

**The Formation of Cultural Capital using Symbolic Military Meanings of Objects and Self  
in an Adult Agricultural Education Program serving Military Veterans**

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## **ABSTRACT (General)**

The United States has been engaged in a number of wars and conflicts throughout the world, including the more recent wars in Iraq and in Afghanistan. Military members returning from wars sometimes come home with not only the physical scars of battle, but many times harboring mental and emotional distress that inhibit their abilities to successfully reintegrate into civilian life. As such, adult agricultural education programs that serve veterans have grown in number to assist these service members as they transition back into the civilian society, face physical and mental challenges, begin a new career in agriculture, and construct new identities. This process is enticing veterans across the country to enter farming educational programs and many of those veterans are reporting transformations in their self-identity and quality of life.

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to investigate how an adult agricultural educational program generates new learning spaces for military veterans. Utilizing Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theories, this study illustrates how military veterans use and make new meanings of military symbols in an agricultural educational context. Findings show that military veterans are employing this adult agricultural education program to transform their cultural identity and re-assign symbolic military meanings of objects and self. They connect with familiar military constructed language, behaviors, and physical symbolism to represent their identity, during and after their service. For them, it is important to be able to express their military identity to civilians and other veterans. It is also, vital for them to participate and express their military identities through symbolic military behaviors. This military symbolism is critical to their ability to socialize with others, acquire a civilian identity, and navigate social mobility. When the use of symbolism is not applied, or is not recognized by civilians, it influences their civilian identity and for some, creates transition challenges and challenges to their connection to civilian population

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## **ABSTRACT (Professional)**

The purpose of this qualitative ethnographic case study was to investigate how an adult agricultural educational program generates new learning spaces for military veterans. Utilizing Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theories this study illustrates how military veterans use and making new meanings of military symbols in an agricultural educational context. After leaving their military service, veterans often discharge with not only the physical scars of battle, but sometimes harboring mental and emotional distress that can prevent their abilities to successfully reintegrate into a civilian setting. For several veterans, adult agricultural programs can provide a vital educational experience to help them address physical and mental challenges, launch a new career in agriculture, and form new civilian identities.

Findings from this research indicate that participants of this study transformation of a civilian identity is positively impacted when familiar symbols of the military are used in the implementation of agriculture education and that these symbols then take on new meanings supporting Blumer (1969) Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Further, mutually beneficial experiences occurred between veterans and community members, allowing for the veteran to build positive connection with civilians and move up in civilian society. This supports the concept of Pierre' Bourdieu (1986) Cultural Capital Theory.

Further, these finding show that military veterans are employing this adult agricultural education program to transform their cultural identity and re-assign symbolic military meanings of objects and self. They connect with familiar military constructed language, behaviors, and physical symbolism to represent their identity, during and after their service. For them, it is important to be able to express their military identity to civilians and other veterans. It is also, vital for them to participate and express their military identities through symbolic military behaviors. This military symbolism is critical to their ability to socialize with others, acquire a civilian identity, and navigate social mobility. When the use of symbolism is not applied, or is not recognized by civilians, it influences their civilian identity and for some, creates transition challenges and challenges to their connection to civilian population.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this dissertation and research to my three daughters! They have not only been my driving force, but offered understanding and patience as I took time away from them to make our dreams a reality. These concepts and ideas in this research are concepts and ideas that we face as a family. Jade, Kylli, and Mia, you have helped me understand the importance of finding a way through such challenges and the process of building resilience.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Rarely, if ever in ordinary life are people required to focus, with such purity, everything in them-mind, emotions, physical strength, perception, and skill- on the present moment with so many others... Euphoria [of war] is addicting and self-sacrifice is transcending; but equilibrium is life-sustaining and reciprocity is the heart of love (Brock & Lettini, 2012, p. 70).

### **Introduction**

Recent reintegration goals have included ways to acclimate returning soldiers back to their home life. This includes easing the symptoms of post-traumatic syndrome disorder (PTSD) and moral injury. Today, this treatment often occurs in government clinical settings with veterans as the patient and loosely focusing on shaping an individual's civilian identity. Treatment often involves little practice on the formation of specific cultural, organizational, and occupational identity, which Ewalt and Ohl (2013) argue is vital to military veterans who have spent years with an identity associated with each of these concepts. Furthermore, critical connections with military comradery and military symbols may serve a significant role and may be unavailable in clinical rehabilitation. Consequently, some veteran patients feel clinical treatment is inadequate for their needs and are turning to other programs where they feel more connected to their peers (SAFC, 2017). Such programs include agricultural education programs. Some veterans indicate they joined this type of program in hopes of overcoming challenges, which often serve as barriers to civilian integration (SAFC, 2017).

Despite ongoing research and developments in the treatment of veterans, adult agricultural programs have yet to be officially identified by our military or some of our government agencies as a potential method to mitigate such symptoms as PTSD and other symptoms associated with military service (Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2015). This lack of acknowledgement affects funding and support allocated to veterans in certain



programs. At the same time, veterans across the country are entering farming programs which claim to assist them and their peers in these above-mentioned areas of trauma, reintegration challenges, and position them in a new career. It is plausible that a transformation in their self-identity and quality of life is taking place. Perhaps the missing element from traditional clinical treatment is the holistic needs of the veteran, to include physical, social, self-fulfillment, and self-worth in addition to psychological focuses.

Therefore, this study explored how military veterans are able to “start over” in agriculture and build cultural capital in a civilian society through adult agricultural education programs. Operation Veteran Farming participants utilized military symbolism to integrate into a civilian community. This study was accomplished by considering Goffman’s (1959, p.4) notion of “total institutions” in order to explain how some military veterans are initially unable to successfully acclimate to the civilian community.

One mechanism that can assist veterans in reducing negative symptoms of reintegration is utilizing situated participation (Moore, 1998). This hands-on approach through peer learning can be applied to military veterans’ agriculture programs. Farming may provide a space for military veterans to participate in situated learning and obtain knowledge through the implementation of tools and practices. They are able to use familiar military associated structures of learning to collaborate and make meaning of the concepts and ideas in the context of farming. Ownership and empowerment is then gained through the veteran farmer’s participation. Self-esteem and self-reliance can be greatly improved through situated learning and situated cognition (Moore, 1998).

Thus, military veterans’ participation and interaction with others in a community, as well as their activity, knowledge, and self-meaning will increase. This increase could lead to

knowledge that can be immediately applied within their own career. Learning will also occur as collective experiences and are not just individually important, but become a socially meaningful activity (Moore, 1998) within the context of farming. Finally, this agricultural education program assist in fostering the veteran ability to satisfy their need to feel secure and develop a sense of purpose. This could help them address psychiatric needs and recover (Maslow, 1943) from some or all of their PTSD symptoms and/or moral injuries obtained through service, ultimately increasing their ability to integrate into civilian community.

## **Background**

It is often argued that that our country is facing challenges in the areas of food security and food diversity (McMichael, 2008). Food production is being moved across oceans to cheaper labor and less strict production laws in the sole interest of making more profit (McMichael, 2008). Therefore, it can also be debated that the diversity of our food choices is being replaced by cheaper products, and is devastating our countries environment and agricultural community where, according to the USDA (2012), the average farmer is now fifty-eight. Generational farms are disappearing due to the high maintenance costs and low profit returns (Veteran Farming, 2015). Meanwhile, wars are being fought over food scarcity and food desserts. In response, local food movements and community development initiatives are beginning to assemble in efforts to bring back local food. Communities are taking a deeper interest in their role within this construct and looking for new ways to build and sustain their communities.

An example can be seen in the Alternative Agrifood Movement (AAM). The AAM encompasses initiatives with diverse emphases, including sustainable agriculture, economic development, social and food justice, and food security (Constance et al., 2014). Their focus is on communities and community food systems. This is done through concentrating on seven

distinct issues including developing sustainable agriculture, preserving and expanding agricultural knowledge, improving community resources, creating and/or improving policies and movement for farmers, working with the Youth Network Fund, and establishing alternative markets such as Green Markets throughout the Isaan region (Constance et al., 2014). This same model is transferable to other community food systems and can be used to create food justice and security, if interest can be obtained.

