (Connelly, 2020), which Charlie clearly demonstrates. However, he expressed a degree of unease and anxiety at the thought of being a civilian and the responsibilities that living a civilian lifestyle entailed. He had been successful in his army career for 13 years and was leaving because he believed this was what was required for him to be a good father to his children. He was therefore making a big sacrifice to move into somewhat unknown territory, after years of what he describes as an easy lifestyle with little responsibility other than his work. Uncertainty is a common aspect service leavers report in their transition to civilian life due to some of the unknowns regarding financial security, social expectation, employment stability and future ambitions (Cox, Grand-Clement, Galai, Flint & Hall, 2018).

Uncertainty becomes emphasised when the service leaver does not plan to leave the army (Cox, Grand-Clement, Galai, Flint & Hall, 2018). Bravo is one such individual, and he explains how his problems began upon leaving the army in one sentence:

> "(.) the problem the problems then started is when you come out"
>
> (Bravo, p.23, lines 1349-1350)

Throughout his narrative, Bravo explains how he had experienced a number of difficulties while in the army, such as observing traumatic events, being injured, and accessing support for ill mental health. However, in this quote, he is suggesting he started experiencing problems when he left the army to begin civilian life. This could be a displacement of blame due to Bravo having a positive and somewhat romanticised view of the army, and therefore not wishing to attribute any responsibility to the army for his struggles when leaving. Similarly, whilst in the army, Bravo was going about his daily routine as normal and could potentially avoid addressing any deep-seated issues. When leaving, he initially took time off before beginning a civilian job, and this is when he began drinking regularly. So, what began as coping through avoidance and structured routine then became coping through use of alcohol, due to a change in his routine within civilian life. Research suggests that as a way of coping with the psychological distress that the transition can create, individuals turn to substance abuse (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). For some, this is an attempt to create new social groups within the civilian lifestyle and find a new purpose (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013).

When transitioning into a new civilian lifestyle, the one thing Juliet missed was the routine the army offered. She expresses her need for more structure and routine in her life since becoming a civilian:

> "and not y'know I missed that routine and that structure of going to work and stuff"
> (Juliet, p.7, lines 366-367)

For Juliet, civilian life was less regimented than her former army life, and this is one element of the new civilian culture she found challenging. Whilst in the military, the presence of structure is the one aspect that many soldiers find comfort in (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer, & Moos, 2015). Structure provides clear rules and expectations, and it allows for certainty within an ever-changing stressful working environment (Ahern *et al,* 2015). Thus, the routine of military life provides the individual with reassurance, support and a stability that many like Juliet miss and crave in a civilian lifestyle (Ahern *et al,* 2015). However, conversely, when Juliet was asked how the first weeks of civilian life were, she described them as having a holiday:

"Int: so what were the first few weeks like as a civilian again?

Juliet: um (.) a bit odd (.) to be honest it was nice to be like on holiday yeah (.) don't get me wrong it was nice to just y'know chill out and (.) coz I y'know was very tired very y'know worked very very long hours it was very intense kind of work (.) um so it was nice to just feel as though you were on holiday"
(Juliet, p.6, line 351-357)

For Juliet, the pressure of the army was so intense, that after leaving and transitioning to a civilian life, she felt a sense of relief. This is a sign that Juliet had prepared herself from moving on from the army and was ready to begin a civilian lifestyle. Juliet's experience was unique as she left the army to begin a family and therefore spent time out of employment for a long period when leaving the army for maternity leave. In a sense, Juliet's main priority and concern as a civilian was beginning a family and therefore that had become her civilian lifestyle choice, and she could feel a sense of achievement and closure when leaving the army. Research suggests that those who recognise their military past as an experience upon which they can build and utilise their acquired skills for success in the future, often transition into a civilian lifestyle more smoothly (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013).

When seeking new employment, many service personnel express a difficulty in securing adequate full-time work. Oscar explains why this is the case:

"you see there was an old there was an old adage that um (..) firms will always take on ex-servicemen (.) because they knew that they got the work ethic um (..) and (.) everything that went with it (.) and they were well trained (..) that came mainly from (..) the olden days not the olden days but in the fifties and sixties (.) where people in industry themselves had served I the forces (.) so they knew what they were taking on and what they were getting (.) right (..) where as latterly because we didn't have national service or we didn't have as many people join the army (..) people in industry and that didn't know (.) what benefits ex-military could bring (.) to the organisation are you with me

Int: yeah

Oscar: they always said whenever we went on briefings 'oh y'know industry's crying out for you y'know because of your trade and work ethic' and this that and the other (.) but it wasn't as such because they didn't know what we had to bring (..) until you managed to get a job and then they realised what a good catch they'd got (.) are you with me"
(Oscar, p.24, lines 1397-1417)

Oscar suggests that for employers, ex-service personnel used to be desirable as they knew the expert skills and knowledge an individual could bring to an industry. However, he suggests that this attitude has shifted over time with employers no longer appreciating the qualities of ex-service personnel. This has been suggested to be a new false belief held by service personnel, due to their perception that employers would find them difficult to work with and institutionalised (Ashcroft, 2012; Bergman, Burdett & Greenberg, 2014). Bravo's experience supports this, for him, he did not have problems finding employment, but staying in full time employment:

"so in the first twelve months of being out from ninety eight through to ninety nine (.) I'd had four jobs and been made redundant four times"
(Bravo, p.23-24, lines 1377-1380)

This quote from Bravo has been used previously within the theme Control to demonstrate the lack agency he felt when looking for work. Within a space of a year, Bravo had been made redundant from civilian employment four times and as such struggled to find permanent full-time employment. He emphasises that the issue with gaining work was not securing the work, but the lack of permanent work that was available, which is apparent through his number of redundancies. However, other participants such as Charlie did not express this as an issue:

"life was good I really enjoyed it was err (.) initially it was all like brilliant this is I (..) it-was it was good (.) I ended up getting a second job (.) um (..) what it was because I was travelling from OMITTED to OMITTED (.) and the fact that (.) working for OMITTED well

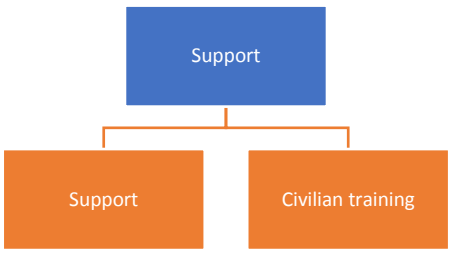
certainly um t-t-the job that I did in there it-w-it-was quite boring but well paid like I say (.) I ended up working with i-my mate"

(Charlie, p.14, line 784-790)

For Charlie, he secured a job before leaving the army, and then continued in this job until he decided he wanted a change. He was then able to take control of his civilian career and choose what he did next, as opposed to others controlling when he changed jobs.

Creating a new civilian lifestyle during the transition from military to civilian life, can be both problematic, and a new lease of life for individuals. For some, leaving the army behind was a breath of fresh air; an opportunity to take a break and start a new life with family, keeping military experiences as a fond and proud memory. For others however, leaving the army and trying to create a civilian lifestyle was a challenge, where service leavers were confronted with loss of status, uncertainty, a lack of structure and routine, and characterised by a lack of interest by members of the public, all of which served as sources of anxiety and distress.

i) Support



This master theme encompasses the support the individual received on the run up to, and after leaving the Army. It includes support provided by the army, such as resettlement and professional support from external institutions, such as combat stress as was accessed by Bravo. Bravo felt that the army does not support service leavers by not setting them up adequately for success in civilian life. Further, India felt the courses provided in resettlement were generic and unhelpful; a feeling reflected by Alpha who did not know what courses to partake in due to his lack of control over leaving the army. Alpha also felt he was forgotten about and that if he needed more support he was required to be proactive in seeking it for himself. On the contrary, Juliet who chose to leave the army felt that the support she received was sufficient for her to begin her civilian life. Also included within this theme are

the participants' thoughts and ideas of what support would have been beneficial to them in light of their experiences. For example, Charlie suggests contact from the army following discharge would have been beneficial.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) work together with the Career Transition Partnership (CTP) to provide support to individuals leaving the Armed Forces in their transition back to civilian life (GOV.UK, 2012) since 1998 (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2018b). Eligibility for this resettlement support depends on service length. For example, personnel with between 4 and 6 years' service are entitled to the Employment Support Programme (ESP); those with a minimum of 6 years' service length will receive the full range of services; however, individuals with less than 4 years' service or those who are compulsorily discharged are only entitled to minimum vocational support (GOV.UK, 2012; Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2018b). The exceptions are those who are medically discharged and these service leavers are automatically entitled to the full range of services (GOV.UK, 2012).

During their service, personnel are encouraged to engage in Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD [Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b]). This is designed to be undertaken throughout their service time to help develop their career prospects and personal skills, for example, personal planning (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b). Soldiers are supported in their continuous professional development and offered opportunities to improve their education and knowledge (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2020b).

In the transition to civilian life, some participants found it beneficial to seek further support from external organisations to help prepare them for a new way of living, perceiving the support offered by the army as inadequate. This is demonstrated in Alpha's quote.

Alpha sought support to help him get back on the career ladder and he emphasised that it is the individual's responsibility to seek additional support; the idea of reaching out was repeated in a number of quotes throughout the interview:

> "I would of never gone to the British legion before for anything (.) err but I was made aware of the royal British legion and how they helped people do different things (.)
>
> Int: mm-hm

> Alpha: erm (.) I asked them for some money to do a course and they helped me out with that (.) and I got my first teaching qualification (.) out of it (…) (p.7, lines 365-372).
>
> Alpha: if I wanted support or help I had to phone people like erm (.) SSAFA or combat stress (.) I had to do that off me own back (…) (p.5, lines 279-280).
>
> Alpha: unless you actively seek out the charities that are there (.) or (…) or whether you're put in yknow whether your urm (.) introduced to these charities prior to coming out"
> (Alpha, p.8, lines 461-462)

Alpha's narrative emphasises the sense of agency and the need for active participation in seeking support when it is required. He stresses that it was seeking the support of the charity which led him into pursuing a career in teaching which would shape his future. This demonstrates an element of causal responsibility, where the individual views their actions as shaping their success or particular state (Minkler, 1999).

Similar to Alpha, Bravo also sought support, this time from Combat Stress to help him with his mental wellbeing when transitioning to civilian life:

> "then I literally picked the phone up (.) and I told (NAME OMITTED) and she says 'right' so they organised it (.) they came down (.) a guy called (NAME OMITTED) came down from combat stress"
> (Bravo, p. 32, Line 1869 – 1872)

It was necessary for Bravo to take responsibility for finding his own additional support after leaving the army and had to be in a mentally stable position in which to do so. In a study investigating young people's attitudes towards help seeking for themselves, individuals only sought help when they felt emotionally ready (Rickwood, Deane & Wilson, 2007). This could have the potential to be problematic, for example in Bravo's case, he struggled with the challenges of civilian life upon leaving the army and so seeking help earlier could have prevented some of these struggles.

During times of transition it is common for adults to seek out support from professionals to help them make sense of their changing environment and adjust to the discontinuity that they are experiencing in their lives (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). Moreover, for those leaving military service, it is particularly beneficial for service personnel to seek ex-military specific support systems, as these tend to specialise in the uniqueness of military transition and are often supported by ex-veterans who have experienced military transitions (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman & Moos, 2015). This can be beneficial to the individual seeking support, as shared experiences assist in creating a group identity between individuals, and the empathy demonstrated as a result of this helps in therapy (Meneses & Larkin, 2015).

However, many ex-army service personnel requiring additional support do not seek help themselves due to a number of barriers (Rafferty, Stevelink, Greenberg & Wessely, 2017). For example, the negative stigma associated with help seeking behaviour can discourage individuals from searching for support (Coleman, Stevelink, Hatch, Denny & Greenberg, 2017). That being said, once an individual has experienced a positive outcome from seeking support, these negative preconceptions are diminished, opening up the possibility of further help seeking behaviour (Coleman *et al,* 2017).

One type of support system the army provides for service leavers is the resettlement package, which is designed to prepare and support personnel transitioning to civilian life. Bravo explains how this is an entitlement for service leavers:

> “you can still do your pre-release courses (.) whatever you decide to do’ (..) //
>
> Int: // I see
>
> Bravo: and at that time (.) I don’t know how they do it now but at that time (.) you’re allowed to have (.) coz of the length of time I had depending on long you’d done (.) if you’d done six years you’re allowed three weeks (.) if you done nine years you’re allowed four weeks (.) which is strange but (.) that’s the way it was (.) if you’d done twelve plus years (.) you’re allowed eight weeks (.) or (.) you can if you’ve got a job to go to you can have those eight weeks working at that job but still being paid for by the army”
>
> (Bravo, p. 21, lines 1252-1267)

This suggests the longer individuals serve in the army, the more time they receive for completing resettlement training (GOV.UK, 2012). One interpretation of this is that the army have recognised that those who have been in the army for a longer period of time, may require more intense support provision to allow them to successfully transition back into civilian life; depending on what this would look like for the individual. This feeds into the idea of the military identity and the all consuming military culture. Those who spend longer in the army have the army values and beliefs further ingrained, and therefore need more guidance and support to essentially 'unlearn' the rigid army routine.

Some participants explain how they believe the support the army provides is sufficient when preparing those for the transition to civilian life.

> "I don't think more could be done (.) a great deal more (..) I think it could be (.) tickled a little bit in one or two places (.) um listen to (NAME OMITTED) um (NAME OMITTED) (.) but generally it seems to be running well and sorted out"
> (Oscar, p.23, lines 1360-1363)

Juliet echo's these thoughts:

> "um no I wouldn't say I think they I think the armed forces do an awful lot actually (..) so (.) y'know no I wouldn't like I say I can only talk about my experience of ten years ago and what the support was like then so I don't know what its like now (.) um (.) but y'know there are various y'know they hold various courses they hold y'know (.) moving into civilian life and blah blah blah and y'know on (.) what experiences can be like and and and stuff so (.) no I don't think they can do any more (.) y'know because I think they do an awful lot as it is really (..) so" (Juliet, p.9, lines 510-518)

The above quotes suggest that both Oscar and Juliet view the support provided by the army as substantial, and therefore, for any additional support an individual may require, the onus is on them to seek this. The participants who were most positive about the support being provided by the army were also the participants who had decided it was time to leave the army of their own accord, which links with the idea of having control. This would support the notion that positive emotion and attitude can facilitate an expected change (Lewis,

Passmore & Cantore, 2008). One explanation for this is that positive emotions improve an individual's cognitive flexibility, and therefore they are more open to change (Vulpe & Ion, 2011). Thus, those participants who have chosen to leave and feel positive about the idea of leaving, are more likely to be equipped with the mindset needed for change and view the army support as useful.

This is better explained using proactive goal generation theory, where an individual is motivated to act based on their own decisions as opposed to reacting to orders from another (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). In this situation the individual can proactively plan ahead, envisage the future, and overcome anticipated problems and barriers with foresight (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010), therefore they can use the support the army can provide to their advantage towards a future set goal.

The idea that those who have made the decision to leave the army themselves feel better supported as they are able to take control is further supported by the narrative of India who was told she would be medically discharged and therefore the decision to leave the army was not her own:

> "had to go to this talk where they talked about different courses you could go on (..) um which (.) (sighs) I can see why they did it (.) but I had to drive all the way from (PLACE REMOVED) all the way down to London to do it (.) and it was for a couple of hours during the day (.) and basically they were talking about you could do sort of like (..) NVQ Level sort of stuff or lower levels to get equivalent like GCSE's and things like that (.) and for me (.) seeing as through ive already got my degree (.) trying to get these low qualifications when ive got my GCSE's ive got my A Levels it was completely pointless (.) but I had to do it it was kinda like I felt like I had to jump through the hoops (.) so (.) they had this certain procedure you had to follow to be discharged (.) so although it wasn't relevant to me whatsoever I still had to follow it (..) so I did that um"
>
> (India, p.14, line 818-834)

India is suggesting the support she received was not relevant to her, and she was only completing it as a matter of process as it was not tailored to the individual. Therefore India was not invested or engaged in the support offered. This implies courses are offered to

leaving personnel as a matter of procedure, and that a blanket approach to providing support is adopted.

Alpha also explains his experience of army support after medical discharge:

> "to come out of something that you wanted to be in (…) and that you'd been a part of for the last four five years nearly (.) to just be give (.) just be told 'oh right sorry mate your getting medically discharged can you sign some forms and we'll get you on some courses (.) what d'you wanna do?' (.) I mean at 21 I don't think anyone knows what they wanna do really (…)
>
> Int: mm
>
> Alpha: I mean (.) if you've got your heart set on something"
> (Alpha, p.7, lines 412-420)

When leaving, Alpha did not know what courses to take during his resettlement. In this sense he was unsure of the path he should follow and had lost his career focus after an unexpected change in circumstance. One interpretation of this is that Alpha was rigid in his thinking as from a young age he had decided being in the army was all he wanted to do. Therefore, as the provision offered could not support him in his core ambition to pursue an army career, he viewed it as inadequate and of no use to him.