Simultaneously, military veterans are returning or settling into their rural homes and are seeking to move into agriculture as a career opportunity and to re-acclimate to the civilian world. These veterans bring with them unique social, financial, and human capital; traits that combine well with the demands of agriculture and community building. In turn, this can bring food security to the nation. However, some veterans also bring with them scars of fighting in this nation's longest wars. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have resulted in more than 6,500 deaths and 50,000 wounded in action, with 118,000 of these veterans receiving a diagnosis of PTSD after returning from deployment (Fischer, 2014). At the very least, fighting in these simultaneous combat operations has resulted in service members serving on multiple extended deployments, which often disconnects them from family and friends.

The connection between agriculture and the military is considered to be a "deep historical heritage" (Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2018). Both professions have often been described as two of the most honorable, oldest, and most dangerous occupations (Samaras, 2012; Snyman, 2005). Each are strongly "mission oriented, and the success of both requires significant skill and strategic planning" (Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2018, p. 5). Veterans often left their rural homes to serve in various wars and then returned home to serve their communities through food production, during peacetime

(Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2018). Therefore, it may not be surprising that these two professions share much in common including their symbolism and language.

These shared symbols and languages may make transitioning to a civilian community easier.

The shift from military to civilian life, under the best circumstances, can be challenging and not always successfully navigated (Hassan & Flynn, 2012). For some, their years of service in the military has left them with feelings of detachment to the civilian population. Some veterans return home and no longer feel they have a connection with their friends and loved ones and often end up isolated (Castro, 2014). They also feel like they do not fit in to civilian communities. Periodically, civilian community members notice the veteran's feelings or share these sentiments of not fitting in and treat veterans as outcasts. Therefore, it is critical to consider how a veteran is able to move into a civilian identity when discussing veterans' ability to heal and become part of a community outside of the military. Castro (2014) highlights how transition plays a crucial role in mental health, making it imperative that veterans are able to integrate into a civilian community as well as their future careers. If the process is not successful, it may be possible that these veterans will experience additional stress or mental challenges.

Stykes (1958) argues that confinement and isolation together, with an abrupt minimal access to material possessions and sexual contact, degrades a person's sense of what they have previously learned to be human. This contributes to a variety of emotional consequences to include: anxiety, depression, severe anger, various phobic reactions, hallucinations, and lowered self-esteem, which threatens one's sense of individuality, autonomy, personal safety, and security (Brodsky & Scogin 1988; Grassian, 1983; Grassian & Friedman 1986; Scott & Gendreau, 1969). Given these mental health challenges, military mental health programs and

support services are central to easing symptoms and restoring the human potential of our veterans (Castro, 2014).

For some, current treatments are not enough and may actually cause adverse effects. Wood (2016) discusses two widely used therapies, which are cognitive processing therapy and prolonged exposure. Wood (2016) reiterates (as also reported by the American Medical Association in 2015) between one-third and one half of veterans receiving this type of therapy still reported symptoms after the completion of their treatment and conveyed no significant change in their PTSD symptoms. This statistic highlights the need for additional social therapy and involvement therapy, situated in a purpose. Examples of this purpose can be observed through the participation of food productivity, such as farming.

Military veterans that discharged from what Goffman (1959, p 4) describes as “total institutions” need an avenue to build upon their pre-existing community capitals. Working in conjunction with each other, social, financial, symbolic, and human capital as well as creating civilian culture capital can transform a veteran’s identity from that of a military member to that of a civilian within a civilian society. The total institution effects can be broken down slowly and consequences such as anxiety, anger, low self-esteem, and threats to individuality can be improved. A soldier can begin to feel safe and take charge of their own goals and future. Adult agricultural education programs designed for veterans can be part of the solution. These programs may provide familiar symbolic meaning that when transformed from military to agriculture service, can provide a smooth transition into farming. Resilience is often embedded in the objectives of these agricultural education programs and validate the connection between nature, human health, and resilience, especially in the face of mental and physical challenges (Tidball et al., 2010; Fusaro, 2010). Providing a social space for such programs may not only

benefit the military service members' mental well-being, it can assist the physically disabled populations of veterans with integrating back into society, teaching them new or rerouted skills, providing them a renewed sense of purpose, and self-appreciation (Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2015; Elings & Hassink, 2008).

Investigating the ways in which veterans use symbols of self and objects to identify themselves in a civilian culture as well as to interact and connect with others in an agricultural education program may help future programs design their environment and curriculum effectively. Symbol usage can improve learning and transition into the civilian world.

### **Problem Statement**

Military veteran participation in agriculture is beginning to grow (USDA, 2014). However, adult agricultural education programs designed specifically for military veterans is an unexplored area of study. Ewalt and Ohl (2013) argue that cultural, organizational, and occupational identity are critical to military veterans who have spent many years with a developed identity tied to each. Critical connections with military comradery and symbols of the military may serve an important role (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013) for educational success. With that being said, in order to facilitate the generation of cultural capital it is critical that these adult agricultural education programs are studied through the lens of Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactional Theories to understand the significance of these symbols and how they play a role in the process of veterans integrating into civilian spaces and creating civilian identities.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore how an adult agricultural education program designed for military veterans contributes to the formation of veterans' cultural capital and human development, such as overcoming PTSD and moral injury symptoms. The goal was to

identify critical reinterpretations of objects and self in verbal and non-verbal communications among veterans and their influence on socialization, group interactions, and concepts of self that can be later applied to a civilian culture, creating opportunities for social mobility.

### **Research Questions**

The following question guided the research:

What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veterans' cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?

Below are the operational questions:

- 1) How does this peer group of military veterans socialize within the adult agricultural education program?
- 2) How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an adult agricultural education program?
- 3) Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?

### **Clarifying Terms**

A number of key terms and concepts were important for this research. Below, I provide definitions of important terms and how they will be utilized in this particular research. These definitions of terms were used as a basis for the research questions and used throughout this dissertation.

To begin, **total institution** is defined by Goffman (1959) as a large group of people that are essentially cut off from the rest of society for long periods of time. This group develops their own cultural norms. It can be argued that his definition fits the military's society. Once military members leave the military, they are considered a veteran. A military **veteran** is defined as any person who served for any length of time in any military service branch (VA, 2015). There are

different kinds of veterans. This study will utilize the **combat veteran** definition given by the US Department of Veteran Affairs (n.d.) for eligibility purposes; however, for the purpose of this study the time in service for eligibility will not be utilized. This is because, this study is not for veteran health care eligibility. A combat veteran includes veterans who served on active duty in a theater of combat operations.

A considerable amount of this research focuses on how veterans transition into their community. **Community**, as described by Wilkerson (1991), includes three elements that include first, place; second, regular social interactions such as social organizations and third, social interaction on common interest. Green & Haines (2012) elaborate by providing examples of community of both place based (schools and road issues) and as common interest (religious belief, race, ethnicity). Important to community is community education. **Community Education** can be described as an expansive area of education that is based on principles and practices of lifelong learning, inclusion, collaboration, and use of multiple disciplines and resources to educate the community (Green & Haines, 2012).

To acclimate to civilian communities, it is vital that veterans recognize or build their resilience. **Resilience** refers to positive adaptation and is commonly regarded as a quality of character, personality, and coping ability (Agaibi, 2003). Though resilience and coping are related, they do not share the same definition. **Coping** indicates the action taken to deal with life's varied complications (Lazarus, Folkman, & Stress, 1984; Moos, Schaefer, 1993; Sharkansky, King, King, Wolfe, Erickson, & Stoke; Wolfe, Keane, Kaloupek, Mora, Wine, & 1993). When neither is achieved, symptoms of PTSD and moral injury can affect a veteran's transition. **PTSD** is a disorder that cultivates in some people that have experienced or witnessed a dreadful, frightening, or threatening event (PTSD, 2014). **Moral injury** is defined as the harm



done to one's conscience or “moral compass” after they are involved in, witnesses to, or fails to prevent certain acts that do not agree with their morals and/or ethics (Litz et al., 2009).

**Transition** can be defined as a process of adapting to change. Schlossberg (2011) describes different types of adult transitions, including anticipated changes, unanticipated changes, and nonevents, when something that was supposed to happen didn't occur. Whether change was planned or not, there is a period of adapting to a new reality, and depending on the degree of changes, they can be completely life-changing. When transition does not successfully occur, therapeutic interventions, such as adult agricultural education programs may be part of the answer. **Therapeutic process** can be defined as the interactive and/or internal process that provides a “corrective emotional experience” (Yalom & Leszcz, 2005, p.27). This process can occur in a variety of situations and by different means, but correction or healing takes place over a period of time or in stages. An **adult agricultural education program** can be described as any program that teaches or instructs on agriculture related areas of work. Beginning farmers utilize this type of instruction to learn skillsets critical their farming success.

### **Limitations of Study**

As the primary instrument for data collection, this program's culture was studied, and analyzed through the lens of the researcher. Perceptions can play a role in this type of naturalistic qualitative research. Everyone views their world differently, and this includes researchers, scientists, and reviewers. This is inherent in qualitative research and was a part of the analysis and thus, was made transparent. Although it can be an asset, there is also an element of limitation through my own experience and involvement with the research. As a veteran who farms and works to promote the importance and benefits of veterans farming, I am connected to the topic of veterans in farming. The intent was not to achieve total bracketing, but to make

apparent my connection to this project in my discussion.

This study was limited by the number of veterans that participated in the agricultural education program within this study. Many veterans with PTSD and other ailments may have been reluctant to provide information for research purposes. This sensitive population has been trained by the military to keep to their team and not to provide information to people outside that team. I combated this by building trust with the participants and creating relationships with those involved in the program.

I knew subjects might behave differently when they knew they were being observed (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991). It was up to the individual if they participated in the research study. The nature of a dissertation and most human research requires IRB approval. The participants needed to read and sign consent forms informing them that they were part of a human subject research project. Once participants knew they were being observed and monitored, they were more likely to behave in different ways than they normally do, which could result in the creation of the Hawthorne effect (Adair, 1984). Meaning that the participants could assume the reason for which they were being observed and would act in the ways to which they thought they should. This included working together and using military language. This had the potential to impact some of the findings. There was no way to completely eliminate this effect; however, I engaged the participants at a minimum while they were participating in the program. Elongated observation lessened the acknowledgment of my presence and allowed a more natural observation and fuller data collection.

Time was a critical limitation. This study would have benefited from a longer research duration. Participants were observed for four consecutive months. Yet, the program is a twelve-month program. Additional time observing the program could have led to additional information

and data to analyze. However, due to the time allotted for graduate students and the money available to complete this research, time was limited to a four-month study.

### **Significance of the Problem**

Military veteran opportunities are increasing in agriculture (USDA, 2014). While this may be viewed as a benefit to veterans and agriculture, it also opens the doors for misguided and/or ill-advised programs that are not fully designed to help veterans. As a large number of veterans are leaving the military with a variety of challenges, many are considering or working in agriculture. This study illustrates veterans in this program are feeling a strong connection to military symbolism of self and objects that are aiding their process of participating in an adult agricultural education program and building cultural capital in civilian communities. Which, according to my research, aids in the transformation to civilian societies.

This study illustrates the unique struggles veterans face. The unique struggles that practitioners will need to consider when they design an agriculture curriculum that involves veterans. It will be imperative to understand the role of a community and community education in creating, not only a new identity for military veterans, but as part of the holistic picture of community development within civilian society. Communities can develop a semiotic relationship with veterans leaving the military and the practitioner should be a part of building that relationship. If possible, programs should consult and even work with local Extension and land-grant universities to establish best practices. A practitioner should attempt to create authentic activities and settings so that real world knowledge can be obtained without a full commitment (Brown et al., 1989; Brown & Duguid, 1991). These authentic activities should also cultivate social interaction, and collaboration (Clancey, 1995).

Additionally, this study can be used to understand how cultural capital is formed through the use of symbolism. Military veterans make unique meaning of these symbols and often form new or modified behaviors while interacting within an agricultural program. Studying programs that specifically serve veterans may help to foster funding and develop policies around military veterans in agriculture. It can show how these programs are beneficial to the veteran's ability to adjust to a civilian community. While there are a limited number of studies being conducted on veterans in farming programs, none have specifically researched the symbols or cultural capital building that accompany this process.

Finally, the implications of this study could be used to inform similar future research projects on methodology for veteran programs, as well as to create a framework to follow. The use of ethnographic case study methodology can be replicated to better understand the particular case of interest. This can create positive outcomes for the program director and stakeholders attached to this program in the form of feedback.

### **Reflexivity Statement**

Reflexivity is defined as the “process of reflecting critically on the self as a researcher” (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011, p. 115). The following statement is meant as a way of providing transparency, detailing how my experience and background influenced this study. This influence is intrinsic in research and specifically in qualitative research. I do not intend to completely detach from my connection with this study. Instead, I intend to make clear my association with the research.

As a military combat veteran, I have experienced many shared experiences with these participants. After my service, I was challenged by my own transition process. My inability to find a purpose and feel connected to a civilian world contributed to my incapability to find a new

mission. As a single mother, I wanted to be an example of a resilient female for my three daughters. With that in mind, I sought a solution in the form of education. Education was another challenge for myself. I was a first-generation college student, missing such cultural capital. This was a struggle for many years. After this research, I am able to see the importance of that cultural capital in education and within the civilian communities. I hope to provide it for my three daughters and relay such methods with other military veterans.

Another reason I chose to complete this work, was the need to assist my fellow veterans and their families. I joined the military for a few reasons. First, I grew up in a low-income family. I wanted to find a way to provide for myself and create capital. The second reason I joined the military was to earn money to attend college. I received many scholarships; however, they were not enough to attend and did not want to put that burden on my family. Finally, I joined the military to serve my country and be a part of providing a safe and free world for my children and future generations. This service is a part of me and I continue to find ways to help peer veterans, military members, their families, and the communities for which they live.

My main reason for choosing to undertake this specific research topic that includes military veterans in a farming program was because of my own experiences. I am a military veteran who benefits from agriculture. I was diagnosed with anxiety and PTSD after discharging from the Army. After tours in both Afghanistan and Iraq, I suffered from symptoms associated with PTSD and traumatic brain injury and was not able to effectively transition or connect with the civilian world. During my undergraduate studies, I worked in the soil science research plots on North Carolina Agriculture and Technical (NCAT) University's farm. Just before my undergraduate graduation, I obtained a position under the Animal Science expert in NCAT University's Cooperative Extension, studying meat goats. My time spent on the farm soon

became considerably more than just education and the work of creating sustainable agriculture. I began to feel a reconnection to life. It was only after reading and researching for this research project, that I learned I am also suffering from moral injuries sustained during war. I was not aware of educational programs that could assist me. I would have benefited from such an adult agricultural education program. I felt an obligation to my fellow military veteran peers to research this topic and present it to the world.

Therefore, writing this dissertation is both professional and personal. As a veteran in agriculture with PTSD and moral injuries, I am able to highlight my personal experiences. As a researcher, I was able to connect this phenomenon through other studies and theories within social and psychological research. As such, this ethnographic case study was completed to collect an in-depth account of this process.

## CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

### Introduction

Veterans are faced with an array of complications after being discharged from the military. Internal locus of control can be overrun by learned external locus of control and contribute to their ability to adjust to civilian life. Rotter (2006) initiated the idea of a locus of control in the 1950s. It is a self-held belief regarding how much power one has over their own life and the events that occur in it. This concept can help explain behavior. Veterans shift from a very fast paced, team oriented, categorized, top down life style to an often-slower paced, self-reliant setting. The need for veteran reintroduction is complicated by the growing number of veterans returning to their homes with moral injury and post-traumatic stress symptoms. Consequently, Resnik and Allen (2007) argue, many veterans are dispositioned to experience poor reintegration to a civilian community after discharging.

Engaging military veterans in an adult agricultural education program which uses military symbols of self and objects, could assist veterans in the participation of these programs, and also guide the reformation of their identity and re-acclimation into a civilian community. It was imperative for this study to first review challenges for veterans after they have been discharged and then to explore how participating in an adult agricultural education program with other veterans using familiar symbolism, language, and similar identities played a role in increasing confidence and fostering the building of community capital. Reciprocally, this lends to an easier formation of a civilian identity within a community.

Veterans bring with them select social, financial, and human capital, which mesh well with the demands of agriculture and needs within a community. Despite many veterans having exceptional areas of community capital, they (as all farmers) will need continued support.