In response to unexpected change brought about by others, individuals may respond with reactive motivation as opposed to the aforementioned proactive motivation (Parker, Bindl & Strauss, 2010). Reactive behaviours are characterised by negative responses (Steindl, Jonas, Sittenthaler, Traut-Mattausch & Greenberg, 2015). Of particular relevance here is the idea of psychological inertia, where the individual responds with passivity and a reluctance to change (Jost, 2015). Therefore, not engaging in the resettlement process, and resisting the change becomes evident through the transition period.

One participant explains how upon leaving the army, all support ended:

> "I think the structure there needs to be a structure in place where they've got (.) more support (…) and where they're not forgotten about because I think (…) once we leave we're forgotten about"

(Alpha, p.8, lines 455-457)

Alpha is suggesting that the support he received upon returning to civilian life was inadequate and felt he was 'forgotten about'. One possible interpretation is that this left Alpha feeling insignificant and unimportant and with the loss of the military identity, could have impacted negatively on his wellbeing and mental health when undergoing the transition.

Similarly, Charlie, who described a positive transition, also highlights an issue with the support when leaving the army:

> "for me it was like there's no sort of like chasing up (.) and they probably don't have the resources to do it to be fair but there was no sort of like (.) phone call to say (.) ' (NAME OMITTED) y'know (NAME OMITTED) whatever (.) um (.) um how's it going I know your civvy street now but we're just doing a welfare check on ya (.) maybe see that you're alright' there was none of that and I don't believe there was any of that (.) to this day"
> (Charlie, p.14, lines 790 – 794)

Again, Charlie outlines the lack of contact the army has with their ex-personnel, which suggests he perceives the army are still responsible for soldiers once they leave. However, he does acknowledge that this is potentially down to lack of resources as opposed to purposeful neglect.

Upon leaving the military it is suggested that ex-service personnel seek to maintain a connection with their military roots to preserve their military identification (Williams, Allen-Collinson, Hockey & Evans, 2018). This is more apparent in those who have a strong bond to their military identity (Binks & Cambridge, 2017), thus meaning they do not want to let go of their former military life (Higate, 2008). However, this can also depend on what other connections and potential 'sub-identities' the individual has aside from their military identity, as holding alternative identities has been found to help an individual cope during an unexpected career transition (Oakland, MacDonald & Flowers, 2013).

This idea is echoed in a quote from Bravo, who suggested the support from the army should in some way reflect what leaving service personnel can expect when entering civilian life:

> Bravo: there should be more help (.) um (.) to try and mirror what goes on in civilian life (Bravo, p.36, lines 2145-2146)

In this respect Bravo is suggesting the support does not set leavers up for success in civilian life, and that the support offered should be tailored to what they can expect real life to be like upon leaving the army. He feels that there is a mismatch between the support that is provided, and information given, and his lived reality.

The army refutes this perception and claims to provide the service leaver with the skills they will need in civilian life through a number of training courses (Ministry of Defence [MOD]. (2020c). However, being able to successfully use such skills would require the practice of the newly learnt skill set, which would ensure the appropriate execution of the skills (Moulton, Dubrowski, MacRae, Graham, Grober & Reznick, 2006). Thus, practice would help to increase the individuals confidence in transferring and using these skills in a different realistic environment (Moulton *et al*, 2006; Paese & Sniezek, 1991). Work related learning (WRL) emphasises this idea, suggesting that incorporating academic learning with work related activities improves the student's ability to put learning into practice, and also helps them to create a professional identity (Trede, 2012). This would support the notion of incorporating learning with practice when supporting those undertaking the transition to civilian life.

In summary, the participants who had made a choice to leave the army were able to prepare themselves for leaving and thus, the resettlement package was viewed as a suitable support for them when transitioning into civilian life. On the other hand, those who had to leave through medical discharge viewed the support provided by the army as irrelevant or inadequate, and discussed having to seek their own support upon leaving. This would be particularly difficult, as to do so would suggest the individual was emotionally ready and capable of finding their own support. One interesting observation and an exception to this is Charlie who, even though describes a positive transition and viewed the support he received as suitable, he suggested that the army could do more to help service leavers by keeping in touch and doing welfare checks when they have entered civilian life.

This theme presents the basis upon which Aim 3 will be discussed. Aim 3 is to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their

transition to civilian life. The theme of Support provides in-depth interpretation of how each individual participant experienced the support provision provided by the army and by civilian industry. Further, it also presents recommendations of the type of support participants felt would have benefitted them and suggestions for how the army could alter provision to better facilitate those in the transition to civilian life. The discussion presented in this master theme will be carried through to the chapter which considers Aim 3, where it will be developed further in an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life.

j) Master themes in relation to Goffman's Total Institutions (1961)

This section will present an evaluation of the nine master themes in relation to Goffman's Total Institutions (1961). Of the nine themes, the most pertinent in association to Goffman's work is the theme of Identity. However, the theme Civilian Connections is of equal significance when considering how army personnel might maintain elements of their previous civilian identity through their civilian connections. Based on the narrative provided by participants concerning their experience of leaving their civilian life, entering army life, living the army lifestyle, leaving the army, and then re-entering their civilian life, this provides an insight into the army as an institution. Further based on the focus of research question 2: How do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?, and research question 3: How do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?, this allowed an exploration of how the individual participants understood their identity and adjustment during their transition both into army life and then back into civilian life. As a result of this, the extent to which the army resonates with the criteria set for total institutions can be evaluated. The discussion which is presented here with regards to the formation of identity will help inform the ideas and recommendations given in Aim 3.

To begin the discussion of the army as a total institution based on the narratives provided by participants, firstly consideration should be provided in relation to the way in which each individual joined the army, for example voluntarily or through coercion. All nine participants communicated that it was their own decision to join the army. In Goffman's Total Institutions (1961), the decision to enter the institution is often recognised as being characterised by some sort of force or coercion. In this sense, the participants in this current research could not identify with the concept of being forced to join the army. However,

Goffman does recognise that in some cases individual may choose to enter an institution. In cases such as in this current research where the participants had chosen to join the army, Goffman suggests that the individual joins the institution as the identity or life associated with the institution is sought after. Thus, the process of detachment from the previous life, in this case the civilian life, begins before entering the army. In defence of Goffman's preoccupation on coercion, up until the early 1960's National Service was still common practice in the UK and in the United States (National Army Museum, 2020). Therefore, forced conscription into the army was usual. In modern day society the army is a voluntary career choice. That being said, three of the participants in the current research mentioned having family in the army, and specifically Charlie remembers growing up on an army barracks. Research has suggested that children of military parents are more likely to follow in their parents footsteps and volunteer for service themselves (Stander & Merrill, 2000). Evaluating this point, it could be argued that children from military families are pressured into joining the army through the expectations of their family. Or, as a result of growing up in military surroundings, the individual may not consider alternative options available to them, and therefore see no other alternative. Consequently, this could be interpreted as the individual not choosing to join the army but doing so as a matter of course.

When joining the army, Mike discussed how he experienced being 'broken down' by the army for the sole purpose of enabling them to build recruits back up again. The way in which he presents this idea suggests negative connotations, for example, being broken. Goffman describes this as the existing identity being mortified and then reconfigured based on the social culture of the institution. Goffman also emphasises the use of authority and discipline to ensure conformity. Again, Mike echo's this characteristic within the army when he described experiencing bullying in the army. As a result, it could be argued that the army use techniques of oppression to ensure recruits abide by the rules and regulations. All participants make reference to the intensity of army life and how it can be all consuming. Juliet voices the opinion that when in the army it must be the number one priority to the serving personnel, and it must dictate daily living. In addition to this, it was suggested that to be successful in the army the individual must relinquish control of their life and allow the army to guide them. One characteristic of total institutions is their need to demand the full attention and respect from members to the extent that individuals are physically cut off

from all other outside social contexts. This can however cause negative consequences for the individual upon leaving the institution as demonstrated by Alpha. Upon leaving the army, Alpha subsequently struggled to find his way with a civilian identity to the extent that he did not know how to function in a civilian lifestyle. Having had every element of his life controlled by the army, he was unable to complete tasks in civilian life such as book a hotel room. This supports Goffman's theory of institutions being all consuming and actively separating its members from any other competing demands. Similarly, Oscar explicitly said that toward the end of his service he did not get a role promotion as a punishment for speaking out, and he surmised that the army do not like people who have their own opinion. Again, this supports Goffmans idea of limited agency within total institutions where individuals can demonstrate disobedience using resistance; however this is often futile and has negative consequences for the individual.

In Goffman's discussion of the Interaction Order, he emphasises the importance of social interactions in helping form the individual institution identity. Interaction orders are time and culture specific and provide the member with a standard by which they can communicate and create meaning within their social interactions. The interaction order within the army can be clearly observed in all of the participant's narratives. They all emphasise the importance and uniqueness of the camaraderie and group bonds within the army. Juliet recalls missing the camaraderie and expresses a notable difference in the team cohesion in civilian employments which seemed inferior to that within the army. Perhaps the clearest illustration of interaction order is communicated by Bravo in his discussion about the use of humour. He suggests there is a unique sense of humour specific to the army which only serving personnel understand. Bravo encountered issues within his civilian employment as he recalls having to be careful with how he communicated with other civilians. Similarly, India felt alienated in civilian life and no longer had a place to fit in. The army had become her family and she did not know how to socialise within her new civilian environment. Not only does this demonstrate the Interaction order of the army as being unique, it also highlights how civilian organisation may also have their own interaction orders. To enable the ex-army personnel to access these new and different interaction orders they would need to let go of their old army identity, as they did with their civilian identity when joining the army.

One of the core characteristic of a total institution is the complete separation of the individual from their old identity. This includes placing physical boundaries around the institution to limit the access the individual has to alternative societies. Interestingly, some participants in this current research discussed maintaining civilian connections during their time within the army. Charlie used sports to create a civilian group membership which helped form part of his identity and consequently he could embrace this part of his identity when he moved back into civilian life. Oscar also communicated a sense of agency while in the army. He talks about making a conscious decision to try and keep his home and family life as independent as possible from his army life. He aimed to create a balance between his work-life and his home-life. Essentially, what he is explaining here is the ability to maintain two identities simultaneously. Goffman recognises that individuals will experience the characteristics of the total institution to varying degrees therefore allowing them to keep a sense of agency. However, one crucial characteristic of a total institution is the authoritarian nature and hierarchical social construct upon which the institutions values and regulations are delivered. Oscar had been in the army many years and had reached a promotion point where he was near the top of his chain of command. Arguably then, he was one of the institutions authoritative figures. He had already demonstrated his commitment to the institution and therefore was now rewarded with further control over his life.

In summary, there are a number of points throughout the nine themes which indicate elements of Goffman's Total Institutions. There is clear evidence in some of the narrative which demonstrates the intensity of the first encounter with the army. During this time, new recruits are stripped of their old identity and begin to learn the rules and regulations upon which their new identity will be built. The interaction order is clearly evident throughout the themes, particularly within Personality. Bravo and Romeo talk about the unique sense of humour that runs through the army institution, and Bravo particularly compares this to his civilian organisations, expressing a struggle to communicate successfully with his new civilian colleagues. The group belonging and team cohesion which is talked about by the participants is expressed in a wholly positive manner, and is one characteristic of the total institution which appears to be valued by participants. Conversely however, the all consuming nature of the army institution is expressed as a hindrance, making it impossible to learn the skills and knowledge which are important for successful

functioning outside of the institution within other societies. Some participants talked about the ability to maintain a civilian identity while serving in the army and this clearly evidences the existence of varying degrees of 'totality' within the institutions, along with individual differences between members which sees them either submit entirely to the army's regime or maintain an alternative element to their being.

k) Summary of the presentation and evaluation of master themes

The nine master themes which were identified were; Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the Army, Wellbeing, Civilian Lifestyle, Civilian Connection, Army Life, and Support. Each theme presents an element of the unique individual perceptions of the transition from army to civilian life and contributes to the bigger picture of how each participant has made meaning of their experiences. For example, the theme Civilian Connection discusses the links the individuals maintain or develop with civilian society whilst they are in the army. This feeds into their identity (in the theme Identity) and whether they keep an aspect of themselves that can be considered a civilian identity through the networks that they preserve. Consequently, this can impact on whether they feel well equipped for their transition to civilian life, as is discussed in Civilian Lifestyle theme. Similarly, some participants felt the support they received during transition was insufficient (Support theme), but this was dependent upon their experience of control and their agency in the decision to leave (Control theme), and their wellbeing during their time in the army, as outlined in the Wellbeing theme. This being said, even the participants who discussed a negative reflection of their transition and of some of their experiences of the army, they still expressed a romanticised view of the army (Perception of the Army theme) and a 'get on with it' attitude in the face of adversity (Personality theme). Therefore, each theme adds an important contribution to each participant's reflection of their experience and helps to highlight the uniqueness of the way in which they make sense of their experiences.

The nine master themes lend themselves to address the three research aims. Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, and Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, are partially addressed in this chapter in the following findings;

- Participants differed in their perception of their own personal transitions based on the circumstances upon which they left.
- All participants choosing to leave the army communicated a more positive transition to civilian life facing what they perceived as minimal challenges.
- Individuals who chose to leave the army expressed a greater sense of agency over their decisions and an element of control over their transition.
- The participants who were 'forced out' of the army faced challenges in their transition to civilian life and sought after the army lifestyle.
- Retaining civilian connections during army service acted to facilitate the transition experience as participants were familiar which the expectations and values of civilian life.
- The military culture was all consuming for all participants creating a strong army identity. Therefore, upon leaving some individuals experienced a sense of loss as a result of being disconnected from the army identity.

In relation to Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life, the theme Support lends itself heavily to address the aim. Each individual experienced the support provided to them during their transition differently. Further, they all accessed different support mechanisms and evaluated them differently based on what the support meant to them and their transition. These unique experiences have been explored to direct an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. Those who chose to leave the army often found the support offered to them as sufficient in meeting their needs for a successful transition, and they were able to use the support available to their advantage. Conversely, the two participants who were medically discharged, Alpha and India, did not benefit from the army support finding it superfluous as it was not tailored to their needs. Interestingly, although Bravo chose to leave the army he struggled with the challenges of transitioning and found the support inadequate. This was arguably a result of the metal health issues which Bravo had faced during his service and after service in civilian life, meaning he required more specialised diagnosis and support.

Various elements of the nine master themes could also be evaluated in relation to Goffman's theory of Total Institutions (1961). This provides a framework of the characteristics of total institutions which were demonstrated to be reflected in the participant's narratives. The idea of individuals being stripped of their old identity with the sole purpose of adopting a new one under a strict regime of regulation was echoed by a number of participants. Further, interaction order was discussed in the way of camaraderie and humour which creates a group bond unique to the army, and something which is values by all participants. Conversely, the isolation and specificity of the army institution creates issues for those in the transition back into civilian life as they once again have to relieve themselves of their army identity and create a new civilian identity, which unlike the army identity, is flexible and multifaceted without one single set of strict predefined characteristics.

The evaluation presented in this chapter will lend itself to the discussion in relation to the research aims. Each of the master themes were developed based on the four primary research questions, which in turn formed the basis of the three research aims. There are elements of all of the nine master themes which contribute to achieving the aims and this will be presented in more detail in the following chapters.

The next three chapters will present the findings of the research in relation to the three research aims. This includes integration of the nine master themes of Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the Army, Wellbeing, Civilian Lifestyle, Civilian Connection, Army Life, and Support, along with key literature in the topic area.

The current research aimed to develop an interpretation of how ex-army personnel could be supported in their transition from army to civilian life based on how ex-army personnel perceived their experience and how they adjust to a civilian lifestyle. By building a rich in-depth picture of each participant's transition experience, this indicated how each individual made sense of their experience. This included interpretation of how they adjusted to a new and different life during that time. Further, it explored how each individual perceived their own identity throughout their service and upon leaving, and the support that they both sought and/or received facilitate the transition. Similarly, it displayed how each individual felt about the support offered to service leavers by both the army and in civilian industries,

which included ideas of what provision may have been of more use in facilitating the transition.

l) Reflection on the presentation of themes

Reflecting upon my development and write up of the nine themes, I do not present them all equally. I have explored each of the participant's experiences of their transition which are unique to them, and therefore there are some themes which are similar yet uniquely experiences and some which are different. Within the write up of these themes I have given some themes a greater status than others based on its prominence, relation to the research aims and with careful consideration of the data and participants. In doing so I have chosen quotes to best reflect the theme and the point being made. This has inadvertently meant that some participant's narrative is displayed more frequently than others.

The status of the themes and the frequency upon which a participant's narrative has been used is not a reflection on the importance of the theme or the person; rather it is an expression of how prominent I felt they were in my analysis. It is important for me to be aware of this and to acknowledge this as this might be miss-interpreted. For example, I am aware that Mike's narrative is used less as example quotations in comparison to some of the other participant's. This is not due to the fact that Mike's narrative was less valuable in the research but because the theme could be demonstrated more clearly using a different quotation. All participants experience were equally unique and valuable to achieving the research aims.