Assistance and mentoring to sustain a farm, guidance on facing issues, and education of programs which exist to help veterans, are necessary pieces of information that need to be provided to future veteran farmers. In a recent study, Besterman-Dahan, Chavez, Bendixsen, and Dillahunt-Aspillaga (2016) revealed that 78 % of veterans who farm were not current students. These veterans may not wish to return to or begin formal education. This may imply an increased need for non-formal learning opportunities to learn farming skills.

Several entities are beginning to develop community-based programs to introduce veterans to agriculture and respond to local food needs. Private organizations have provided much of this support and government backing is beginning to grow. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) is a supporter of beginning veteran farmers. They view veterans as a central part of the food security strategy; however, no funds are currently allotted for training under the GI Bill. Congress passed the 2014 Farm Bill and tailored a separate section for veterans, providing them unique access to loans and support (USDA, 2014). With these new tailored initiatives, it is likely that more veterans will become involved in agriculture. It will become vital that these local adult agricultural education programs are meeting their needs. A well-run program that incorporates its' community, and the veteran can provide opportunities for partnerships between private and public sectors. This collaboration has the capability to assist with reintegration to benefit veterans, their families, and the community (Sayer, Carlson & Frazier, 2014), leading to future GI Bill funds for such programs. Examples of veteran priority in the United States Department of Agriculture - National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA-NIFA) grants include, BFRDP and ArgAbility.



## **Reintegration**

**Veteran reintegration and rehabilitation programs.** The military trains its recruits for months. The exact time of training depends on their assignment. During this time, new military members are adapted to the military. Quickly, they learn the jargon and social conduct. The bottom line is for military members to follow discipline, support, and accomplish the mission. When trust and confidence are weak, the mission suffers (Redmond et al., 2015). Therefore, functional and ceremonial acts of discipline are deeply embedded into military culture (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006) and combat operations (Redmond et al., 2015). Social and cultural capital are immediately built. Those who are unable to adhere to this newly formed capital are forced out in a variety of ways, to include retirement, honorable discharge, other than honorable discharge, or dishonorable discharge. For those who endure, cohesion is defined, and reinforced daily throughout a service member's military career.

A service member must transition after they return to their family and friends after combat and then again once they leave their military service. When a service member returns from combat they are debriefed. The reintegration process consists of short lectures on how "not to go crazy". At the end of service, again service members partake in a mandatory reintegration seminar. This short de-brief often only lasts a few days and is designed to serve as training on how to return to civilian life. Despite these efforts, roughly 44% of veterans reported a difficulty readjusting to life after the military (Military Medicine, 2014).

A quick search on the internet shows there are hundreds of programs claiming to assist veterans and their reintegration into a civilian community. Government programs, such as those offered by Veterans Affairs, as well as privately run programs, offer reintegration services to

veterans in a variety of settings including formal, clinical, and peer groups (Wood, 2016). Some of these such programs will be covered later.

**Reintegration challenges.** Reintegration challenges are widespread for veterans. For the military member, the transition from military service to civilian life does not involve simply changing occupations. It is a change in lifestyle, including: networks, surroundings, safety, responsibilities, households, communities, friendships, finances, healthcare, training, and support. This abrupt shift is for some, a happy experience, but for many others, is a time of anxiety, struggle, and uncertainty making reintegration into a civilian life problematic.

Numerous studies (Cascardi & Vivian, 1995; Gelles & Cornell, 1985; Riggs, Caulfield, & Street, 2000; Seltzer & Kalmuss, 1988; Strauss, 1990) have found that military members returning from deployments experience stress brought on by economic pressures, chronic debt, and lack of income. Increases in these stressors also elevate the likelihood of social violence. Other studies convey that there is a suggestive association between continued exposure to violence and intensive combat exposure to post-military antisocial behavior (McFall et al., 1999; Resnick et al., 1989; Yager et al., 1984; Yesavage, 1983). In a recent study, Tanielian and Jaycox (2008) stated that 31% of today's veterans are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Wood (2016) discusses current treatment and how data show that adverse effects may persist. "People...lost it, gone crazy in exposure treatment for some trauma" (p. 258) supporting the need for alternative programs that do not expose memories of past experiences. Moreover, it is estimated that at least 60 % of current military personnel experiencing mental health problems do not seek professional help (Sharp et al., 2015). The national suicide rate among veterans under the age of thirty rose 26 %t between 2005 and 2007 (Brock & Lettini, 2012). Despite

required and improved mental health screenings for veterans leaving the military, more in-depth research on PTSD, and redesigned clinical methods for treating PTSD, suicide rates continue to grow (Brock & Lettini, 2012).

Additionally, U.S. civilians have limited confidence that veterans are able to successfully reintegrate into their civilian community (Leventman, 1978; Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; Waller, 1944; Wecter, 1944). This view is often voiced by civilians and can reduce trust and bonding motivation for the veteran. Preconceived ideas of veterans and PTSD are widespread. These civilian perceptions often exacerbate mental illness and seclude some veterans, further prolonging successful reintegration (Wood, 2016) and the creation of cultural capital within civilian communities.

**Resilience.** As the slogan “22” depicts, many military service members and veterans’ resilience is low. These individuals are unable to cope with the transition and stress leading to between 20 and 22 veterans committing or attempting to commit suicide daily (Shane & Kime, 2016). The issue has become such a concern that Congress insisted the military act immediately. As such, the military researched and embraced the concept of resilience in 2008 (Simmons & Yoder, 2013). Although curbing suicide rates was the catalyst, resilience training, and recognition was subsequently found to help prevent the development of mental health disorders, thus reducing health care cost (Vyas, Fesperman, Nebeker, Gerard, Boyd, Delaney, Webb-Murphy, & Johnston, 2016).

With budget cuts, the military adapted resilience training as an effective way to decrease the costs connected with suicide, treatment cost for PTSD and depression, which totaled nearly \$3.1 billion annually (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). The National Comorbidity Survey found that treatment for these conditions can last thirty-six to sixty-four months and veterans still reported

lingering symptoms lasting ten years after the event (Kessler et al, 1995). Not surprisingly, and perhaps due to other stressors, veterans had lower resilience scores than active duty service members (Rice & Lui, 2016). Meaning veterans may be more susceptible to stress and mental health challenges, because of factors such as transitions, and seeking employment. The assumption can be made that veterans may need additional resilience building resources after leaving their military service and entering the civilian world.

Multiple research studies have concluded that not all people react to traumatic experiences in the same way. Some veterans recover and enter civilian communities successfully, while others develop PTSD and other mental challenges, and even attempt or successfully commit suicide. In fact, there are extensive studies that show how veterans cope with traumatic experiences (Bonnano, 2004; Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Drozdek, 2004; Friedman & Lindy, 2001; Wilson & Raphael, 1993; Zeidner & Endler, 1996). To begin to understand the phenomena of resilience, it is first significant to incorporate the concept of coping.

Coping indicates the action taken to deal with life's varied complications (Lazarus, Folkman, & Stress, 1984; Moos, Schaefer, 1993; Sharkansky, King, King, Wolfe, Erickson, & Stoke, 2000; Wolfe, Keane, Kaloupek, Mora, & Wine, 1993). It encompasses the ability to constantly change cognitive and “behavioral efforts to manage specific external and or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (Lazarus, Folkman, & Stress, 1984, p. 141). Coping techniques can occur in positive or negative ways (Rice & Liu, 2015). A positive result would indicate successful adaption, while negative results would refer to PTSD or other mental challenges (Rice & Liu, 2015).

Resilience refers to positive adaptation and is commonly perceived as a quality of character, personality, and coping ability (Agaibi, 2003). It is regarded as a good trait that is

sought by individuals including veterans. Resilience implies a strength and flexibility that leads to “normal” functioning after stressful challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rihardson, 2002) such as transitioning back to a civilian community. It is what the military hopes their troops will adapt to, saving them money on treatment, lost soldiers, and retraining of new soldiers (Green, Calhoun, & Dennis, 2010).

Many similar definitions for resilience exist. Bonanno (2004) defined resilience as the aptitude to preserve a state of normal equilibrium in the face of distress. Wilson and Drozdeck, (2004) define it as the health recovery from extreme stress and trauma. Agaibi and Wilson (2005) define resilience as a multifaceted phenomenon that is characterized by its the ability to cope in extreme stress and trauma. In other widely used definitions, resilience suggests the ability to overcome extraordinarily stressful events such as: trauma, death, economic loss, disaster, political upheaval, and cultural change to maintain a state of mental health by mobilizing resources (Bonano, 2004; Harel, Kahana, & Kahana, 1993; Harel, Kahana & Wilson, 1993; Wilson, 2004; Wilson & Drozdek, 2004; Yehuda, 1998). Regardless of the exact chosen definition, resilience most basically means the ability to adjust and cope successfully despite hostile or challenging situations. Resilience building is worth the increased demands, higher costs and/or risks of study because the result could lead to sustained competence (Wilson & Drozdeck, 2004).

Resiliency research is becoming increasingly important. Recent studies on resiliency indicate that it has the ability to guard against the onset of PTSD, (Pietrzak et al., 2010) depression, (Pietrzak et al., 2009) anxiety and fear (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2013), alcohol use (Lee, Sudom, & Zamorski, 2013), behavior and acclimation and adjustment disorders (Reivich, Seligman, & McBride, 2013), suicide (Simmons & Yoder, 2013), and general health

(Green, Calhoun, & Dennis, 2010) challenges. These are particularly relevant to those who served in high combat zones (Green, Calhoun, & Dennis, 2010; Lee, Sudom, & Zamorski, 2013) and need strong and healthy resiliency.

Richardson (2002) proposes that resiliency can be classified in three ways; first, it identifies the unique characteristics of persons who cope well in the face of adversity; second, it identifies the processes by which resilience is attained through developmental and life experiences; and lastly, it identifies the cognitive mechanisms that govern resilient adaptations. Research on resiliency has identified crucial factors that are thought to effect a person's resilience, to include: genetics, neurobiological factors, childhood development, type of trauma or stressful event, personality characteristics, cognitive style, prior history of exposure to stressful events, gender, age, capacity for affect regulation, social support, and ego (Agaibi, 2003; Fredrickson, 2002; Schore, 2003; Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingham, Krystal, & Charney, 2004; Wilson, 1995; Zeidner & Endler, 1996; Zuckerman, 1999). Understanding the implications this implies, helps the direction of future research and future development of resilient focused programs.

Ahmed (2007) distinguishes vulnerability and factors that contribute to resilience. He recognizes that there are internal and external factors that lead to a veteran either demonstrating resilience or vulnerability to stress. Internal factors such as a low sense of safety, social support, preexisting psychological history, exposure, and internalization of a traumatic event as well as, biological factors including high trait neuroticism create an atmosphere for negative resilience or vulnerability. Such an atmosphere leads to the development of PTSD, other mental challenges, and inability to acclimate to a civilian community. External factors such as previous traumatic

events, severity or length of prolonged trauma, immigrant status, and level of education may lead to a person being more vulnerable to trauma (Ahmed, 2007).

Equally important are the factors Ahmed (2007) distinguishes as promoting resilience to a traumatic event and ability to acclimate to a civilian population. Once again, Ahmed (2007) categorizes them as internal and external characteristics. Some internal characteristics that lead to resilience include: higher self-esteem, trust, ability to be resourceful, self-efficacy, internal locus of control, secure peer, and family attachments, optimist outlook, high level of skills (both social and work related) and a good sense of humor. Finally, he describes how external factors such as safety, religion or group affiliation, strong role models, and a sense of belonging can lead to a strong resilience to trauma or stress (Ahmed, 2007).

Many factors can contribute to the level of resilience within a veteran. Davidson et al., (1985) claim PTSD is more likely to emerge in people with parents or first-degree relatives who have experienced mental health issues. Charney (2004) explored brain structure in relation to a person's resilience and investigated how neural pathways, particularly the ones that support fear and memory, contribute to resilience or vulnerability. Charney (2004) suggests that there is a link between resilient individuals and their ability to cease traumatic memories by fusing emotional memories. McNally (2006) researched how hypo-responsive prefrontal cortex and hyper-responsive amygdala work to heighten PTSD. The amygdala provides a role in the processing and storage of memory of events (McNally, 2006). It has also been proposed that chronic or elevated pain is interconnected with PTSD. Geraciotti et al., (2006) implies that chronic pain is associated with PTSD through his studies on the pain transmitting neuropeptide substance P, which showed an elevated amount in people with PTSD.

New data shows that people who suffer from PTSD have certain neurobiological dysfunctions. The D2 dopamine receptor (DRD2) gene is linked with chronic comorbid psychopathology (anxiety, insomnia, social dysfunction, somatic concerns, and depression) in people with PTSD (Lawford et al., 2006). This may aid counselors, doctors, and researchers in grasping why PTSD is often linked with insomnia and other ailments. In all animals, the release of adrenaline in distressing or life-threatening situations is typical and often used to save lives. On the one hand, for reasons not completely known, this adrenaline may become unhampered in those with PTSD, leading to hypervigilance, anxiety, and interfering memories (Southwick et al., 1999). On the other hand, those that encompass resilience may only release adrenaline in needed stressful situations (Morgan et al., 2000).

Along the same lines, Corticotrophin-releasing hormone (CRH) and cortisol are important moderators of stress (Morgan et al., 2000). CRH is sent from the hypothalamus into the hypothalamic-pituitary circulation in stressful conditions, causing the introduction of the hypothalamic pituitary axis and ensuing secretion of cortisol from the adrenal glands (Charney, 2004). Thus, the capability to limit CRH is understood to be interconnected with resilience (Charney, 2004). Adversely, increased levels of CRH in the cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) have been correlated with the progress of PTSD (Bremner et al., 1997). Due to research that suggested that cortisol receptors are more sensitive in people with PTSD, (Yehuda et al., 1995) a pilot study giving low-dose (10 mg/day) cortisol was dispensed and it was anticipated that the low dosage of cortisol would help reduce the abnormal intensified traumatic memories in people with chronic PTSD (Aerni et al., 2004). The results specified that low-doses of cortisol reduce the central indicators of the disorder (Aerni et al., 2004).



Psychosocial factors can be a chief contributor to vulnerability. According to Ahmed (2007) psychosocial factors include: the nature of the trauma, the perception that one's life is at risk, strong initial emotional reaction, witnessing someone being killed or seriously injured, low socio-economic status, being divorced or widowed, and being unemployed. Lack of positive coping and a defensive response may also lead to the development of PTSD (Hobfoll et al, 2006). Additionally, a lack of internal locus of control may contribute to the development of PTSD. Other external factors such as the lack of political, social, cultural, and financial capital can also increase susceptibility. Those securely attached to other individuals exhibit fewer symptoms of PTSD (Fraley et al, 2006). Avoidance of reality, culture, and social gatherings show increased symptoms of PTSD (Scarpa et al., 2006).

Vulnerability, resilience, and coping can be considered a temporary state or trait, and can be improved in certain environments such as interventions (Lee, Sudom, & Zamorski, 2013; Vyas et al., 2016). Creating or supporting programs that consider these traits and needs is useful to susceptible veterans who need encouragement to generate resilience. Vyas et al., (2016) suggest programs that incite a return to normality which include emotional and social support. Participation in creative activity programming that urges social support can cultivate better social skills and acclimation into a society, building resilience (Vyas et al., 2016). Research has also shown that a critical part of mental health rehabilitation is peer support. Peer support often includes others who have undergone similar mental illnesses (Davidson et al., 1999; Dixon, Krauss, & Lehman, 1994). Group therapy can also provide a space where individuals can recognize their capability to self-heal, leading to greater autonomy, and self-interest (Foa et al., 1995).

## **Resilience Building Programs**

To define a route to building resilience, alleviating PTSD symptoms among other mental disorders, and aid in transforming into the civilian world, programs across the country are offering services (SAFC, 2017). These programs range in experience, goals, focus, location, length of stay, cost, services provided, and eligibility. Each are unique, some assert the ability to ease the suffering caused by traumatic events. In some of the program designs, therapy is incorporated to build resilience and help civilians acclimate to civilian culture. Some clearly state resilience training in their mission statement or on their website. Other programs do not specifically mention resiliency however, do conduct transition training and/or PTSD treatment to transition into communities. Both components incorporate the critical piece of resiliency. Further discussion of these programs will occur in order to get a sense of what kind of resilience training programs are available. These specific programs were chosen, though not exclusive, to show the diversity of programs available to veterans.