It is important to also be aware of my own position within the evaluation of the themes. When inferring judgement in our writing we can do so against a position which we hold as a norm. This becomes a dominant position giving it a higher status. Upon reflection, there are times in my evaluation where this becomes apparent, for example within the theme of Wellbeing it is heavily weighted toward a deficit model, where the individuals are portrayed as lacking in some way in comparison to an expectant norm. This is possibly typical of current societal norms and agendas reflecting the stigma which is attached to ill mental health. The consequences of this are that there is sometimes an imbalance in the way in

which I have portrayed the themes seemingly focussing on deficits and not attending to the strengths.

The analysis and the interpretation offered in the themes directly relates to the achievement of the aims. Specifically, my analysis of the experiences offered by the participants helps inform the interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life (Aim 3). Thus, the points that are made more prominent through the themes would lend themselves to the interpretation and proposals made in Chapter 5. One thing for me to be mindful of here is the fact that, issues which are made more explicit or something that we can visually see around health and wellbeing are often perceived as more easy to address. They are issues that people act upon or pay attention to. However when they are invisible to us or something which can be hidden, they are viewed as more challenging to manage (Denman, 2015), both personally for the person who has the issue, and on a societal level. This would be true for mental health issues including those discussed within the theme of Wellbeing. Acknowledging this and being mindful of this is important for two reasons. Firstly, due to the challenges inherent in having an arguably invisible issue in relation to health and wellbeing, individuals may not be able to recognise or accept that they have a problem. Therefore, they would not be able to communicate this and it might go unnoticed. Further, whether the issue is recognised and visible would have implications for where attention is focused and what systems might be funded. Both of these factors would have an impact on the interpretation offered in Chapter 5 and the acceptance of the proposals made.

Recognising the framing of the themes and the prominence and status of some points, and how this might impact the discussion in Chapter 5, specifically Aim 3, is important for transparency. Further it demonstrates the significance of the participant's interview, through to my interpretation of the participants experience and then the analysis and presentation of themes in developing thoughts and ideas for the support which would be beneficial for ex-army personnel when leaving the army. I am fully aware that not only might my judgement be placed against a backdrop of an accepted norm creating a deficit approach in my examination, but also I only have access to an individual's experience to the point which they allow and recognise themselves. This further emphasises my

epistemological and ontological approach to the research. The idea of embracing multiple truths capturing the idea that context, subject position and time are important in framing narratives rather than accepting it as a single static truth. There is a relational, interactive and dynamic relationship amongst factors where experiences are subjective and unique.

The research aims were;

Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life.

Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

Each aim will now be considered in turn, integrating discussion of the nine master themes (support, personality, civilian connections, civilian lifestyle, army lifestyle, perception of army, identity, control and wellbeing), alongside reflections on existing literature.

5) Discussion

This chapter will present a discussion in relation to the three main aims of the research. Firstly, Aim 1 of the current research: to reflect upon how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life. This aim takes its focus from research question 1: how do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life? This section starts with an exploration of how the research participants might reflect upon and sum up their experience of transitioning from army to civilian life. This incorporates interpretation included within the nine Master themes. Following this the differences and disparities between the participants are explored to demonstrate how each of the participants experience was different from one another, including their circumstances for leaving the army. In addition to this, previous literature is introduced to help interpret how the individual's reason for discharge can influence their perception of their transition experience. The points discussed in relation to Aim 1 are also used as evidence through the discussion of Aim 3 to explain how the service leavers discharge circumstances and feeling towards their transition can consequently have an impact on how they view the support they received during their transition, and subsequently, what they may suggest would be beneficial in the support service leavers receive.

The next section will present a discussion in relation to Aim 2 of the current research: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle. Aim 2 is supported and informed by research question 2: how do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?, and research question 3: how do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?. This section explores how the participants discussed their adjustment to a civilian lifestyle and discusses both the positive and negative ways in which the service leavers in this current research adapted. In this respect, the discussion presented for Aim 2 lends support to Aim 3 in that it explores how service leavers could be supported based on both the positive and negative methods of adjustment they chose and the outcomes of this.

Finally, Aim 1 and Aim 2 will be used to create the outcome of Aim 3 of the current research: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. In order to present a fully informed

discussion of Aim 3, the analysis provided of the nine Master themes will be considered, particularly the Master theme of 'Support'. The analysis and interpretation offered throughout the Master themes in addition to the exploration and reflection offered in the sections which present Aim 1 and Aim 2, will help advise and guide the interpretation in this section of the ways in which service leavers could be supported in their transition from army to civilian life. This final section will start with a presentation of how participants reflected upon the support provision provided to them and others, based on their own experience of the transition from army to civilian life. Relevant literature will also be included. Following this, the section then develops participant's perceptions further in a discussion of possible suggestions for how service leavers would best be supported in their transition to civilian life. This includes an interpretation of how existing army support procedure might be further developed, and how civilian support provision could complement this. Finally, the section will close by providing a summary of how Aim 3 has been met.

a) Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life.

This section will present Aim 1 of the current research: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life. This aim encapsulates research question 1: how do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life? The examination provided in this chapter also lends itself to the discussion provided in response to Aim 3, and ultimately contributes to achieving this Aim. The section begins with a discussion of how some of the participants from this current research would summarise their entire transition from army to civilian life. This is based on the interpretation surrounding the nine Master themes. It then presents some of the differences and disparities between the participants. This includes the circumstances upon which they left the army. Further, previous literature will be incorporated to demonstrate how the circumstances upon which the individual has left the army can impact on how they perceive their transition experience. The points discussed through this chapter are later used in Aim 3 to explain how the service leavers circumstances, and how they view their transition can have an effect on how they view the support they received, and subsequently how they feel support for service leavers can be adapted.

The challenges service leavers face differs across individuals. Johnsen, Jones and Rugg (2008)—outlined four different categories of service leaver; individuals who report vulnerabilities before joining the forces, those who experience difficulties during service, individuals who struggle to settle into civilian employment (following a successful service), and finally those who report very few challenges in transition but experience issues later in life. Some of the participants in the current research could fit into these categories, however their experiences were not as clear cut as the four categories would suggest. For example, Bravo faced many challenges during the army such as trauma from observing his fellow peers being killed and being unable to help, and a back injury which removed him from his regular duties for a long period of time. With these examples, Bravo may fit into the second category of experiencing difficulty during service. However, he explicitly says that his problems began during his transition from military to civilian life and he details the numerous civilian jobs which he had within a short period of time. Therefore, by Bravo's own admission, he would identify more with Jones and Rugg's (2008) third category; individuals who struggle to settle into civilian employment (following a successful service).

Other participants including Charlie, Juliet and Victor expressed a positive transitional experience characterised by very few challenges, albeit all had extremely different experiences. Juliet for example, left to have a baby and expressed a sense of relief upon leaving; and Charlie left to devote more time to his family and explore alternative career paths. The one thing these three participants had in common was that it was their own decision to leave the army, and they had prepared themselves emotionally and physically for the return to civilian life. They were active agents in their transition therefore they perceived themselves as being in control of the decision-making process and their transition. This is supported by existing research, where an anticipated work-related transition is viewed more favourably and the expected change is embraced in situations when an individual has perceived control over a change (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). Furthermore, this idea of control links with the theme 'Identity', as an individual experiencing a change in identity as a result of transition will feel more in control of this experience if they have secured a reliable and secure network of family and friends to support them through the change (Anderson *et al*, 2012).

The idea of agency in changing identity was presented in Goffman's works on Total Institutions (1961), and Scott's thoughts in Reinventive Institutions (2010). Individuals voluntarily choosing to let go of an old identity and adopt a new identity arguably feel a greater sense of agency in their adaption. Similarly, the change, which is viewed as desired is an empowering experience of releasing the old sense of being for the purpose of improving oneself. Therefore, the participants who chose to embark on a new civilian life would potentially experience a sense of achievement and fulfilment in letting go elements of their army identity which they found problematic, to replace this something which they desired.

Conversely, this was not the experience of Bravo, who had planned to leave the army and had completed his resettlement period. He experienced a number of issues throughout his transition such as struggles securing employment, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and depression, and alcohol abuse. This is supported by research that has indicated service leavers may struggle to secure civilian employment after leaving the military, as there are few civilian careers which the unique training and skill base of a solider can be applied (Zoli, Maury & Fay, 2015). Thus, the elements of army life that service leavers become accustomed to, such as the sense of adventure, the strict structure and uniform order of the military lifestyle, could create a potential barrier for service leavers seeking similar civilian employment (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). However, service leavers have expressed a desire to seek employment that is different to the military career, aiming instead for new experiences, and therefore the uniqueness of the army career and the disparity of this to civilian employment would not create a challenge for those looking for a new direction (Zoli, Maury & Fay, 2015). Even so, the experiences of service leavers finding new employment is not as simplistic, problem free and linear as previous research may suggest. Challenges may still emerge around finding a fit between leaver's skills and expertise in a new field. For example, Charlie, who had planned his discharge from the army and secured a new job soon realised after leaving the army that he wanted more job satisfaction and sought a more challenging role.

A further challenge service leavers have shared when securing employment in their transition to civilian life, is the feeling that they will be disregarded by civilian employers due

to having a reputation for being more difficult employees than their civilian counterparts (Ashcroft, 2012). This is aided by the idea that they lack the ability to think for themselves due to being institutionalised (Grand-Clement, 2017). Similarly, those who joined the army early on in life will not have had the experience of going through the civilian employment process, for example writing applications and participating in interviews, which will disadvantage them when competing with civilians (Simpson & Armstrong, 2009). Alpha demonstrates experiencing this issue in the theme 'Control' and in the theme 'Support'. He joined the army at a young age and had decided that being in the army was to be his lifelong career. Thus, when he was medically discharged, he was left feeling unsure of what career he wanted to pursue. He also expressed having no knowledge of how to begin searching for a new job.

Due to the strict way of life the military ingrains in individuals, leavers can find it difficult to communicate their military specific knowledge and skills to employers in a meaningful way that would translate to a civilian workplace (Buzzetta, Hayden & Ledwith, 2017). However, the belief that service leavers are institutionalised to the point that they are unable to adapt their expertise and attitudes to apply to the civilian lifestyle is misleading and inaccurate, meaning that service leavers positive attributes such as their reliability, punctuality and focus is not considered (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). For example, Victor secured employment in the police force which was due to commence a few weeks after he left the army. He therefore used the resettlement support offered by the army for enjoyment, rather than using it for functional or practical reasons. Therefore, Victor had applied for work in a different institution which is arguably similar to the military culture in some ways. He had used his skills and knowledge to find a career which was a good 'fit' for him. In return, the police force had recognised the benefits of employing an individual who had experienced a military lifestyle and had the skills and qualities that go along with having a military background. This suggests that transition into new employment can be assisted but choosing a career which is the best 'fit' for the individuals work experience and military training.

Of the nine participants interviewed in this current research, six had not secured employment ready for when they left the army. These were Alpha, India, Bravo, Oscar,

Romeo and Juliet. Bravo and Juliet made the conscious decision not to pursue another career before leaving the army. Bravo wanted time off to adjust to civilian life and Juliet wanted time to begin her own family without the stress of work. The charity Help for Heroes found that 44% of service leavers did not have a job lined up for after they leave the army, and a quarter of those surveyed were worried about where they would live (Help for Heroes, 2019). However, it has been found that a number of service leavers purposefully begin their transition to civilian life unemployed, as they intend to continue into further education to enable them to follow a completely different career path (Zoli, Maury & Fay, 2015). Although India was medically discharged from the army and as such, had no previous intention of leaving and finding a different career, she made the decision not to seek further employment but instead to go back to university to become a teacher. That being said, transitioning to civilian life with a physical or psychological injury can cause an additional challenge for service leavers looking for employment (Faberman & Foster, 2013). India's experience would refute this research, as even though she was medically discharged she joined university and subsequently successfully secured employment thereafter, despite suffering with the physical injury she acquired in the army. Conversely, Alpha who was also medically discharged struggled seeking further employment and sought support from army charities. This highlights the uniqueness of transition experiences. Transitions for some may be characterised by the need to seek additional support from external agencies (SSAFA, 2018).

The key findings in relation to Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life are:

- The reason for leaving the army can have a significant impact on how ex-army personnel perceive their transition, specifically; the individuals who were forced to leave the army in this current study detailed a more negative transition experience.
- Having a plan for civilian life appeared to facilitate the transition for the participants who chose to leave the army.
- Pre-army adult civilian experience helped the participants recognise what was expected of them in their new civilian lifestyle.
- A number of factors can influence an individual's perception of their transition and each individual differed in the way in which these factors impacted upon them.

In summary, to address research Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life, a number of factors must be taken into account. One factor is the circumstances upon which the individual left the army, in other words, their reason for leaving. Whether the individual chose to leave the army themselves or if they were asked/forced to leave can have an important impact on how they perceive their transition from army to civilian life. For example, individuals who chose to leave for personal reasons, such as family, felt a sense of control over the situation. This sense of agency appeared to give them the determination and motivation to succeed in their new life. This, in turn, helped them overcome the challenges they faced in their new civilian life. Further, if the individual had either already secured a new civilian job for when they left the army, or if they knew what their new civilian life's plan was e.g. starting a family, then this too saw participants perceiving their transition in a more positive light. It appears that these elements give the service leaver a goal and an ambition. This helped to drive their motivation to succeed and focussed their daily structure and routine. Pre-army experiences are also important to consider. The experiences and situation of those who join the army can impact on the skills and knowledge they have about life outside of the army. It can also influence the sort of civilian life service leavers are likely to encounter upon leaving the army and rejoining civilian life. For example, in the examination of participants perception of their transition, limited adult civilian experiences before joining the army can make some individuals feel lost and alienated. As a consequence of limited civilian experience, service leavers can face the challenge of being unsure of how to cope in civilian life after the army. Similarly, physical and psychological injury/issues can further impact on how an individual deals with the challenges of civilian life after service. For example, some physical injury and psychological issues can be limiting and restrict what the service leaver is able to do in a civilian lifestyle. This leads into discussion of Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

b) Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle

This section will present Aim 2 of the current research: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle. Aim 2 encapsulates research question 2: how do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?, and research question 3: how do ex-army personnel

make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?. The evaluation provided in this chapter also facilitates the discussion provided in response to Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. For example, by evaluating how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, this chapter considers both the positive and negative ways in which the participants in this current research adapted, and the methods they choose to transition into civilian life. Thus, this reveals how service leavers could best be supported based on both positive and negative methods of adjustment.

The chapter begins by presenting the ways in which the individuals interviewed in this research adjusted to civilian life after leaving the army. This includes the presence of a 'get on with it' attitude, alongside coping using alcohol, and the maintenance of civilian connections throughout service. Following this, evaluation of adjustment is provided in light of how participants discussed their identity during transition. This includes feeling a sense of loss during adjustment, being unable to connect to civilians and a civilian identity, and the disparity between the army culture and civilian culture. The issues experienced in relation to identity can all impact on how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle, and this is explored here. Finally, the chapter is summarised to demonstrate how Aim 2 has been achieved.

A key feature which came through in many of the participants' narratives and was discussed in the theme 'Personality', is the 'get on with it' attitude that the participants displayed, usually in response to an adverse situation or where they had little perceived control over their situation. Similarly, control was also important for participants in their adjustment to civilian life. For example, Romeo felt that he adjusted by taking control of his daily routine, and he felt that he needed to treat trying to find a job like having a job. This gave him daily structure and purpose. Similarly, Victor emphasised the need to recognise the differences between civilian life and army life. In doing this he suggests that you can them accept the differences and 'get on with it'.

The British Army is defined by strict values and standards which soldiers are expected to maintain at all times even if it requires self-sacrifice, and failure to comply with such orders is punishable (Ministry of Defence, 2018a). When joining the army, individuals are stripped of their civilian standards and beliefs, and the army way of being is instilled within them

(Demers, 2011). Therefore, when given a task or an order by a senior officer, soldiers are expected to comply regardless of their own emotions. Mike's narrative demonstrates this idea in the theme 'identity' where he explains how the army try to break new recruits so they can then be taught new values and behaviours. This could facilitate the 'get on with it' attitude which the participants displayed whilst in the army and during transition.

In relation to Goffman's Total Institutions (1961), one of the core characteristics of total institutions is the active stripping of the individual identity. In the army this is done in the initial stages when recruits first enter the institution by removing the civilian clothing, only allowing individuals to wear allocated uniform, and rejecting any value that is not associated with the army ethos. Goffman emphasised how total institutions are authoritative and constrained, often being viewed as oppressive in nature. In this regard, the 'get on with it' attitude demonstrated could be a result of accepting subordination. When serving in the army a degree of control is taken from the individual as they submit to a rigid routine underpinned by strict values. Therefore the individual succumbs to authority, and must proceed with duty even in the face of adversity. Furthermore, this control is emphasised in the barriers which are placed between the institutions and competing outside cultures.

Alternatively, this type of demeanour is often referred to as hardiness and is argued to be made up of a perception of three states: commitment, control and challenge (Maddi, 2004). Hardiness is an attitude which is created through social environments and interactions and once developed, it becomes a part of the individual throughout their life and when beginning other endeavours, such as a change in career (Dolan & Adler, 2006). Those who exhibit hardiness to a higher degree will ultimately be more motivated to succeed in the challenge that the transition to civilian life poses, and therefore they will be better equipped to adjust to the different lifestyle (Maddi, 2007).