**The Refuge.** The Refuge considers themselves a healing placed program. Program duration can be a one month to one year and is a residential (live in) treatment program that specializes in PTSD, trauma, depression, substance abuse, and process addictions (The Refuge, 2017). The Refuge believes that these challenges are treatable, claiming that remission can occur with proper treatment. This particular program focuses on physical, spiritual, and emotional healing. Here, emphasis is placed on the individual using a “combination of addiction treatment cognitive behavioral therapy, 12 step recovery, and holistic modalities and approaches” (The Refuge, 2017, p.1). They pride themselves on trained staff to patient education, group and individual counseling, behavior management and peer support as ways to “productive lifestyle”, and recovery. The goal is to center a veteran’s treatment on the nervous system through nature

exposure and intervention. It is in this natural environment that clients can process the trauma and strengthen their coping strategies.

At The Refuge, clients participate in group or individual therapy sessions, meditation, yoga, 12 step based meetings, and outdoor activities (The Refuge, 2017). Many staff members of this program have successfully recovered from all kinds of trauma or PTSD, themselves. They advertise their rehab facility as a family that strives to replace the negative experiences with positive experiences. They do this by re-establishing positive relationships and the joy that life holds (The Refuge, 2017). Therapists at their treatment center first build trust with participants, create a safe environment, involve their family, and do not pass judgment as ways to connect with veterans and find ways to help them move forward (The Refuge, 2017).

The Refuge is located in Ocala National Forest in Florida. This facility is housed on 94 acres of “secluded and tranquil” land (The Refuge, 2017). Using the environment, they approach treatment as a holistic venture. This includes a therapeutic co-ed environment that utilizes a camp like experience such as: cabin living, swimming, volleyball court, obstacle courses, hiking, a meditation trail, a basketball court, and a fishing dock for fishing (The Refuge, 2017).

This program is not free to veterans and there is a large associated cost. Participants are expected to pay for the amenities before arriving at the site. According to their site, most insurance plans will not pay for client’s entire treatment. To be eligible for this education program, participants must be 18 or older, suffering from clinical symptoms of a substance use disorder, suffering from clinical symptoms of a mental health disorder, be considered to have appropriate medical history and self-preservation ability, as approved by The Refuge’s physician, possess the ability to recognize danger or threat to personal safety, must be willing to reside in a safe, sober, and supportive environment, must demonstrate a willingness and ability to

maintain abstinence from a variety of drugs throughout the course of treatment, and must be able to pay for services (The Refuge, 2017).

**UCLA's Nathanson Family Resilience Center.** This program in cooperation with Major League Baseball Charities, the Robert R. McCormick Foundation and the Welcome Back Veterans Initiative awards grants to veterans and their families. This allows them to participate in a program designed to build resilience. They also provide services and conduct training sessions or workshops to build new skills and capacities among veterans, while decreasing the negative effects of deployment among Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans and their families (Nathanson Family Resilience center, 2017).

Dr. Patricia Lester, Nathanson Family Professor of Psychiatry at the UCLA Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior and director of the Nathanson Center's goal is to provide veterans and their families "the best possible mental health care services, supported by the latest research, to strengthen their ability to cope with the separations, reintegration and traumatic events" (Nathanson Family Resilience center, 2017). Due to this, the Nathanson Center now partners with the U.S. military to provide resilience training in evidence-informed programs.

These programs purpose is to build on strengths and reduce stress through communication, problem-solving skills, and proactive approaches that include learning how to identify and cope with emotional "triggers" (Nathanson Family Resilience Center, 2017). This program is offered both in person and through web-based seminars. It helps identify individual and family strengths and challenges, helps manage and discuss emotions, talks about difficult subjects, clarify misunderstandings, respect individual points of view, improve family

communication, gain practical skills to manage family transitions, and work to solve problems together (Nathanson Family Resilience Center, 2017).

Nathanson Family Resilience Center (2017) declares it's programming is unique in that it is not a mental health program, but rather a system to stimulate the body's natural resiliency for health. The program's success is based on its' individualized nutritional protocols and its' one-on-one emotional desensitization sessions. The resiliency program approach has proven to be effective even when traditional therapies have failed (Nathanson Family Resilience Center, 2017).

The resiliency program was developed and is directed by Dr. Steven Zodikoy. This resiliency training program is currently operating in five states to include; New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, Mississippi, and Pennsylvania. However, Dr. Zodikoy assures veterans who wish to receive treatment in other areas can be accommodated by regionally located physicians. This program is not run by veterans, but by trained clinicians, M.D.'s and Ph.D.'s. To be eligible for this training program, participants must send proof of military service during OEF/OIF. Once accepted by the reliance program, participation is free of charge, as long as funding is available.

**HeartMath.** This resilience training program integrates research-based self-regulation techniques that reduce symptoms of operational stress and endorse sustained resilience. HeartMath claims to improve mental and physical performance, focus and enhanced decision-making in adverse environments, heightened situational awareness, and reduction in the physical, mental and emotional symptoms of operational stress through coaching or self-awareness. This training is an attempt to assist military members in being strong, efficient members of the military.

The Resilience Advantage training is a part of the HeartMath program and helps service members in building character, strength, and resilience (HeartMath, n.d.). It is designed to help military personnel acquire the skills to “take charge” of and self-regulate their mental, emotional, and physical energy (HeartMath, n.d.). Doing so, helps them to better handle stressful situations and reactions, such as deployments, reintegration, and day-to-day challenges. Moreover, this program claims to assist veterans by building their self-regulation and resilience-building techniques.

Service members who take charge of their mental, emotional, and physical energy experience a heightened resilience in the form of: vitality, overall well-being, mental clarity for decision-making, emotional awareness, sensitivity to relational issues, ability to sustain self-control in challenging settings (HeartMath, n.d.). Additionally, the program claims to reduce symptoms of depression, anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness, and stress. Military members who finish the course are more equipped to maintain professional status. They may not be as likely to separate from the military or worse, fail the mission.

HeartMath interventions ultimately assist in the: reduction of PTSD and combat operational stress (COSR), increase the function of memory and reactivity, reduce anger, reduce anxiety and depression, increase their self-responsibility, and self-regulation, help in the regulation of pain management, improve cognitive functions. These reduced ailments help to diminish health-care costs for the military. They also help military members and eventually, military veterans.

Resilience training occurs in two or four-hour workshops. A more in-depth training is delivered through one, two or three day sessions. It is provided in person or via instructional DVD featuring retired Army Major, Robert A. Bradley and HeartMath Institute Research Director, Dr. Rollin McCraty. Although these programs are designed mostly for active duty

service members, they are available and free for veterans, and their spouses. Eligibility is established upon contact.

**The Veteran Intervention Program (VIP).** This is a specialized treatment program designed explicitly for combat veterans with PTSD. This program includes both medicated and non-pharmaceutical treatments in the participants' local community. VIP utilizes both medication and other treatments to assist military members with PTSD and/or Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) by encouraging prosperous transition back into a civilian society. It includes support with the following services: connection with a PTSD service dog, psychiatric evaluations, individual therapy, vet-to-vet therapy, alternative anxiety reduction treatments, spiritual connections, educational assistance, job connections, business mentoring and the opportunity to give back to the program (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.).

VIP recognizes the unique complex changes soldiers need such as the feeling of personal safety and well-being, reconnection to relationships, work or unemployment stress, and difficulty adjusting to civilian life including normal, everyday activities (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.). To fight against PTSD symptoms, VIP uses a "hands on" approach to support transition and recovery. Military veterans are often able to then build sustainable resistance and move on with a productive life.

The program uses spiritual connections, employment connections, medications, and treatments to build resilience (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.). Since it is well-documented that a spiritual connection helps people reduce the amount of stress and anxiety they are feeling, VIP strives to connect veterans with a good spiritual connection. This, they assert, will considerably improve PTSD/TBI symptoms in veterans (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.).

Assisting veterans with employment opportunities is a key goal for VIP. They believe employment is a vital component in effectively handling PTSD. “Moving forward with an exciting new career furthers the PTSD healing process and helps a Combat Veteran feel positive towards reintegrating into society” (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.). It is important to first ensure the veteran is stable and ready to maintain work. A variety of approved medications and treatments are used to assist veterans with their symptoms including acupuncture, yoga, and exercise (Veteran Intervention Plan, n.d.).

The program utilizes local qualified professionals, some of which are fellow veterans. The program functions in person in conjunction with local providers or remotely, allowing it to be accessible in most locations across the United States. DVDs are available for some treatments.

In order for veterans to be eligible, they must provide a driver’s license (or other government-issued ID), a Military ID (if on active duty), or their DD214 if they are a veteran, and a VIP enrollment application. This is a free service, so veterans do not receive a bill. However, services are offered based on the availability of funds. Funds are obtained through public and private donations, as well as grant funding. They do allow funds to be raised for individuals, allowing for veterans to skip the waiting list.

**Veterans Healing Farm.** This is a program intended to assist transitioning veterans dealing with challenges accrued from PTSD and other disorders. It takes the most common and pressing needs of veterans into account. They attempt to connect veterans with tools, support networks, and resources needed that can lead to lower veteran suicide, depression, divorce, homelessness, and substance abuse (Veterans Healing Farm, 2017).

Veterans Healing Farm facilitates veterans’ ability to grow and provide free high-quality fruits, vegetables, and flower bouquets to other veterans and their caregivers. This program



also provides workshops on farming techniques. Through participation and association with the program, communities of veterans and civilians build sustainable relationships and nurture emotional, physical, and spiritual health (Veterans Healing Farm, 2017).

This program considers donating produce as part of the solution to addressing food insecurity in Western North Carolina. The highlighted difference of this program from others is, it offers veterans a safe space to exist with nature and serve. One way they serve is by donating to veterans being seen at the VA hospital in Asheville, North Carolina. They proclaim their farming program offers therapeutic benefits and other health benefits from eating nutrient dense foods, Vitamin D absorption from time in the sun, physical exercise feed both the body, mind, and spirit Veterans Healing Farm (Veterans Healing Farm, 2017).

It is also their intention to build resiliency through self-empowerment and self-worth. They attempt this by fostering a veteran's self-image, which veterans begin to construct as they realize that they are an important part of the community and start to feel their community sees their value. All parties see the synergistic relationship leading to the veteran feeling empowered (Veterans Healing Farm, 2017).

Among the services provided, this program also includes equine psychotherapy as a way to facilitate emotional growth in veterans. For veterans, this therapy can contribute to the treatment of PTSD, anxiety, and other mental health issues that lead to transition difficulty. Equine psychotherapy also provides a non-threatening environment where awareness, usefulness, and instant feedback are negotiated. It is in this environment that veterans are cultivating comradery, fellowship, and relationships to other people, their community and their environment (Veterans Healing Farm, 2017).

To boast this cultivating of relationships and skill training, Veterans Healing Farm also offers the PermaTribe Farm Community program. This initiative is an attempt to foster interpersonal relationships, self-empowerment, and peer support. While participating in the PermaTribe, veterans can share in all of the farm tasks and in return, have indefinite access to organically grown fruits and vegetables. To initiate the conversation and interaction, PermaTribe holds many community events to include potluck dinners, camping retreats, concerts, bonfires, and outdoor movies.

Veterans Healing Farm is located in Hendersonville, North Carolina. This program is completely free to military veterans. To be eligible you must be a military veteran. To establish eligibility, a veteran must contact the program and provide undisclosed information.

Though these programs are different and do not all incorporate the same methods, they all serve to assist veterans with transition challenges by building resilience. All but one highlights that they assist with mental disorders. Some of these programs utilize medication or meditation, others have training programs or mentor processes. Though the training varies and the environments in which training occurs differ, all of these programs attempt to build resiliency and help veterans have a successful sustainable life.

Resilience is important to consider when assessing veteran's needs, including the need to transition to a civilian life. This less studied area is critical in the adaption to distressing life events (Angel, 2015). In short, resilience is the ability of a person, who has witnessed or experienced a traumatic event, to maintain or swiftly recover to a healthy and stable state, physically, cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally (Carver, 1997). Resilience has been associated with the ability of individuals to detach and conceptualize problems (Block & Kremen, 1996). It includes such concepts as personality, affect regulation, coping, ego defenses

and the utilization and mobilization of protective factors and assessing resources to aid in coping. Resilient veterans can show insight, initiative, humor, creativity, independence, and social connections.

### **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

As previously mentioned, PTSD often coincides with other psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety disorders, and substance misuse as well, as other factors that can either contribute to vulnerability and resilience. These internal and external factors show the complexity of resilience and vulnerability and how they affect PTSD, other mental disorders, and the ability of a veteran to return to a civilian community. Currently, there is little focus on interventions to promote resilience, although researchers suggest cognitive behavioral therapy and group work can be effective (Dixon et al., 1994). Often, support programs like the ones summarized above, can be extremely beneficial to a veteran. Veterans with mental health challenges do not need to solely rely on mental health professionals to overcome challenges (Dixon et al., 1994). Veterans can take charge of their future by participating in programs which lend to their autonomy and resilience.

Doctors are diagnosing many military veterans with PTSD. This disorder is described as an anxiety disorder brought about by a traumatic experience (Eggleston, Beckham, Straits-Troster, & VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC OEF/OIF Registry Workgroup, 2010). Though the symptoms have always been visible in military veterans, the Department of Veteran Affairs has taken on a charge recently to name the symptom and work to relieve its effects (USDA, 2015). It is vital that PTSD be studied and solutions to its symptoms be found because, “The most common psychiatric disorder resulting from war-related trauma is post-traumatic stress disorder” (PTSD) (Horesh, Solomon, Zerach, & Ein-Dor, 2011, p. 863).

Traumatic events do not bring on PTSD symptoms with everyone and doctors are unsure why although, part of the belief is that the more personal the traumatic event, the more PTSD resonates (PTSD, 2014). PTSD is neither a linear nor immediately observed disease. This means evident signs and symptoms of PTSD can be suspended, taking months and even years to present themselves in war veterans (Horesh, Solomon, Zerach, & Ein-Dor, 2011). This condition is known as delayed-onset PTSD or DPTSD. Since this phenomenon is not fully understood, neither is an understanding of how to treat PTSD and DPTSD (PTSD, 2014).

Studies argue that military combat veterans suffer the worst from PTSD (Eggleston, Beckham, Straits-Troster, & VA Mid-Atlantic MIRECC OEF/OIF Registry Workgroup, 2010). The homecoming process often triggers PTSD, making the intense process of civilian acclimation even more challenging (Horesh, Solomon, Zerach, & Ein-Dor, 2011). Veterans return to their homes and are abruptly forced to live in “harmony” with people and situations that they are unable to adapt well to because of changes in mentality. Reminders of negative experiences can bring about a feeling of seclusion and stress, leading to higher rates of divorce, physical disease, nightmares, and unemployment (Horesh, Solomon, Zerach, & Ein-Dor, 2011).

Military veterans suffering from PTSD have experienced an elevated release of hormones and chemicals that do not stop after responding to a stressful situation (PTSD, 2014). Their body continues to release hormones and chemicals for some unknown reason. This elevated hormone production mostly affects the brain’s amygdala and hippocampus, which is the control center for our responses to fear and emotions (Brock & Lettini, 2012).

Doctors have categorized PTSD symptoms into four types: reliving the event, avoidance, hyper-arousal, and negative mood (PTSD, 2014). The first of these incorporates military veterans reliving disturbing occurrences in the form of flashbacks, causing nightmares, and memories of

an uncomfortable event (PTSD, 2014). Experiences of memory eruptions often re-traumatizes them (Brock & Lettini, 2012). The next category, avoidance, presents itself in the form of detachment from any emotional feelings or feelings of attachment. Veterans often feel unsuccessful, worthless or that they do not have a future (PTSD, 2014). Additionally, veterans are often unable to remember important parts of a traumatic event. The third type of a PTSD symptom is hyper-arousal. Veterans displaying this type of PTSD will continuously scan their surroundings for signs of a threat (much like they were trained to do in war) and will not be able to concentrate on another task (PTSD, 2014). They are easily irritated and have eruptions of anger. Additionally, they may have trouble falling and staying asleep (PTSD, 2014). The last type of PTSD symptom is negative mood, which involves negative moods and/or feelings of guilt about the event. These include survivor guilt, blaming others for the event, dizziness, fainting, the feeling of your heart beat in your chest, and headaches (PTSD, 2014).