For those struggling to adapt to a new civilian lifestyle, a common method of coping with the separation from military life is alcohol abuse (Derefinko, Hallsell, Isaacs, Garcia, Colvin, Bursac, McDevitt-Murphy, Murphy, Little & Talcott, 2018), which was expressed in Bravo's narrative in the theme 'Civilian Lifestyle'. Bravo left the army without securing further employment as he intended to allow himself time off work to enjoy and adjust to civilian life. During this time however he began drinking and when lacking daily routine and purpose

would turn to alcohol to give him a purpose and help him cope with the loss he was experiencing.

Research has suggested that the army culture supports and encourages alcohol consumption as part of the bonding process and group identity (Derefinko *et al,* 2018). This idea was echoed by Alpha who admitted heavy alcohol use between himself and his peers while he was in the army. Its use in the army creates a sense of group belonging and unity, and when recruits partake in drinking activity this in itself creates an identity which represents group membership (Fear, Jones, Murphy, Hull, Iversen, Coker, Machell, Sundin, Woodhead, Jones, Greenberg, Landau, Dandeker, Rona, Hotopf & Wessely, 2010). When in the army the individuals who are most susceptible to alcohol misuse tend to be reported as those who are younger, male, lower ranking and those who have been deployed (Fear *et al,* 2007).

Other research has reported that exposure to traumatic events such as combat, may result in psychological issues which upon separation from the military can become accentuated if service leavers turn to alcohol as a coping method (Mansfield, Bender, Hourani & Larson, 2011). Again, Bravo's experience relates to this as he had experienced trauma during his combat roles. That being said however, upon leaving the army, service leavers may turn to alcohol to enable them to cope with the psychological distress they are experiencing, regardless of risk factors (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Furthermore, during the army, involvement in alcohol consumption activities were viewed as a bonding experience (Derefinko *et al,* 2018; Fear *et al,* 2010), alcohol consumption during the transition to civilian life can be viewed as an attempt by the service leaver to find new group belongings and relationships in the one way they know how (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013).

In considering Goffman's ideas as presented in Total Institutions (1961), the identity is created by being submerged in an all consuming culture. The accepted way of being is therefore dictated and the interactive order (Goffman, 1983) provides members with given method of interaction with others where performance is monitored through shared obedience to the rules. However, everyday civilian society is arguably complete with overlapping norms and values which are flexible and changeable depending on the context, circumstance and location. Therefore, when going from a structured total institution into a civilian society, individuals may struggle to know the socially acceptable way of being. In

Bravo's case, the pub to which he returned regularly would have offered some stability and consistency in an ever changing and unpredictable world of uncertainty.

Although alcohol is noted in research as a big part of army culture and group belonging, it did not feature as a key element in the majority of the current participant's adjustment experiences. For example, in the theme 'Identity' and 'Civilian Lifestyle' Juliet recognised the difference between the teamwork, structure and bonding between army life and civilian life, and expressed missing this. However, in cope with this she showed a 'get on with it' response where she accepted the differences and moved on in her life.

For Oscar, adjusting to civilian life came without many challenges. In the theme 'Civilian Connection' he expressed that he felt he adjusted well to civilian life because he was able to maintain connections throughout his service. He suggests this kept him from becoming 'institutionalised', as he was able to maintain his army identity and his civilian identity. For the majority of service leavers adjusting to a civilian lifestyle, there are very few challenges, particularly if they maintained meaningful civilian connections throughout their service or engaged in civilian connections in the lead up to leaving the army (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This would result in a steady network of civilian relationships which would support the individual and help them feel more in control during their transition, which has been found to be beneficial when an individual is experiencing a significant change in their life and identity (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012). However, research has suggested that maintaining civilian contact during and after army experience can be difficult, as the intensity of the military experience is such that it changes an individual's personality making them less agreeable and more aggressive in comparison to their civilian counterparts (Jackson, Thoemmes, Jonkmann, Lüdtke Oliver & Trautwein, 2012). Thus, building relationships without conflict and connecting with civilians can be a challenge for service personnel (Jackson *et al,* 2012) as it requires them to draw on and develop a different skill set. Both Romeo and Bravo voice this as an issue, as in their transition to new civilian employment they noted a difference in the sense of humour between civilians and soldiers. This made adjusting to civilian life more challenging for them due to the unique way of 'being' the army culture promotes.

Conversely, research has also suggested that if the service leaver had experienced adult civilian life before joining the army, thus having a civilian identity, then integration back into

civilian life after their service is characterised by fewer challenges in comparison to those without previous adult experience, as those with experience are already familiar with civilian society (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). In the current research, Oscar voices having fewer challenges when transitioning back into civilian life as he already knew what was required of him from previous civilian experience, such as finding a school to enrol his children into. He specifically notes that he recognised that others who did not have this experience were struggling to adjust. This is supported by the SSAFA charity, who have found that many service leavers often have a distorted view of civilian life or lack knowledge of elements of everyday living, such as the cost of living, and without the structure and routine that army life provided, struggle to adapt to a new way of life (SSAFA, 2018).

For many service leavers, such as Alpha, their transition period is characterised by distinct feelings of loss. In the theme 'Identity' Alpha reveals how he felt he had lost more than just his job, but he had also lost his life. This demonstrates his strong connection with the army identity. Research has suggested that veterans transitioning to civilian life can experience what is considered a 'crisis of identity', where they sense feeling terrible loss of their military identity, to the extent that it is considered the death of that identity, thus, the death of oneself (Demers, 2011). Arguably, a sense of self is created through a combination of social interaction and social experience within a specific culture, and it is these connections that transpire as perceptions of belonging which is linked to an individual's perceived identity (Adler & McAdams, 2007). Therefore, those transitioning from military life to civilian life are balanced between the unknown civilian identity which will be, and the known past military identity which has been (Demers, 2011). In this period of waiting, research has proposed that individuals can benefit from creating what they termed a 'hybrid' identity, which combines both values and knowledge of their previous identity with aspects of the new identity (Mahalingam, 2008). Charlie found that he was able to do this successfully as he had maintained both a healthy army identity and a civilian identity simultaneously, and had found civilian employment before leaving the army. However, it is this in between period that still causes service leavers to feel negatively about their transition (Demers, 2011), as they struggle to find a new norm to their lifestyle (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015). Both Victor and Juliet recognised that the

differences between identities can cause negativity but suggest that by accepting this and moving on then individuals can be successful in their new identity.

As was experienced by Bravo, the struggle to find a new path in life was also characterised by feelings of being misunderstood and as if the service leaver does not fit into civilian life as a result of the differences between the two cultures that the service leader is experiencing (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015). The civilian culture and military culture differ hugely, with the military culture being highly structured and hierarchical in nature and being fierce in the way in which it imposes its values and expectations upon recruits (Stevenson, 2020). Mike highlights the intensity of the training involved in the military and the fact that the army imposes its values and behaviours onto new recruits. The intensity of this can sometimes mean that alternative civilian relationships, connections and identity cannot be maintained, as was suggested by Victor. Further, Juliet felt misunderstood and as if new civilian colleagues did not respect, value or understand her military past. Research has suggested that veterans view civilians as not being able to identify with their military experiences and as such, civilians show no respect for service leavers' military past and who they were (Demers, 2011), thus, leavers felt disconnected from their civilian friends and family (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015). Similarly, where civilians tend to make unjustified comments or ask insensitive questions, they lose favour with the veteran and are perceived to be disrespectful (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015).

However, this disparity is not experienced to this extent by all service leavers. For example, Oscar displayed being at ease with the balance between his civilian and army life and embraced the role he had to play within both. The separateness of army life and civilian life as well defined isolated cultures is suggested to create difficulties during transition (Binks & Cambridge, 2018); however, research has demonstrated that individuals embracing and recognising their multiple identities are more flexible in their thinking and are better at problem solving (Gaither, 2019). Service leavers who have had experience of civilian life and have socialised with civilians within civilian settings have been found to understand the values and societal norms of civilian life better than those who do not engage much during their service (Edelmann, 2018). Therefore, those who are able to maintain meaningful civilian contact and relationships whilst still serving in the army face a less challenging

transition back into civilian life (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This is reflected clearly in Oscar's story. He experienced adult civilian life before the army, maintained civilian connections throughout his service, and found that he was easily able to bring his civilian identity to the forefront when leaving the army. Further, he notes that he always recognised and kept his army values as part of who he was, emphasising the importance that identity bore for who is perceived himself as.

For a number of service leavers, the decision to leave the army and military life is not one of their own, but due to circumstances they are forced to leave. For example, for every 1000 service personnel leaving the UK army in 2019, 17 of these left due to medical discharge (Ministry of Defence, 2019). Of these service leavers, 56% left due to musculoskeletal disorders and injuries, and 29% left due to mental and behavioural disorders (Ministry of Defence, 2019). Of the nine participants in the current research two, Alpha and India, left the army due to medical issues and were subsequently medically discharged, and one participant, Bravo, experienced medical issues throughout his service and again later after he had been discharged. The charity Help for Heroes has suggested that the support and the process that medically discharged service leavers receive, and experience, is inconsistent and often inadequate, leaving the service leaver feeling vulnerable and without the help that they are entitled to (Help for Heroes, 2019). This is echoed by India who found that her resettlement was inadequate, and she did not receive the medical help she had been promised by the army after leaving. This left her feeling victimised and unable to let go of her former identity.

For many individuals who leave the military unexpectedly and sometimes suddenly, the feelings of loss and grief after losing a career can be more severe and life changing in comparison to those who are given a longer period of notice before they leave (Brewington, Nassar-McMillian, Flowers & Furr, 2004) as there is a period of acclimatisation to the idea of leaving. Further, losing friends and colleagues through loss of a career can cause individuals to feel a loss of emotional security, thus, those leaving immediately and unexpectedly through medical discharge could experience a significant negative impact as a result of leaving the army (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Juliet specifically notes that the camaraderie was one thing she deeply missed from her new civilian identity. Help for Heroes has found that for some personnel, the time between the decision for them to be

medically discharged and actually leaving the army can be very short (Help for Heroes, 2019), and therefore they are particularly vulnerable to negative feelings of grief and loss during their transition to civilian life. This was particularly pertinent in Alpha's case as he has not fully accepted that he had to leave the army, and therefore was reluctant to engage in perusing a new civilian identity.

The adjustment to civilian life can also be impacted by the use of everyday communication, as research has found that those leaving the military can struggle to communicate in civilian life particularly through the use of humour (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Bravo emphasised how humour in the army was different, and this has been supported with service leavers feeling they have to be careful about what they say in civilian environments through fear of getting into trouble (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). This contributes to the feelings of alienation an individual can experience, as many service leavers struggle to reconnect with civilian family and friends when leaving the army (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015). This was deeply expressed by India who felt an overwhelming feeling of loneliness when she left the army, despite living with family and having friends she could look to. This suggests that proximity itself is insufficient as service leavers can still sense feeling alone despite being with others.

Previous research has found that even when surrounded by friends and family, service leavers can feel lonely as they are misunderstood due to becoming a different person during their army service (Demers, 2011). This feeling was expressed by Juliet, who felt civilians did not appreciate her army past; and Bravo who felt he had to be careful with what he said around civilians as the army humour and the civilian humour was very different. It has been suggested however that the transition process is lengthy and multifaceted, and as such, service leavers will be faced with different challenges at different stages of their transition process (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Therefore, finding a new identity is not as simple as might be suggested but instead involves a continuous development over a long period of time.

The key findings in relation to Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle are:

- Civilian connections made before joining the army and maintained throughout army service were noted to be beneficial in helping participant adjust during their transition.
- Implementing control and routine in their new civilian life gave participants a sense of agency and helped them take control of their life.
- The 'get on with it' attitude demonstrated by some participants facilitated their ability to deal with adversity in civilian life.
- Adjusting to civilian life was made more challenging for some participants due to the unique sense of humour held by the army culture being misaligned to civilian attitudes.
- Maintaining or connecting with a part of their identity more typical of their civilian self helped some participants bridge the gap between moving from a military identity to a civilian identity.

In summary, Aim 2 was to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle. There are many factors which were identified which either helped participants adjust or created barriers. One important factor was the civilian connections which had been maintained throughout army service. This was seen as having a positive impact on adjustment, as was having previous civilian experience, as this facilitated the transition. Individuals were able to understand what was expected of them as a civilian. Similarly, by already having civilian connections before leaving the army, the individual has already formed part of a civilian identity. In this respect they have a group which they belong to and can connect with, resulting in a feeling of acceptance. Further, taking control of life by implementing structure and routine, particularly when seeking new employment helped individuals feel a sense of purpose, and demonstrated the 'get on with it' attitudes. This mirrored their experiences of being in the army and therefore was a positive way in which they used their army experiences to adapt to a new life. Something which made adjustment to civilian life more difficult for individuals was the difference between the civilian sense of humour, and the army sense of humour which was perceived as unique. It was acknowledged that this created a barrier between leaving personal and creating potential connections with civilians due to the individual feeling misunderstood. Similarly, using coping strategies such as alcohol use to try to adjust to civilian life is maladaptive and creates further challenges.

Identity is suggested to be a complex and multifaceted concept. Some participants felt that their previous adult civilian experiences helped them in adapting to a new civilian identity as they were aware of the expectations placed upon them. Similarly, maintaining civilian connections during service allowed participants to continue this civilian identity after service, whilst still keeping the military values which had become part of who they were. However, despite leaving the army, some participants found it difficult to connect with a new civilian identity as they were not ready or prepared for letting go of their army identity. They hand a longing to maintain their army identity which created a barrier in them adapting to civilian life. Connecting with civilians was difficult as participants felt misunderstood and unappreciated, making it harder to relate to them. How individuals made sense of their identity during the transition, and how this contributed to their adjustment during this time, was a complex and multifaceted relationship which was dependant on many influencing factors. The process of adjustment and identity was personal and individual to the service leaver. Consequently, providing support for service leavers can be complicated based on their individual needs and experiences. This leads into the discussion around Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

c) Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

This section will present Aim 3 of the current research: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. In order to achieve this aim, the relevant elements of the nine Master themes will be pulled upon, particularly the Master theme of 'Support'. The evaluation offered throughout the Master themes and in the sections which present Aim 1 and Aim 2, will help to inform the interpretation in this section of the ways in which service leavers may be better supported in their transition from army to civilian life. This section will begin with a discussion of how participants perceived the support provision provided to service leavers based on their own experience of the transition from army to civilian life. Relevant literature will also be presented here. Following this, the section then develops participant's perceptions further in a discussion of possible suggestions for how service leavers would best be supported in their transition to civilian life. This includes interpretation of how the existing army support

mechanisms could be further developed, and how civilian support provision could assist. Finally, the section will close by providing a summary of how Aim 3 has been met.

i) Participants perception of support provision provided to service leavers in their transition from army to civilian life

Serving members of the British Army who leave the forces have been offered support options by the Army for a number of years (Ministry of Defence, 2019a). The support available to service leavers can be extensive, and can include, advice, training courses and further education opportunities, most of which comes at no expense to the service leaver (Armed Forces Covenant, 2020). The guidance offered is intended to facilitate service leavers in their transition to enable them to have the best start to their new civilian life, addressing their financial, employment and housing needs (Ministry of Defence [MOD]. (2020c). It has been suggested that the majority of service leavers transition into a civilian lifestyle facing limited challenges and reflect positively on their experience, however there are still individuals who struggle with the barriers that civilian life presents after being in the army (Iversen, Nikolaou, Greenberg, Unwin, Hull, Hotopf, Dandeker, Ross & Wessely, 2005).

Although research using quantitative methods presenting statistics may allude to the idea that the majority of service leavers face limited challenges, the experience of transitions is likely to be much more complex than this suggests. Further, more superficial reflections of experiences may not explore the participants feeling in enough detail to reveal true feelings. For example, this was demonstrated clearly by India in the current research. As presented in the theme 'Perception of the army', India discussed how she reflected positively upon the army and how she found it fun. There were also incidents throughout India's interview which suggested that she would like to be back in the army and she sought to remain attached to that identity in her civilian life by joining Cadets. However, as India opened up more about her experiences she revealed how she felt she was victimised by the army. She felt they treated her badly during service but also created barriers for her when leaving due to their refusal to accept responsibility for her injury which led to her discharge. India also became upset during her interview and claimed she did not know why she was so upset and had not realised her bad experience of leaving the army had affected her to that extent. India's story demonstrates how on the surface, individuals may provide an account that it

romanticised, however upon further exploration achieved through qualitative methods, participants begin to provide a deeper more extensive account of their experiences.

A difference in the way individuals in this current research made meaning of their army experience was in terms of whether their service was viewed as a job or a lifestyle. In turn, this also contributed the way the service leaver felt about their transition and the support they were entitled to. For example, in the theme 'Identity' Alpha specifically mentions losing not just a job when leaving the army but his life also. Research into the Institutional/Occupational Model has found a difference in the way soldiers in combat roles felt about their experience in comparison to those in support roles, in terms of identity formation and socialisation (Burland & Lundquist, 2011). Individuals who viewed their army past as an occupation held less expectations of what the army would offer, felt the army had not changed who they were as an individual, and maintained civilian relationships during their service (Binks & Cambridge, 2018). This suggests that an individual in an army role that is similar to civilian occupations engage less with the army identity and have less meaningful relationships with their colleagues (Binks & Cambridge, 2018).

This current research however does not necessarily support the idea that those in army roles which are similar to the career roles found within civilian lifestyle can connect to civilians more effectively. In the current research some of those in combat roles, for example Charlie, were able to connect with a civilian lifestyle with relative ease despite having a combat role in the army for 13 years. This could be explained by similarities in the way the individual perceived and interpreted their experience as opposed to just their respective roles in the army (Binks & Cambridge, 2018; Norris, Friedman, Watson, Byrne, Diaz & Kaniasty, 2002). This suggests that those who explicitly perceived their experience as a job, like Charlie, Juliet and Victor, were able to transition with few challenges. However, those who saw it as their life, such as India and Alpha, struggled to separate themselves from their army past. Alternatively, there may be additional factors which may influence the challenges an individual may face in connecting with civilians in their transition. Charlie explicitly mentions maintaining civilian connections while in the army through playing sport. It could be argued that Charlie had a strong civilian identity which was associated to his group belonging of a civilian sports team. Therefore, this part of Charlie was already able to connect with a civilian lifestyle, thus allowing him to find his place within civilian society.

Considering Goffman's work on Total Institutions (1961), he suggested that if an individual voluntarily joins an institution, that is they choose to enter on their own free will, then the mortification of their old identity actually begins before they enter the institution. One interpretation of this, is that the individual may not be fulfilled in their current identity and therefore seek a new one for self improvement. They may therefore no longer identify with their previous self as they seek alternative identities. The individual may want to acquire something else in their life which is currently not available from their current identity. This concept is discussed in relation to individuals seeking to join an institution. However, it may also be possible to use this idea to explain some of the differences between individuals experience of their transition to civilian life. Individuals choosing to leave the army often do so in search of something the army cannot offer them. In some cases, the army has nothing left to offer the individual. Therefore, upon choosing an alternative path to follow they may start to dissociate themselves from their army identify. Particularly, as the process of leaving the army after notice has been given can take up to one year, allowing the individual to begin letting go of their old identity, and start assuming the characteristics of the new identity. As is suggested in Scott's idea of Reinventive Institutions (2010), the new identity then is welcomed and embraced. Thus, letting go of the army attachment and beginning a new civilian life is empowering and support may be unnecessary in this respect.

The idea Goffman presents of voluntary attendance to the institution being characterised by the mortification of the old identity before entering the institution could so be considered and interpreted in reverse. Specifically, those not choosing to enter the institution of their own accord and thus being forced to adopt a new identity could be more obstructive and resistant to change. This could be explored in terms of serving personnel who are forced to leave the army. Typically, those experiencing medical discharge or compulsory discharge will leave the army with a short notice period and often have to leave against their will. Using Goffman's principle, the new identity for those forced into a total institution is dictated to them through authority and strict regimes including discipline. Applying this principle to the transition to civilian life, it is unlikely that ex-serving personnel forced into civilian life will be subjected to the same identity enforcement that they experienced upon joining the army. This could possibly leave them feeling a sense of loss and struggling to find somewhere to fit

in and construct their new identity. In this respect, these individuals would require substantial structured support to help them find their new sense of self and being.

The perception of their army service experience was also an element that appeared to separate participants in terms of how they viewed the support they received. There were some who viewed it as a short-term job, thus seeing the support as well tailored and a useful tool. Then there were those who perceived their experience as their whole life's being, and therefore felt the support was superfluous, too general and inadequate. This could also be explained by the shared experience that Alpha, Bravo and India had in relation to physical and psychological medical issues. Service leavers are at higher risk of experiencing mental health issues due to trauma in their career, but they are also a less likely cohort to seek help (Pearson, Madigan, Spencer-Harper, Hatton & Murphy, 2019). Studies have suggested that there are barriers and stigma within the military, where help seeking is seen as a weakness (Kulesza, Pedersen, Corrigan & Marshall, 2015), and this is arguably a result of the self-coping and self-efficacy mentality that the army encourages (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Similarly, for those who left the army due to a physical injury, such as India, the transition can cause a different set of challenges, requiring a different type of support as a result of not being able to take part in civilian life to the fullest (Cooper, Caddick, Godier, Cooper & Fossey, 2018).

Each participant in this study voiced very different views with respect to the support the army offers. For example, Charlie said that a follow up support system for service leavers during their transition might be beneficial, but he found the support offered more than adequate for himself, as he had found a new civilian job and had a civilian family. Therefore, Charlie had little use for the resettlement programme. He recognised that even though he had no use for the support offered that many individuals would still require this support. On the other hand, India who was medically discharged quite suddenly, felt the support she received was useless. India thought that more targeted and adapted support programmes would be more beneficial, particularly if they catered to individual needs. Both Oscar and Romeo acknowledged that even though they themselves did not require further support, they felt that for others that were unsure of the transition ahead of them, and for those who struggled, that the army could do more to help them find employment or housing. However, they also noted that even though the support system when they left the army was

basic, times had developed and changed, and therefore they thought it likely that support from the army had improved since their departure.

In summary, each participant had different opinions which did not always seem to be based on their personal experience of the army support system. Those who were medically discharged felt support should be more individually tailored and thorough, and it should be specific to needs of the service leaver. Although some of the participants reported finding the support provided by the army as adequate for themselves, they also recognised that the support provided could be improved. They further acknowledged that some service leavers feel the support could be enhanced to facilitate the transition back to civilian life. Two important connected factors played a part in the participant's feelings of support. Firstly, the way in which they left the army, and secondly, their connection and experience within the army. For the majority of those who perceived to have control over their decision to leave the army, the support provided to them was perceived as adequate. Conversely, for those who had little perceived control, the support was viewed as insufficient for facilitating them back to civilian life. Similarly, for those who were able to create a new civilian identity, either as part of their identity during service or as a new view of the self after service, again felt more positively about the support offered. They did still recognise however that the army could do more after service for those struggling to find employment and housing. Further, it was acknowledge that due to the stigma surrounding help seeking, being proactive to seek the required support after leaving the army can create a challenge for service leavers.

ii) Army support for service leavers in the transition from army to civilian life

Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) scheme

The support offered to service personnel who leave the army often begins before the individual leaves their army contract. The Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) scheme encourages service personnel to focus on their development throughout their service to create a portfolio of evidence which will support them in their transition to civilian life. This also includes access to information about the services which are available to both serving personnel and service leavers to aid personal and professional growth, and to provide knowledge about the transition to civilian life. Further, it presents the serving personnel with opportunities to attend sessions hosted by the Career Transition Partnership (CTP). These events are essential for providing service personnel with the information they need regarding access to and the delivery of support. Information about the IPPD is available to serving personnel via the MOD website or through the unit for which they serve.

The IPPD scheme demonstrates how the army have sought to prepare serving personnel for their transition back into civilian life once their service comes to an end. However, the IPPD scheme is not a compulsory practice for serving personnel, and although participation is encouraged, engagement in the process is voluntary. The onus is therefore on the individual serving member to actively seek out the resources and guidance available through the IPPD. This informs the first interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

Developing the IPPD

As was demonstrated by some of the participants in the current research, there are a number of individuals who join the army with the intention of pursuing an army career. Although the minimum length of service is four years, a contract can run for up to 12 years before being renewed or extended. One of the participants in the current research served 30 years in the army before he left. Therefore, preparing to leave the army is unlikely to be a priority for serving personnel, particularly if they anticipate remaining in the army for many years. Not only this, but individuals may also leave the army unexpectedly. This can happen for a number of reasons such as, medical discharge, family responsibilities and compulsory discharge. These unexpected life events can see the serving personnel leaving the army a lot sooner than anticipated. Sometimes, duties and day to day life in the army will change instantly for the individual. Occasionally, serving personnel can be discharged immediately with little notice.

The IPPD is undoubtedly a useful and worthwhile tool for serving personnel. However, without the engagement of recruits it is superfluous. One recommendation would therefore be to create elements of the IPPD which are compulsory. Arguably, one of the main ambitions of serving personnel is career progression; to progress through the ranks gaining more skills and training, along with having the opportunity to travel. The IPPD presents numerous opportunities for personal and professional development, and these benefits would be valuable assets for recruits wanting promotion. It would also be within the interests of the army as an employer to allow and encourage service personnel to pursue continuous develop, as this would enrich the skills of the personnel they have working for them and lend itself to job satisfaction. Research has indicated that individuals expressing higher job satisfaction tended to stay within that particular employment for longer (Long & Thean, 2011). Further, those working long hours tended to exhibit less depressive symptoms if their job satisfaction was higher (Nakata, 2017). One interpretation of these findings is that those who are more satisfied with their working environment tend to feel more favourably towards their employment, and therefore are happier at work and are more likely to want to work their longer. With only 38% of army personnel disclosing being satisfied with their career management (including training and development) and only 37% feeling valued (Ministry of Deference [MOD], 2019c), it would be in the interests of the army as employers to invest in their serving personnel.

The IPPD scheme is already in place within the army, and its services are readily available to serving personnel. However, not one of the participants in the current research alluded to the IPPD during their interview. This may have been because they did not feel it was relevant to the current research or due to them not partaking in the scheme. It would be advised that the army further implement the IPPD and make explicit its inherent benefits to the serving personnel. Not just in preparing them for their transition back into civilian life but for their own personal and professional development. Further, having engagement in the IPPD as a recognised credit which will be looked favourably upon during promotion opportunities would further persuade serving personnel to actively take part.

'Needs tested' army resettlement programmes

All serving personnel are entitled to resettlement in some form. The longer the individual has served in the army the more resettlement facilities they are entitled to. The most substantial support package available is known as the Core Resettlement Programme (CRP) and is available to those who have served more than six years in the army or have been medically discharged. The CRP gives service leavers the opportunity to embark on new training and educational courses and has considerable online employment facilities which the service leaver has full access to. The decision to provide service leavers with a more substantial support package the longer they have served in the army lends itself to two possible interpretations. Firstly, the army recognises the intensity of the military culture and therefore identifies the need for enhanced support to facilitate the transition back to civilian life. Secondly, there is the idea that service leavers are receiving further resources due to their increased sacrifice over the years. Therefore, they are essentially getting back what they have put into the system.

The decision to provide longer serving members with more support does however cause issues. Based on the experiences of those in the current research, seven of the nine participants either chose to leave the army themselves or came to the end of their service contract. All seven were entitled to a comprehensive leaving package and six out of these seven participants suggested that they faced very few challenges during their transition to civilian life. As was explored in the theme 'Control', those individuals who decided to leave or anticipated leaving i.e. due to end of service, felt a greater sense of agency over their life

during their transition. This sense of control appeared to empower the individual to overcome any challenges without causing them any hardship or long term problems. The majority of these individuals had a firm plan for what they intended to do when they left the army and all of them had families. This suggests that those who have chosen to leave or can anticipate leaving can either use the resettlement opportunities to their benefit, or do not require them at all. For example, Charlie had already secured civilian employment and had essentially paid to leave the army before working his notice so he could start his new job. Similarly, Victor had plans to join the police force and stated the following as his feelings towards the resettlement he received:

> probably got more than I (.) more than I wished for do you know what I mean so (..) a nice a nice trip for a couple of weeks to put the (.) put the cherry on the cake as the (INAUDIBLE) say yeah it was good
>
> (Victor, p.8, lines 431-434)

The way in which Victor describes his resettlement as a 'trip' suggests he used his entitlement to do something enjoyable, and potentially did not use it to complete workshops or courses which would help in further employment. There are arguably two possible interpretations of this. Firstly, Victor may have seen little point in the resettlement since he had a family already set up in a civilian life and he had secured a job in the police for when he left the army. Therefore, he used his resettlement to his advantage to do something pleasurable; a two week break away as he was entitled to it. A second interpretation is that by using his resettlement as a 'trip' and a chance to go away, Victor had a defining end to his army career. In this sense he could compartmentalise this part of his life, using the two weeks to readjust and set his army life aside, before rejoining civilian life. Therefore, the resettlement had facilitated Victor's transition back to civilian life, whether he recognised it or not.

The two participants who were medically discharged both viewed the support they received from the army as inadequate. India had already obtained a number of educational qualifications in her life and therefore the majority of the courses which were offered were not suitable for her. She had also planned on a long army career and thus did not know what route to go down in her new civilian life. Similarly, Alpha had also planned on a long army career and medical discharge had come as a surprise. He too did not know what resettlement activities to take advantage of as he did not know what he would need for

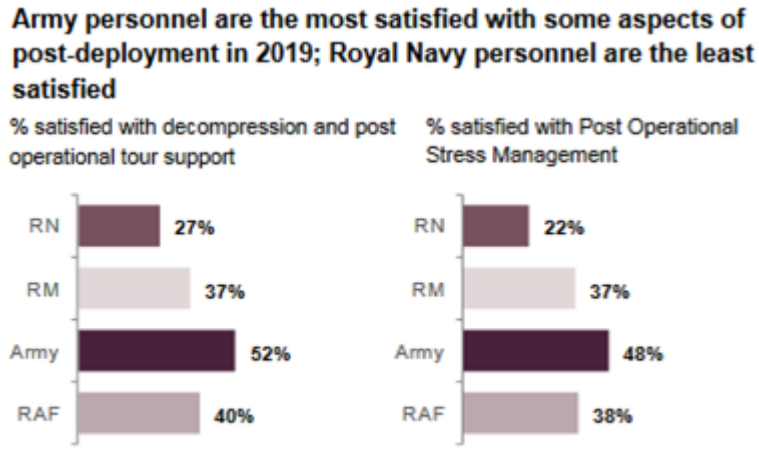
civilian life, and had little ideas of what civilian work he might like. The resettlement support for both Alpha and India was not helpful in this respect.

It is clear that every participant used the resettlement in different ways and reflected upon their experience of the resettlement support differently. Therefore, one interpretation of the best way in which to support service leavers would be to have a solely 'needs based' system, whereby the individual is provided with support based on their individual needs. Similarly, it would be recommended that support entitlement is not based on the length of time the service leaver has served in the army. Early Service Leavers (ESL) are defined as serving personnel who choose to leave the army before their minimum contract time i.e. before 4 years service. ESL along with those who are facing compulsory discharge, are entitled to the minimum resettlement support; two years employment support through the CTP. This presents two potential issues. Firstly, individuals who are made to leave through compulsory discharge are dismissed from the army without a substantial amount of notice. As already discussed, those who lack a sense of agency over their decision to leave such as those with compulsory discharge face challenges during transition and feel a lack of control over their transition to civilian life. The second issue is that ESLs are regularly reported as facing the same challenges as regular service leavers in their transition, such as alcohol misuse, mental health issues, barriers to help seeking and social exclusion (Buckman *et al,* 2013; Samele, Mental Health Foundation (London, England) & Forces in Mind Trust, 2013; Stevelink, Greenberg, Wessely & Rafferty, 2017). Therefore, providing ESLs and those facing compulsory discharge with a considerably reduced level of provision seems illogical, assuming that they can face the same difficulties or challenges as other service leavers.

The one problem service leavers can face when preparing to leave the army is knowing what support and services would benefit them, as some are unaware of the path that they would like to take when they join civilian life. Alpha, Bravo and India all faced this challenge when deciding upon the resettlement they wanted access to or when they began civilian life. Similarly, service leavers may have needs which they had not anticipated, for example, access to mental health services if they had not yet been diagnosed with any mental health issue or sought any formal diagnosis. Seeking this sort of support while in the army is laden with barriers for serving personnel as they worry seeking support for mental health will result in demotion or medical discharge (Finnegan *et al,* 2014). This forms the basis for the next interpretation of the best ways in which to support service leavers.

As it stands, the majority of service leavers have the choice of many support services, training, short courses, seminars and workshops which they can opt to partake in. However, if they are unsure of which to choose, this can leave them choosing ones which are unbeneficial and inappropriate, or result in the designated army staff choosing for the service leaver. Both of these outcomes may lead the service leaver to experience unsatisfactory support which does not meet their needs. Therefore, it is recommended that the service leaver completes a series of assessments to ascertain which provision would best assist in their transition. The assessment could take the form of a risk based matrix which would identify where risk factors lie for the individual, and which parts of the support provision may be most beneficial to the individual. In addition to this, each serving personnel who is leaving the army should undergo a metal health assessment. As they are leaving the army, this should not threaten their army career and may help to identify those individuals who will require mental health services. Figure 1 demonstrates how the support the army provide its personnel post deployment is viewed more favourably by those receiving it in comparison to the other forces. This suggests that the army can provide suitable support services to those who are in need following a potentially traumatic experience. Therefore, there is the potential for the development and improvement of support services to better facilitate each individual service leaver in their transition to civilian life.

Figure 1. Extract from: UK regular armed forces continuous attitude survey results 2019 (Ministry of Defence [MOD], 2019c)



When joining the army the army individuals are subjected to a total institution environment as described by Goffman (1961) where they undergo an intense mortification of their identity for the purposes of adopting a new army identity. As previously discussed this is all consuming and serving personnel develop a strong association to the army within the confines of the institution. Therefore, it would be recommended that a degree of 'undoing' would be required to re-socialise ex-army personnel in their transition to civilian life. Alpha specifically states that he would have benefited from help and support in learning how to be a civilian. Although issues exist with this due to the multifaceted and diverse nature of the civilian societal culture, a 'needs based' assessment may help identify which part of civilian life an individual may require support with. Further, in areas where there are standard processes and procedures in place, for example when applying for job seeker's allowance or when applying for a new job, a programme or guidelines to assist serving personnel in doing so would potentially be of great benefit.

Beyond service support

When leaving the army and joining civilian life, there exists a vast number of civilian support services specifically targeted towards helping service leavers. Combat Stress for example, help service leavers who maybe experiencing mental health issues, and they specialise in helping those with service related trauma (Combat Stress, 2020). Similarly, the Royal British Legion provides a variety of support services from housing, to education and employment (Royal British Legion, 2020). The majority of these support services will also have provision to help the families of service leavers so they can access support for themselves or learn how to best facilitate their service leaver. Two participants in the current research, Alpha and Bravo, spoke highly of the civilian support services that they accessed. The support they received appeared to be a turning point for them. It provided them with the help they required to turn their struggle in transitioning into civilian life around.

The support that is available to service leavers when they have left the army is undoubtedly worthwhile and beneficial for many who are in the transition to civilian life. These services are introduced to serving personnel while in the army, and again, their contact details are provided to those who are leaving the army. The responsibility for accessing these support services however lies with the service leaver, and the onus is on them to take the necessary

steps to contact the correct service. One of the problems with this is that the service leaver may not know that they require such provision. For example, they may not be able to identify that they have a mental health issue, or that this is the reason that they are struggling. The aforementioned suggestion for the introduction of an assessment before the service leaver left the army would be one such way to address this issue. A second problem is focused around a point which was made by Alpha, that sometimes service leavers may not know how to seek support. There is the suggestion that the army does not prepare its serving personnel for civilian life. This is because the army provide a structure and routine, and often remove the need for the serving personnel to organise their finances or housing (SSAFA, 2018). Therefore, accessing civilian support services may be a daunting thought to someone who is already struggling with their transition.

A further interpretation of the best ways in which to support service leavers in their transition is based on what could be done by both the army and civilian services after the service leaver has left the army. In the current research, in Charlie's experience he felt that the army could do more to follow up on his progress after leaving the army. This suggestion of 'checking in' could serve three purposes. Firstly, to identify those individuals who may like to rejoin the army upon reflecting on their civilian life. Secondly, it would show the service leaver that they have not been forgotten about upon leaving the army, and that they matter. Lastly, to find those who might be struggling in their transition and thus, need directing towards the appropriate support services. Not only could the army implement a follow up procedure to ensure the welfare of service leavers, but the civilian support provisions could also take an activate role in contacting and offering their support services. By working closely with the army, civilian support services could create a follow up procedure for service leavers. By allowing the support service to contact the service leaver, the responsibility would be transferred and the service leaver would no longer have to take it upon themselves to seek out the correct support. Thus, this would remove any barriers to help seeking that the service leaver may experience.

d) Aim 3 summary

In summary, this section presented Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. To achieve this aim relevant interpretation from the nine Master themes, particularly the Master theme 'Support', was presented, along with the discussion presented in Aim 1 and Aim 2. The analysis provided for the Master themes along with Aim 1 and Aim 2, formed the basis upon which Aim 3 was developed. This section also answered the research question 4: how do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life?

There were a number of observations made in respect of the type of support offered by the army and by civilian support services, and the experiences of those accessing the support services in their transition from army to civilian life. Firstly, the IPPD scheme which encourages personal and professional development throughout the serving personnel's time in the army was not mentioned by any of the participants. The IPPD provides service leavers with a tool to build their knowledge and understanding of the transition back to civilian life. The IPPD is currently voluntary, and therefore the first interpretation of the best way to support service leavers is by making the IPPD compulsory, or to make the engagement in the process rewarding for the personnel's career. This would encourage service personnel to actively take part in the scheme.

A wide variety of training, guidance and workshops are available to service personnel who leave the army as part of their resettlement entitlement. Currently, the level of support they receive is based on how many years the individuals have served or their terms of leaving for example medical discharge. Some of the participants in the current study reflected on their resettlement fondly, however there were two individuals who found the process unhelpful. This was because these individuals were unsure of the path that they were going to taking in civilian life and therefore could not choose appropriate resettlement options. Based on this, the next interpretation for how best to support service leavers is to make resettlement 'needs based'. Further, this would require an assessment of the individuals needs to gage which areas pose a risk to them, such as housing or financing. This assessment would aid the service leaver in choosing their resettlement. As part of the assessment it would be beneficial to have a mental health screening for service leavers to identify underlying issues

which may not have been diagnosed. This would avoid the service leaver experiencing their transition to civilian life with the added challenge of an undiagnosed mental health condition.

Some participants felt that they had been forgotten about when they left the army and struggled to access the support that they required. To address the issue of feeling 'forgotten about' one interpretation of the best ways in which to support service leavers is by introducing a process whereby the army provides a follow up call after the individual had entered civilian life. This process of checking in would be beneficial for all involved as not only will it help to identify those who are in need of support, and make service leavers feel as if they have been remembered and appreciated, but it might also help the army bring back recruits who, on reflection, regret their decision to leave. This one measure, if implemented successfully would have a number of benefits in supporting the service leaver and the army.

Finally, the section also presented a potential opportunity for civilian support services to assist those who may need their provisions. This interpretation involved the civilian support services contacting the service leaver directly to discuss what support is available. It is not uncommon for service leavers to struggle to access support as they are unsure of the correct procedure. Similarly, the service leaver may not be aware of the support on offer. By providing a facility whereby the civilian support services contact the leaving personnel directly, this takes the responsibility away from the individual and would make it easier for them to access the services available. The interpretations provided in this chapter are one possible perspective based on the experiences of the participants in the current research and the accompanying analysis.

The next and final chapter is the 'Conclusion'. This will present and summarise the key research findings, followed by an evaluation of the utility of the present study for academic and policy/practice communities, an evaluation of the present study, closing with suggestions for future research.

6) Conclusion

a) Key research findings

The purpose of this current research was to explore the experiences of ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life. To address this, the experiences of ex-army personnel during their transition from a military into a civilian life were explored, and examination of how they adjusted to a new lifestyle during this time was provided. Four primary research questions were developed to help guide the current research. The research questions were as follows;

Question 1: How do ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life?

Question 2: How do ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle?

Question 3: How do ex-army personnel make sense of their identity during their transition to civilian lifestyle?

Question 4: How do ex-army personnel perceive support could be further developed or introduced, to facilitate individuals in the transition from military to civilian life?

The research questions were exploratory as this reflects the nature of IPA research. They also present a focus on how individuals make meaning of their unique experiences and create an understanding within a specific context. The research questions were used to devise three clear research aims.

The research aims were;

Aim 1: to examine how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of their transition from military to civilian life.

Aim 2: to explore how ex-army personnel adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

Aim 3: to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life.

In conclusion, this research has demonstrated that many factors contribute to the way in which service leavers make meaning of their transition experiences from army to civilian life and how they adjust. Prior experience of an adult civilian life, the maintenance of civilian connections, and perceived control over one's decision to leave the army, can all contribute

to an individual experiencing a transition characterised by more positive reflections. While some service leavers may struggle with feelings of loss as a result of leaving the army, and endeavour to maintain and hold onto their army identity despite some negative feelings about the way the military treated them, others are relieved to leave the intense lifestyle behind and begin a more relaxed way of living, while maintaining a positive look on their previous military identity. Each individual adjusted differently from using their military experience to help them structure civilian routine, to adopting a 'get on with it' attitude to motivate them through the transition. Further, one participant also expressed using alcohol as a way of coping and finding a new identity. The key research findings are as follows:

- Participants differed in their perception of their own personal transitions based on the circumstances upon which they left.
- All participants choosing to leave the army communicated a more positive transition to civilian life facing what they perceived as minimal challenges.
- Individuals who chose to leave the army expressed a greater sense of agency over their decisions and an element of control over their transition.
- The participants who were 'forced out' of the army faced challenges in their transition to civilian life and sought after the army lifestyle.
- Retaining civilian connections during army service acted to facilitate the transition experience as participants were familiar which the expectations and values of civilian life.
- The military culture was all consuming for all participants creating a strong army identity. Therefore, upon leaving some individuals experienced a sense of loss as a result of being disconnected from the army identity.

Using IPA, the nine themes discussed in this research capture the key elements experienced by the nine participants during their transition. The nine themes were; Identity, Control, Personality, Perception of the army, Wellbeing, Civilian lifestyle, Civilian connection, Army life, and Support. Consideration of the civilian connections, perceived control and changes in identity throughout the participant's unique army experience, through to transition and civilian life, contribute to how that individual makes meaning of their transition experience. This demonstrates that the process is complex and involves many a combination of factors

which are both inside and outside of the individual's control. This research has contributed to the increasing literature into the transition of British Army Service leavers which has received little attention in comparison to its US counterparts (Iversen *et al,* 2005).

The present research considered Goffman's work on Total Institutions (1961) as its theoretical framework in relation to the development of identity. According to Goffman, a total institution is 'a place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals, cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time, together lead an enclosed, formally administered round of life'. Given this definition and the specified characteristics of a total institution, the master themes were discussed in relation to total institutions. All participants gave the appearance of having entered the army voluntarily in search of the military career. This idea is synonymous with Scott's theory of Reinventive Institutions (2010) where individuals willingly enter institutions for the purpose of bettering oneself. In this respect, all participants voluntarily let go of their old identity to adopt a new identity and way of living.

The characteristics of the army as an institution, as communicated by the participants, demonstrate how the army can be considered a total institution in the way it forms its member's identities. For example, Mike explicitly voices how the army 'break' new recruits, to strip them of their old civilian identity for the purpose of teaching them a new way of living through the strict rules, regulations and values the army imposes. The disciplined and hierarchical nature of the army is evident in participant's narrative. Alpha explains being put in his place very quickly as a way of teaching him the attitude which was considered acceptable. Similarly, Juliet discusses how the army has to be the number one priority for serving personnel, a concept which is echoed by both Charlie and Victor when they express the inability to maintain a successful family life while in the army. Similarly, India describes how the army became her 'family' to the point where she felt alienated upon returning to civilian life. To show the intensity of army life and the all consuming nature, an experience of Alpha's can be used. Upon returning to civilian life, Alpha describes being unable to book a hotel as he did not know how to. Further, Bravo experienced being unable to effectively communicate to his civilian colleagues using humour due to the unique social communication and interaction displayed within the army. Goffman's idea of Interaction

Order (1983) supports the notion of a specialised unique social interaction within the army institution which provides a standard and a structure upon which communication is created and evaluated.

Exploring participant's experiences of being in the army and how they viewed their transition to civilian life demonstrates the intense nature of the identity development through the strict authoritative nature of the army culture. However, in Oscar's experience he recalls making a conscious effort to keep his family life separate, maintaining a separate civilian identity. Goffman offers support to this notion as he acknowledges that the degree to which individuals experience the characteristics of total institutions can vary. Therefore it is possible for individuals to associate themselves with the army identity on differing levels. The army identity is enforced behind locked doors, where serving personnel 'eat, sleep and play' to a structured presubscribed routine, with the same like-minded people, under the same roof. It is this therefore which makes the army as an institution 'total'.

Aim 3 was to develop an interpretation of the best ways in which to support ex-army personnel during their transition to civilian life. This was based on the evaluation provided to meet Aim 1 and Aim 2, and the discussion of the nine master themes. Three core suggestions were created in an interpretation of how to support ex-army personnel in their transition to civilian life. The recommendations explored in Aim 3 are as follows:

- The first recommendation takes place during the personnel's service and involves further deployment of the Individual Planning and Personal Development (IPPD) Scheme. This would give serving personnel the skills, knowledge and tools needed to succeed in civilian life which are developed and mastered throughout their service.
- The second recommendation for support occurs before the individual leaves the army and filters into civilian life in the form of a 'needs tested' army resettlement programme. An assessment to ascertain which resettlement programmes might be of benefit, along with an assessment of risk factors would help individuals access the support they need upon leaving the army.
- Finally, the last recommendation is for an after service support facility allowing services to contact ex-service personnel to offer their assistance or at the very least, inform the service leaver of what they can offer to benefit them. A combination of

these elements in a multifaceted approach could facilitate ex-army personnel in their transition from army to civilian life.

b) Evaluation of the utility of the present study for academic and policy/practice communities

The Armed Forces Covenant is described as 'a promise by the nation ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly' (Armed Forces Covenant, 2021). The Covenant details the commitments made across the UK by industries, partners and businesses to ensure those leaving the armed services are fully supported and facilitated in their transition. Further it stresses the importance of service leavers receiving fair treatment and access to services aligned to their civilian counterparts (Armed Forces Covenant, 2021). It emphasises the need for a holistic approach to support with engagement from a number of services to enable the service leaver to be fully integrated into civilian life.

The Armed Forces Covenant points to the Joint Service Publication 100 (JSP) which details the Defence Holistic Transition (DHT) providing guidance on the procedures which should be followed and services which should be provided to service leavers (Joint Service Publication 100, 2019). Within the JSP, it's recommendations for best practice in supporting service leavers align to those explored within Aim 3 of the current research. Specifically, it suggests the use of tools for assessing the individual's readiness for transition with the aim of highlighting and prioritising certain issues (Joint Service Publication 100, 2019). The current research suggests a 'needs tested' army resettlement programme would be beneficial to assess which support services might be most beneficial for the service leaver. Further, the JSP suggests a 12 month follow-up contact with the service leaver to ascertain whether they require any further support (Joint Service Publication 100, 2019). The current research also suggests after service contact to identify any service leavers which, upon reflection would benefit from additional provision. The alignment of the guidance given in the Joint Service Publication with the recommendations provided in this study demonstrates how research can support and/or inform policy.

Although the guidance outlined in the JSP supports the findings in this current research, it also states that referral to the DHT services are to be made by a responsible tri-Service military authority or by the service leaver themselves (Joint Service Publication 100, 2019). There are inherent issues with this process that the current study can highlight. Firstly there is no formal assessment provided for the authority to use to assess whether the individual might require further services. Secondly, as seen in the current research some service leavers do not know what support might be beneficial to them. Finally, service leavers might be unaware of the support available or the way in which they can access it. Therefore, not all service leavers requiring support will have access.

The alignment of the support recommendations suggested in the current research and in the JSP clearly demonstrates a positive relationship between research findings and policy, however, how and if this policy then translates into practice is where the current research can help inform application. The current research has suggested how the formalisation of support provision through assessment and follow-up might be beneficial to service leavers as it can help identify hidden or invisible issues which require attention. In this respect, when translating policy into practice the process would benefit from formalisation and strategy, for example, formal standard assessment with set outcomes for measurement. This would ensure all service leavers were receiving equal opportunity and guarantee the Armed Forces were following policy and procedure.

This current research is also relevant to other institutions aside from the army. The use of professional development programmes is commonly used within many other employments such as the Police. Formal management of these programmes are in place and development is assessed throughout the individual's employment, helping to build their personal and professional skills allowing promotion within the institution and transferable skills for alternative employments. Further, as previously discussed the army can be considered to fit within the explanation of Goffmans 'Total Institutions' (1961). Arguably then, other establishments which can be considered under Goffman's definition could too benefit from this research. The idea of an individual trying to adapt to a new life after adopting a new prescribed identity within an all consuming environment could present the circumstances

upon which the suggested support mechanisms might be beneficial. Particularly the other institutions included within the tri-services.

This research adds support to the qualitative research on the topic of military transitions which is somewhat limited in relation to the quantitative research available. It provides an exploration of personal transition and support experiences, and is therefore relevant to institutions reflecting on transitional experiences such as counselling psychology and identity research. It is specifically relevant to literature in relation to transitions out of an all-consuming environment, and it demonstrates how 'total institutions' can be applicable in the modern day setting.

c) Evaluation of the present study

The current research study has limitations which it is important to be explicit about for the validity and transparency of the study, and for any future research looking to replicate or develop the findings further.

The subject positions of the researcher and the participants could have been an issue which hindered some of the conversations, with the researcher having no experience and little knowledge of what it is like to be in the military. As such, she could have been positioned by participants as an outsider (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Research has suggested that this can often post a challenge for researchers, particularly when trying to understand, empathise and engage with topics which have the potential to be sensitive such as military experience (Williams, Allen-Collinson & Hockey, 2020). For example, during one interview, the researcher noted that the participant made reference to the researcher potentially not fully understanding their experience, which could have been a result of their differing backgrounds. These differences and the lack of understanding by the researcher could have been detrimental to the rapport building between the researcher and the participant, meaning that the latter did not feel that they could share their experiences openly due to a lack of researcher acceptance (Brunger, Serrato & Ogden, 2013). Having said this, this could potentially lead the participant to further attempt to explain their experience and thus, could have encouraged deeper exploration of the topic. In some of the interviews in this study, the subject positions of the researcher and participant acted as a hindrance. For example, there was a noted lack of rapport which negatively influenced sharing of

experiences. However, in other interviews, this led the participant to go into further detail to facilitate their imparting of information in an attempt to try to help the researcher understand.

One benefit of the research study was the broad inclusion criteria. Recruitment of participants was not restricted based on their age, gender, rank in the army, time since leaving the army or experience of tours, and as a result, a wider range of experiences were explored. For IPA research, it is necessary to look to recruit a homogenous sample. This is due to the very few participants who are required within the research design, and it is therefore necessary to identify a group of participants for whom the research questions are significant (Smith & Osborn, 2008). This was the rationale in the current research study for specifically choosing experience in the army as criteria, as it was noted how different each of the armed forces was with regards to its practices, values and processes. There was no rationale or reason for restricting the boundaries for the criteria any further based on the demographics of the participants. Many previous studies have neglected to include female participants in military research and this area is dominated by research investigating male soldiers. The current research however includes two female participants which give greater variance to the sample as it attempts to be inclusive.

This has however created natural variance between participants due to their differences in the army and the changes the institution faced throughout the years. For example, some of the recent support mechanisms were not introduced into the army until after the year 2000 when the Armed Forces Covenant was introduced, and support is regularly updated as funding and regulations change (Armed Forces Covenant, 2018). Therefore, India's experience of the support the army offered would differ to Oscar's experience due to the time differences in when they left the army. However, with IPA, the nuances and differences between participants is of key interest (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009) and therefore, these differences would have been a valuable part of the exploration of each participant and their individual experiences.

As some of the participants had left the army a number of years before the research interviews were conducted, their accounts would be subject to recall bias and potential errors due to the time that had passed (Iversen *et al,* 2005). Therefore, it is likely that there may be some inaccuracies in the recall of the experiences. One of the many benefits of using

IPA for this type of research however, is how it considers the way in which individuals have made meaning of their experiences through their individual accounts from their own points of view (Smith & Osborn, 2008), and thus the complexities involved in making meaning out of an experience is not ignored (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). Therefore, the way in which an individual has remembered their experience and how they communicate this to others is of great importance. What individuals have said is an interpretation in itself and is subject to bias. Time and space from the original experience would allow for reflection, which would be useful in terms of helping individuals make sense of situations.

d) Future research

Further research on this topic would benefit from assessing specific elements of the current support offered to army personnel leaving their military career for a civilian life. It would be of interest to ascertain which parts of the current support system were considered the most beneficial and why, and which were not so beneficial and how these could be improved. Similarly, it would be of interest for further research to explore the transition process to ascertain whether service leavers go through a step by step transition procedure characterised by different challenges at different stages of the process. This would bring to light suggestions of what support service leavers might benefit from at certain stages of their transition to enable them to get the best out of the support that is available to them and bridge the gap between their military service and civilian life.

There were certain aspects which came out of the interviews and the themes which would also benefit from further exploration. Firstly, within Oscar's interview specifically, he mentions that although he experienced the army support system when he left the army, as many years had passed since then he felt the army support system may have developed and changed. Therefore, he felt that some of things he had suggested as ways in which the army could develop their support to facilitate service leavers transition may have already been implemented for current day service leavers. An interesting insight for future research may be to chronologically track the changes of the army support system through the years and see how service leavers perceived their experience in relation to these changes. The specific differences within service leavers experience could be assessed in relation to how the support system of the army had developed and changed.

A clear important element to come out of this research is the part that identity plays in transition. The current research took a retrospective stance where participants looked back at their experience. They explained how their identity changed from before becoming a soldier, throughout their service and when leaving. The research therefore captured how the participant made meaning of their experiences when looking back. It looked at how they interpreted their identity in a retrospective manner based on situation and circumstance. Future research would benefit from considering a longitudinal study where participants are interview at different points of their army experience and transition. This would capture the nuances in their perception of identity through the different stages of their army career. It would also shed light on the transition process within identity. For example, it would capture how they felt about their identity when leaving the army, joining civilian life, and how they adapted years later. Some participants in the current research suggest their army identity was a chapter in their life, and others see it as a part of themselves they will keep with them. These differences and changes in the way in which individuals connect with certain identities would be facilitated by multiple interviews with an individual over a long period of time.

An interesting concept which came to the forefront was perceived control. Control became central to how individuals made meaning of their transition. For example, those who were medically discharged gave the impression that they had no control over their lives when leaving the army, and they sought to maintain and hold onto their military roots. Future research would benefit from specifically focussing on the circumstances by which an individual leaves the army and their transition to civilian life. This would highlight how the decision to leave the army and the perceived control associated with this may impact on the challenges an individual faces when they leave. For example, in the current study, Alpha struggled with the challenges of civilian life and felt a lack of control when leaving the army when he was medically discharged. Juliet, however, chose to leave the army and was prepared for being a civilian. Conversely, although Bravo chose to leave the army of his own accord, he struggled with the challenges of civilian life and felt a lack of control when finding new employment. These nuances are important in exploring the impact of certain factors on the transition period and therefore could be developed further.

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8) Appendix A: Information for participants

Who is the researcher and what is the research about?
My name is Alice Jones, and I am a PhD student at the University of Gloucestershire. I am conducting a research project exploring the transition from military to civilian life. Specifically, how ex-army personnel perceive their experience of this transition, and how they adjust to a civilian lifestyle.

What type of data are being collected?
I will be interviewing individuals face to face in order to collect data. I am interested in gaining an insight into your own personal experience of the transition you made from military life into civilian life. Therefore there are no right or wrong answers to the questions you will be asked. Before the interview you will be asked to answer some demographic questions e.g. age, gender etc. This is so I can get an idea of who is taking park in the research project. However, you do not have to provide this information if you do not wish to.

Who is eligible to participate?
There are some criteria for taking part in this research: anyone who has served in the army, and anyone who has left the army to begin life as a civilian. If you fit these criteria I would like to invite you to take part in my research.

What will participation involve?
Participation will involve one interview which will be conducted by myself. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission, and should last for about one hour. In the interview you will be asked to talk about your experience of the transition from military to civilian life and how you adjusted.

When and where will the interview take place?
The interview will take place at a time that suits you and in an environment that is appropriate. The University of Gloucestershire have a number of rooms suitable for interviewing, which can be booked at various times throughout the week. If this is not convenient for you, another location can be arranged.

What will happen on the day?
I will be there through the whole process; to meet you and to conduct the interview. I will also be the only one to transcribe the interview. When you arrive for the interview you will be asked to read and sign a consent form. You will be given a copy of the consent form to keep for yourself. I will explain to you what is going to happen during the interview and give you the opportunity to ask any questions you may have. If you are then happy to proceed I will switch on the recording device and begin the interview. You will be given another chance to ask questions at the end of the interview.

Will I be identifiable?
All information you provide in the interview will be anonymised, and steps will be taken to protect your identity. I will transcribe the interviews myself, making sure that any potentially identifying information is omitted or disguised. Data will also be kept safe and secure on a password protected computer, where only I will have access. Extracts of your interview will be presented in the final write up of the research. Please be aware that the research may be published.

Please note, any information you provide may be discussed between the researcher and the research supervisors.

Please be aware that if I have serious concern over your safety, or of the safety of others who may be endangered by your behaviour, I will inform you that some of the information that you have shared will need to be discussed with my research supervisor.

Are there any risks involved?
As the interview will be a discussion of a personal topic, there is a chance that you may find it upsetting in some way, for example, if a question reminds you of a particular distressing experience. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to answer, and if you wish to leave a topic and return to it later in the interview, this is not a problem. You will also have the opportunity throughout to discuss topics further, or introduce a new topic if you feel a particular area has not been covered, or if you have more to say.

How can I withdraw from the research?
Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You can withdraw from the research at any time without giving reasons. You can withdraw before, during or up to 2 weeks after receiving the transcript of your interview. If you wish to withdraw only a section of the interview, this is also possible. To withdraw from the research, please contact me directly.

If you have any questions about this research or would like to know more, please contact:

Alice Jones
Email: [email redacted]

If you would like to participate in this research please let me know by email. Thank you for your time and help in considering taking part.

"This research is being conducted under the guidelines of the University of Gloucestershire's Research Ethics Sub Committee. The research plan has been approved by the University, but the contents and opinions expressed in this research instrument are those of the researcher and in no way represent those of the University of Gloucestershire."

Research supervisor: Dr Claire Cooke
Email: [email redacted]

Associate Dean (Quality and Standards): Dr Malcolm MacLean
Email: [email redacted]

University of Gloucestershire telephone: [Tel No redacted]

9) Appendix B: Participant consent form

Title of project: Exploring the transition from army to civilian life

Researcher: Alice Jones

I have been provided with information of the research project, and I understand what my participation involves. I have been given the opportunity to ask any questions I may have about the research, and they have been answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that participation in this project is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw from the research at any time (within the limits noted on the participant information sheet) without giving a reason. I understand that I am under no duty to answer any particular question, and any information provided will be kept anonymous to protect my identity.

I understand that I will be given the transcription of my interview to read, and I will have the opportunity to omit any information that I do not want to include in the research.

Please indicate whether you would like to receive a copy of your interview transcript by ticking the appropriate box:

☐ I would like to receive a copy of my interview transcript

☐ I would **not** like to receive a copy of my interview transcript

Signed:

Date:

Please answer the following questions:

Age:

Sex:

Rank before leaving the army:

10) Appendix C: Interview Schedule

Opening

- What was your role in the army?

- How long did you serve in the army?
- How long ago did you leave the army?

1. **Life before the army**

    - Could you tell me a bit about your life before the army?

    (Prompt: Family, friends, social life)

2. **Entering the army**

    - What made you decide to go into the army?

    - Did people react to your decision to join the army? (If yes, in what way?)
    (Prompt: Friends, family, colleagues, acquaintances, unexpected reactions)

    - What were you expectations or hopes when entering the army?

    - Do you have any prominent memories of joining the army?
    (Prompt: signing up, first day/week)

    - Did joining the army change how you viewed yourself?
    (*Prompt: status, views about civilians, power, authority, belonging*)

3. **Army life**

    - Could you explain to me what it was like when you first started serving in the army?
    (*Prompt: What changed, relationships, emotions/feelings, expectations*)

    - How did you adjust during this time?
    (*Prompt: coping, attitudes/behaviour*)

    - How would you describe your time in the army?
    (*Prompt: positive/negative experiences*)

    - Do you have any prominent memories of army life?

4. **Leaving the army**

    - Can you tell me about the time leading up you leaving the army?
    (*Prompt: normal work, change in behaviour, relationships, feelings*)

    - Could you tell me when it was you left the army?

    - What were you reasons for leaving the army?

- Did you have any concerns about leaving?
(*Prompt: employment, home life/family, relationships*)

- Did leaving the army change how you viewed yourself / and who you were?
(*Prompt: power, loss, role change*)

- What support did you have before you left?
(*Prompt: friends/family, army, professionals*)

- Could you tell me about what it was like leaving the army and being a civilian again?
(*Prompt: What was easy/hard*)

- How did you adjust during this time?
(*Prompt: behaviour, coping, employment, housing*)

- What support did you seek during this time if any?
(*Prompt: professional, friends/family*)

- Are you receiving any support currently?
(*Prompt: help from health professionals, housing*)

- How do you view yourself now?
(*Prompt: ex-soldier, partner, employment*)

- What do you think about the support that the army offer those in the transition to civilian life?

Closing

- How do your experiences of coming out of the army compare to others?

- How often do you see people that you served with in the army?
(*Prompts: friends, taking parting activities organised by the army*)

- Are you currently employed? (If yes) What is your current employment?

- Do you have anything to add to what we have been talking about?
- Are you happy that we have discussed everything you wanted to?

<u>Probes</u>

- Can you tell me a bit more about that?
- Can you give an example?
- How did others feel about that?
- How was this important to you?
- How did you feel about that?
- What stood out for you?
- Can you remember any more experiences like that one?
- Do you have anymore examples of where you experienced this?

11) Appendix D: Participant debrief form

Thank you for taking part in my PhD research 'exploring the transition from military to civilian life.' For this research project I am interested in gaining an insight into personal experience of leaving the army. Therefore your contribution is very much appreciated.

If you have requested a copy of your transcribed interview, this will be given to you in person to read through, shortly after the interview has taken place. This is an opportunity for you to check that you are happy with the information that you have shared and that any potentially identifying information has been disguised or omitted to your satisfaction.

Proof of identification will be required before the transcript is handed over. If you wish to remove any of the information from the interview or would like to withdraw from the research, please contact me as soon as possible with your request. Please note, information can be removed but can not be changed. You can omit information or withdraw from the study up to 2 weeks after receiving your transcript. If you have not requested a copy of the transcript, you can withdraw from the study up to 3 weeks after your interview.

I am aware that some people may wish to discuss some issues further, and therefore have provided a list of contacts below for your use.

Thank you again for you time, and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any further questions about the research you have taken part in.

Alice
Email: alicejones@glos.ac.uk

Research supervisor: Dr Claire Cooke
Email: [email redacted]

Associate Dean (Quality and Standards): Dr Malcolm MacLean
Email: [email redacted]

University of Gloucestershire telephone: [Tel No redacted]

Contacts

Combat Stress
Helpline: 0800 138 1619
General enquiries: 01372 587 000
Email: contactus@combatstress.org.uk
Address:
Combat Stress
Tyrwhitt House
Oaklawn Road
Leatherhead
Surrey
KT22 0BX

ABF: The Soldiers Charity

Helpline: 0207 901 8900
Email:
info@soldierscharity.org

Address:

Mountbarrow House,
6 - 20 Elizabeth Street,

12) Appendix E: Confirmation of receiving transcript

I can confirm that I have received a full copy of my interview transcript.

I understand that receiving my transcript is an opportunity for me to check that I am happy with the information that I have shared and that any potentially identifying information has been disguised or omitted to my satisfaction.

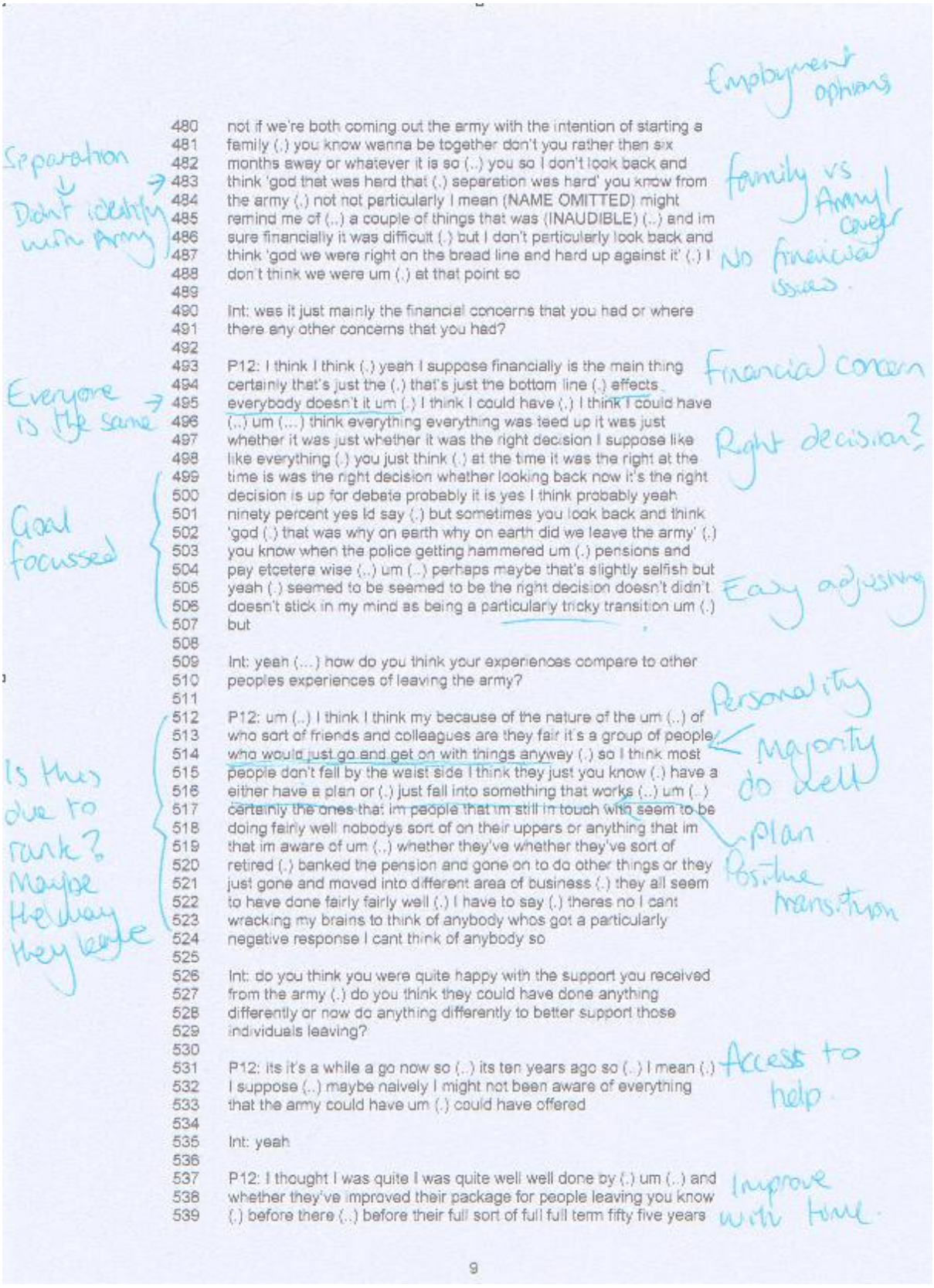
I understand that I can request removal of information from the transcript but I can not change information, and this can be done up to 2 weeks after receiving my transcript.

Signed:

Date:

Participant number:

13) Appendix F: Example of initial coding – Victor



not if we're both coming out the army with the intention of starting a family (.) you know wanna be together don't you rather then six months away or whatever it is so (..) you so I don't look back and think 'god that was hard that (.) separetion was hard' you know from the army (.) not not particularly I mean (NAME OMITTED) might remind me of (...) a couple of things that was (INAUDIBLE) (..) and im sure financially it was difficult (.) but I don't particularly look back and think 'god we were right on the bread line and herd up against it' (.) I don't think we were um (.) at that point so

Int: was it just mainly the financial concerns that you had or where there any other concerns that you had?

P12: I think I think (.) yeah I suppose financially is the main thing certainly that's just the (.) that's just the bottom line (.) effects everybody doesn't it um (.) I think I could have (.) I think I could have (..) um (...) think everything everything was teed up it was just whether it was just whether it was the right decision I suppose like like everything (.) you just think (.) at the time it was the right at the time is was the right decision whether looking back now it's the right decision is up for debate probably it is yes I think probably yeah ninety percent yes Id say (.) but sometimes you look back and think 'god (.) that was why on earth why on earth did we leave the army' (.) you know when the police getting hammered um (.) pensions and pay etcetera wise (..) um (..) perhaps maybe that's slightly selfish but yeah (.) seemed to be seemed to be the right decision doesn't didn't doesn't stick in my mind as being a particularly tricky transition um (.) but

Int: yeah (...) how do you think your experiences compare to other peoples experiences of leaving the army?

P12: um (..) I think I think my because of the nature of the um (..) of who sort of friends and colleagues are they fair it's a group of people who would just go and get on with things anyway (.) so I think most people don't fall by the waist side I think they just you know (.) have a either have a plan or (.) just fall into something that works (..) um (..) certainly the ones that im people that im still in touch with seem to be doing fairly well nobodys sort of on their uppers or anything that im that im aware of um (..) whether they've whether they've sort of retired (.) banked the pension and gone on to do other things or they just gone and moved into different area of business (.) they all seem to have done fairly fairly well (.) I have to say (.) theres no I cant wracking my brains to think of anybody whos got a particularly negative response I cant think of anybody so

Int: do you think you were quite happy with the support you received from the army (.) do you think they could have done anything differently or now do anything differently to better support those individuals leaving?

P12: its it's a while a go now so (..) its ten years ago so (..) I mean (.) I suppose (..) maybe naively I might not been aware of everything that the army could have um (.) could have offered

Int: yeah

P12: I thought I was quite I was quite well well done by (.) um (..) and whether they've improved their package for people leaving you know (.) before there (..) before their full sort of full full term fifty five years

14) Appendix G: Example of emergent theme list - Charlie

Joined at 17

Line	
72-73	Control (lack of)
78-79	Identity. Expendable.
96	military family
102	control (lack of)
110	effects on family
120	Planned military career
123-123	Identity
123-124	Identity
126-127	Planned career
137-147	Institutionalised. Socialisation.
164	regret?
169-170	rigid thinking
186, 199-204	Military families
192-196	Soldier selection
202-204	expectations of others
209	Military culture
210	expectation vs reality
224-229	Gender equality
229	team work
231	expectation vs reality
235-240	hierarch
244-245	Control
249-267	Contradiction ‘good vs bad’ (making sense)
258	friends as support
254-255	Camaraderie
262	coping strategies
272-290	limited understanding of job role

291	travel
298	Family influence
330-331	Role expectations
345	Camaraderie
344-350	coping with adversity
354	Lifelong friendships
360	Control/power?
377	Strong friendships
388-390	Job role/responsibility
388-397	job satisfaction/fulfilling role
398-399	socialising/friendships
409	Friendship
411-419	Team
420-420	Us vs them, classified job role
429	Military family
449-450	lack self confidence
454	Coping strategy
458-468	Regret
466	Support
467	High standards
469	Critical point (leaving)
476	Prioritise family/work life balance, sacrifice?
480	Sacrifice military career
482	regret (repetition)
484	Positive experience
486-487	Control. Hierarchy.
492-493	Fitness and Wellbeing
496	Oppressed negative memories
510	Hostile environments
513	Role
514-520	Fear

520-522	identity
524	Isolation
532	Group/team
534-537	Achievement (lack of), aspirations
539-541	perceived risk. Trauma
541-544	Avoidance, oppression of negative memory
548	Avoidance of traumatic memories
548-552	Extreme enjoyment of role
549	hierarchy? Work ethic
563-564	Work ethic
568	'get it done' personality, resilience
574	Marriage breakdown
579	Extreme role enjoyment
577-591	Opportunity for career progression, high aspirations
583	Hierarchy
591	Judgement, accountable
592-599	False promises
602-608	Critical point – turn around
607	Career vs family
612-616	Career or family?
624	Anxious about leaving
631	expectations
632-638	Security
639-641	Prepare civvy life, anxiety, fear
648-649	Regrets? Questions decision
655-659	Big decision
662-691	support offered vs no support
664	resettlement refused
667	undervalued
679 & 691	HIS decision vs entitlement, undervalued vs not Army responsibility
694	'ready-made' civvy life

669	civvy group membership
701-702	paying bills – unusual
708	set free
708 – 718	Positive reasons for leaving
714 -718	Group identity, friendships
719	Civvy expectations
720 & 725	Correct decision
737	Change in priorities
471 – 748	Change responsibilities
753	smooth transition
756	Military identity, us vs them
758 &760	Them vs us
763 – 764	Camaraderie
765 -769	Regret
769	Army career or family
778	Positive transition
780	Team/group involvement
790	Military identity
791	Ex-military colleagues
816	Hierarchy in civvy job
818-819	Valued and appreciated
839	Responsible for children
845	sense of pride in work
854	friendship
819&867 & 875	Repetition: Job satisfaction
869	Respected
895	clear career goals
907	Ambition/goals
912-913	Public duty
912	Job satisfaction
936	Goal

949-950	Critical point: Police vs civvies, us vs them, identity
959-963	ex-army friends regret
965	coping during transition, personality
977-983	Follow up support required
989-996	Expendable, replacable

15) Appendix H: Example of superordinate themes table - India

Superordinate themes	Emergent themes
Military personality	269-271 Good of the group
Group belonging	120 Friends and family together
	130-138 Forced interactions/friendships
	145-147 shared experiences
	169-174 Sense of self as group (this can go into identity too)
	224-227 Alone (contrast to group id)
	235 – 236 Shared experience
	236 – 237 Stronger friendships
	262-271 Loyalty to group
	406-409 Group bond
	445-446 Group = friends
	584 – 586 **Alone**
	879 -882 Civilian = alone
	1064 – 1076 Civilian = alone
Friendships	281-282 Friendships
	398 – 400 Friend support
	405 Strong bond friendships
	417 – 428 Friendship
	436-437 Friends as family
	618 – 622 Broken bond
	901 No civilian friends
	971 – 977 Army friends
	985 – 990 situational friendships
Identity	50 Army ambition
	51-57 Army education
	67-69 Army ambition (repetition of line 50)
	113-117 Army education

	153-156 Army future
	221-222 Two identities contrast
	478 Past identity
	696 -705 Civilian status
	716 – 718 Army vs civilian
	723 -731 Teacher – army similarities
	923-924 Official civilian
	926 Army attachment
	991 -998 **IMORTANT QUOTE –'JUST A NUMBER'**
	1276 – 1282 Army ties
Control	315-319 Abuse/hierarchy
	326 Control activities
	349-352 Powerless/abuse
	353-356 Lack of respect
	360- 362 Unnecessary suffering
	371-373 Neglect
	389-390 Control with Fear
	452, 455, 457 'allowed'
	458-459 Social punishment
	487 Forced to leave
	497-498 Abuse from hierarchy
	588-590 Controlled during discharged
	889 – 892 Future taken
	1109 – 1126 army impact on civ life
	1253-1254 Forced to leave
Coping	204-210 Avoidance – us and them (can fit into ID)
	355 – 356 Blame (them)
	363 Self blame (contrast)
	710 – 712 Career focussed

	853-856 Organised personality
	1126 – 1143 Blame/responsible
Lifestyle	119-120 Army lifestyle -travel
	216 Stress
	233 Stress
	253 – 256 Punishment
	291 -294 Bad treatment/health and safety
	307-310 Extreme training
	323 -334 Extreme training
	400 Bad environment
	441 Experience opportunity
	500 – 512 Neglect/duty of care
	643 Physical
	651 - 654 Physical demand
	941 -944 Group cohesion vs alone (civvy)
	1279 army is good career
Responsibility	178-180 Grow up faster
Support	91-94 Family support
	190 Strong family relationship
	534-535 **no support from senior**
	603 Family support
	613 -614 Family
	811 Lack of medical support
	818 – 833 Inappropriate Resettlement
	837 -848 'you' vs 'me' – lack of help
	848 'I got nothing'
	874 present tense lack of support
	903 family support
	953-961 Family support
	1030 – 1032 Self support
	1054 GP

	1082-1083 Lack of support
	1088-1090 Self support
	1151-1154 Self support
	1167 – 1172 Inadequate support
	1177-1188 Unnecessarily complicated
	1196-1226 Transition support
	1259 – 1265 Tailored support
	1267 Family support
Family	84-86 Army family tradition
	195-199 Army as family
Perception of Army	157-158 Perception of Army as great
	159-161 Achievement – Army pride
	286 – 288 Distorted reflections (Army =great)
	290 – 291 (contrast) Bad treatment
	294 – 295 Personal bad treatment/misjustice
	467-469 Achievement
	472-474 Remember it all/memory
	475-476 Pride
	479-481 Achievement and pride
	1016 -1020 Expectation vs reality
	1155-1160 Negative perception
Loss	297- 299 Grief
	513 Scared of loss
	517 - language used is interesting
	521-527 Contradiction – earlier says she has come to terms with it but now she cries while talking about being medically discharged
	605 Couldn't understand
	630 -632 Ambition taken
	627-629 Prolonged trauma
	879 – 888 'on your own' repetition

	889 – 892 Future taken
	894-895 Loss of one life
	927 - 935 No independence
	968 -971 Loss of ID
	978-981 Painful memory
	1033 – 1048 Loss of expected life
	1059-1060 Denial of impact
Injustice/treatment/victim	486 – 494 Medically discharged
	546 – 555 Lack of trust
	559 – 560 Let down/failed
	561-562 Forgotten about
	581-586 Isolated
	585 Forgotten
	586 Detached
	658 Lack of physical care
	671 Deprived of treatment
	669 -670 Powerless
	681 Lack of treatment
	736 -737 No respect in army
	741-742 Bad treatment – not valued
	754 – 757 Not believed
	761-764 Abuse
	784-791 Personally Victimised
	1172 **'They just don't care'**
	1226 – 1227 Cut off
Military culture	746 -747 High expectation
	748 – 754 Institutionalised/moulded
	896 – 898 Isolated
	1100 – 1105 Cut off after discharge

16) Appendix I: Table of combined superordinate themes with participant number

	Participants								
Family	1	7	8	11	2	3			
Control	1	7	8	9	11	2	3	4	6
Group belonging	1	7	8	9	11	2	3	4	6
Instutionalised	1	7	8	9	11	3	4	6	
Military culture	1	2	6						
Psychological wellbeing/needs	1	7	8	9	4				
Trauma	1	3							
Loss	1	2							
Responsibility	1	7	9	11	2	3	4		
Identity	1	7	8	9	11	2	3	4	6
Emotional investment	1	8							
Military personality	1	7	8	9	11	2	4		
Personality	1	8	11	6					
Expectations	1	7	4						
Support	1	7	9	2	3	4	6		
Change	1	7							
Friendship	1	8	11	2	4	6			
Military failing	1								
Military future	1								
Heirarchy	1	8							
Alone	1								
Stigma	1								
Civvy connections	7								
Positive transition	8								
Discipline	11								
Opportunity	8								
Exclusivity	8								
Training	8	9	11	3	6				
Civilian training	8								
Welfare	9	11	3	4	6				
Coping	9	2	3	4	6				
Lifestyle	9	2	4	6					

Memories	11								
Perception of army	2	11							
Injustice/treatment/vicitm	2								
Army attitude	3								
Ambition	3	4	6						
Mental Health	3								
Army lifestyle/culture	3	4							
Pride	3	4	6						
Camaraderie	3								
Civilian Lifestyle	3								
Romanticised	3								
Sacrifice	4								
Closure	4								

17) Appendix J: Master themes with corresponding superordinate themes

Support	Army life	Personality	Control	Identity
Support	Discipline	Military personality	Control	Identity
Civilian training	Military culture	Personality	Instutionalised	Emotional investment
	Opportunity	Army attitude	Heirarchy	Loss
	Training		Responsibility	Group belonging
	Lifestyle		Sacrifice	Friendship
	Army lifestyle/culture			Camaraderie
	Change			Alone
				Military future

Civilian connection	Perception of the Army	Wellbeing	Civilian Lifestyle
Family	Military failing	Stigma	Civilian Lifestyle
Civvy connections	Romanticised	Welfare	Positive transition
	Pride	Coping	Expectations of leaving the Army

Injustice/treatment/vicitm	Mental Health
Perception of army	Closure
Exclusivity	Psychological wellbeing/needs
Expections of Army life	Memory
	Trauma

18) Appendix K: Master themes with rationale

Support

This encompasses the support the individual received on the run up to, and after leaving the Army. It includes support supplied by the Army, such as resettlement, and support from external institutions, such as combat stress. Also included in the theme is the participants thoughts about the support they received, and their ideas of what would have been beneficial support for them to have had. Family support is also included here, however the Superordinate theme of 'family' is better suited to civilian connections (this will be discussed within that section).

The questions I asked participants were geared around support and the feelings they had about the support they had and the support offered. An interesting observation I made is where individuals who had a positive transition are generally complimentary about the support, but those who struggled think the support is unsatisfactory. However, i think one important thing to note is Alpha's opinion where even though he had a difficult transition and still identifies with the army, he notes that he is not their responsibility, and in any other job you would not expect to receive support, so why should the army be different?

Although this theme is straight forward and felt like it came quite naturally out of the interviews, the one thing making it difficult was the fact that most of the participants left the army a number a years ago, and noted that it had changed since they left, which makes their experience unique to them but not relevant to the way the army supports leavers today. With this in mind, I would have liked to interview some more recent leavers to get their experience of current practice.

Army life

Army life is about what it is like to be in the military, e.g. the type of lifestyle. This includes the military culture and what day to day living looks like. Within this, Army training and discipline is also discussed.

Personality

Personality includes both the traits demonstrated by the individual and traits which appear to be present in most individuals during their time in the army. It suggests a 'get on with it' attitude which is arguably due to the need to react a certain way to the situation they are often put in. This also includes the idea that the army encourages certain traits which individuals find difficult to change/adapt when moving back into civilian life , for example, the need for routine or group socialisation.

This theme I feel will become clearer for me when researching military and personality. I think there is possibly a link between the way the army treats/trains its employees and how the participants react in situations.

Control

There are two elements here; the individual having control (of their life, situations, any decisions which need making), and then the control the individual perceived the army to have due to its hierarchical nature. This also includes the responsibility the individual has, both in the army and in civilian life as a potential measurement for the amount of control they feel they have over things/people.

Identity

Identity refers to; who the participant perceives themselves to be. How they define themselves. Which groups they feel a part of and can relate to, and how this changes through situations and time. On the other hand, this also includes the notion where the individual feels 'alone' or potentially separated from those they identify with.

I feel this is the most important theme to the research. Not only does it form the basis of all of the interviews, it also seems to relate to nearly all of the other themes. With this in mind I am further considering how I can structure my thesis to emphasise its importance.

Civilian connection

This refers to the friendships and connections to civilian life the individual maintains while in the army. This links very closely with identity, in that individuals who can relate to civilian life whilst still in the army are better able to transition when leaving the army behind due to the associations they keep, and the separation from the army.

Perception of the army

The 'perception of army' is how the participant feels about the army. It is to do with their attitudes towards the army as a career, how they felt personally about the army, and what they had expected it to be like. This theme should be discussed alongside 'army lifestyle' and 'control', as it contradicts both.

Wellbeing

The main elements of this theme are to do with mental health and coping. A number of individuals reported experiencing MH issues during or as a result of being in the army, so this theme is constructed around the individual's army experiences which are sometimes traumatic, and their ability to cope with said experiences. Similarly, there was some discussions about basic needs being met and being fulfilled which is important so general welfare.

Civilian lifestyle

This is the individual's perception and experience of civilian life, mostly during the time they are transitioning from the army. It includes expectations both in terms of what they thought it would be like and what others required of them.