These are all physical and mental signs that many veterans and their families are experiencing every day (PTSD, 2014). This has the potential to make it very hard to be around a victim of PTSD and often they will find it easier to retreat to seclusion. These four types do not have defined lines. Veterans can experience all the symptoms or a variety of them randomly.

There are many suggestions for treating PTSD. Doctors are prescribing medicines and supplying therapy however, soldiers do not always respond to these methods. Many veterans do not wish to take medicine. Additionally, their self-pride and mistrust contributes to their inability to seek government services. Support groups that include members who have experienced the same type of distressing experiences seem to be more helpful (PTSD, 2014). Providing a purpose in the community and involving veterans in rigorous work may also contribute to treating PTSD

in veterans. However, the moral questions of war can often begin to emerge after PTSD symptoms have begun to improve.

### **Moral Injury**

It is widely accepted that war distresses veterans spiritually and morally (Drescher et al., 2011). There are stressors which impact a veteran, causing them to violate (or feel they have violated) their deeply held moral beliefs and values (Litz et al., 2009). It is possible to be morally injured when watching and not taking part in atrocities (Hiley-Young et al., 1995). A significant amount of war veterans suffers psychiatrically, behaviorally, occupationally, socially, and medically throughout their life (e.g., Buckley, Mozley, Bedard, Dewulf, & Greif, 2004; Hoge et al., 2004; Kulka et al., 1990). Though decades of research explored the psychological impact of combat on veterans, such as killings and violation of rules of engagement (Haley, 1974) under the umbrella of PTSD, experts are beginning to agree that PTSD does not fully capture the impact of war-related events on our nation's military members (Drescher et al., 2011).

These decisions are not always as clear as one may think, and often lower ranked enlisted personnel are the people who must carry out their orders and commit acts against their morals and values (Wood, 2016). The opening to the book *Soul Repair* dictates, "to violate your conscience is to commit moral suicide" (Brock & Lettini, p. ix). Committing "moral suicide" is also known as moral injury and is a less focused on area of research.

Moral injury is an evolving construct that researchers have recently been working on further developing. This concept is being developed to better and more fully understand and address military veterans needs. These needs include guilt, shame, anger, self-handicapping behaviors, relational complications, spiritual problems, and social alienation (Currier, Holland & Malott, 2014; Vargas et. al., 2013; Litz et al., 2009; Brock & Lettini, 2012). It can be

summarized by saying it encompasses anything that challenges one's basic sense of humanity (Currier, Holland & Malott, 2014) or just soul wounds (Vargas et al., 2013). Experiences such as direct combat and witnessing of killings contribute to the impact on a veterans' spiritual, moral values and identity (Vargas et al., 2013). Litz et al., (2009) defines moral injury as, "perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (p. 700). The definition was later revised by Drescher et al., (2011), adding the importance of how the acts committed are "inhumane, cruel, depraved, or violent, bringing about pain, suffering, or death of others" (p. 9).

Symptoms of moral injury are often confused with PTSD symptoms. Morally injured veterans frequently experience social problems, loss of trust, a sense of betrayal, spiritual issues, psychological symptoms, and self-deprecation (Drescher et al., 2011). More specifically, betrayal in the eyes of a veteran can include: leadership failures, peer betrayal, and betrayal of civilians. Disproportionate violence includes: mistreatment of enemy combatants and acts of revenge; incidents involving civilians such as: destruction of civilian property and assault; and within-rank violence such as: military sexual trauma, friendly fire, and fragging (Maguen & Litz, 2012). Maguen et al. (2010) observed that military personnel returning from modern deployments are at higher risk for mental health conditions and psychosocial functioning.

Fontatna and Rosenheck (2003) found that not acting to prevent killing better predicted higher suicidality, more PTSD symptoms and other mental health disorders. Accordingly, it is not just killing but other secondary witnessing of experiences, such as handling dead bodies, which 65 % of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans reported (Hoge et al., 2004). Victims develop a feeling that they are no longer decent human beings because, they no longer live in a reliable, meaningful world (Brock & Lettini, 2012).

War offers moral shields of honor and courage. Its camaraderie bonds warriors together around a common purpose and extreme danger. War offers service to a larger cause; it stumbles on despair. On the other hand, moral injury feeds on despair. When the narcotic emotional intensity and tight camaraderie of war are gone, withdrawal can be intense. As memory and reflection deepen, negative self-judgments can torment a soul for a lifetime. Moral injury destroys meaning and forsakes noble cause. It sinks warriors into states of silent, solitary suffering, where bonds of intimacy and care seem impossible. It torments to the soul can make a death a mercy (Brock & Lettini, 2012, p. xvi).

Drescher et al. (2011) argue that there are symptoms that are often related to moral injury.

There are negative changes in some people's behavior and their beliefs towards ethics (Mental Health Advisory Team, 2006). For others, there is a change in, or loss of spirituality (Drescher & Foy, 1995; Fontana & Rosenheck, 2004). Some people who suffer from moral injury experience guilt, shame, and challenges with forgiveness (Kubany, Abueg, Kilauano, Manke, & Kaplan, 1997; Witvliet et al., 2004). Reduced trust in others and in social settings also occurs (Kubany, Gino, Denny, & Torigoe, 1994). For some, hostile behaviors may be a symptom of moral injury (Begic & Jokic-Begic, 2001). Often, there is a decrease of self-care (Schnurr & Spiro, 1999). Finally, a symptom of moral injury may be self-harm (Bras et al., 2007; Lyons, 1991; Pitman, 1990; Sher, 2009).

Moral injury is thought to occur during periods of incongruity between realities of a stressor and a veteran's meaning system. There are two qualities of this meaning making process, the first is global meaning or a person's fundamental beliefs, values, goals, and significance (all which work together to give themselves a sense of purpose) and the second quality is situational meaning or a person's assessment of specific events (Park, 2010). "Challenges in recovery, as observed in cases of moral injury, may then arise to the degree that veterans cannot integrate the appraised reality of their warzone experiences into a global meaning, and/or they cannot accommodate beliefs/values or life goals to 'make sense' or (situationally) construct meaning out



of these stressors” (Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2014, p.231). It is understood that veterans can recover from moral injury by making meaning of such events by adjusting their view in such a matter that is either integrated into global meaning or by revising his or her disrupted meaning of events or by match the appraisal of the stressor (Currier, Holland, & Malott, 2014). Doran, Kalayjian, Toussaint, and DeMucci (2012) suggest that self-forgiveness and positive self-reflection plays a major role and may lead to reduced moral injuries.

Litz et al., (2009) encourages collaborative work across multiple systems as a way of alleviating symptoms of moral injury. Maguen and Litz (2012) suggest “multidisciplinary effort that also considers social systems in which the individual is based and can receive help and support” (p. 2). Could this be part of the reason agriculture in general is helping veterans acclimate to the civilian world? The collaborative disciplines required to have success in agriculture, such as raising livestock, growing produce, soil maintenance, and social connections to feed people rather than killing or mistreating humans may be part of the reason there is a reversal of negative effects of war on veterans in agriculture. As stated by Gray et al., (2012), it is in these collaborative cases of “compassionate exercises” that morally injured veterans can lead to forgiving and reductions in PTSD symptoms and other symptoms of depression” (p. 186). To aid in the challenges such as PTSD and moral injury, many veterans are turning to their community.

### **Community Education and Development in Respects to Veterans in Agriculture**

Again, to learn the skills necessary for successful farming, some veterans are turning to agricultural education programs. These agricultural programs are suitable settings for culture reproduction (military and then civilian) and ultimately can be viewed as a community. A critical

piece to this study was the sense of and participation in a community and therefore, community education.

Community education can greatly enhance community development, programming development, capacity building, and community capitals (Kenny, 2002). Green & Haines (2012) describe community education as an extensive area of education that is based on principles and practices of lifelong learning, inclusion, collaboration, and use of multiple disciplines and resources to educate the community. These public interests are broad and may include a variety of topics with a range of outcomes. Likewise, education offered can encompass a series of subjects and support various needs. First, implying a definition of community is vital, and the definition of community development can be helpful for the commencement of any community education conversation.

Numerous definitions of community exist. Hillery (1995) located at least ninety-four distinct definitions for the term, community (Green & Haines, 2012). To summarize, most of these definitions incorporate common themes such as the topic of place and common interest. The United Nations (n.d.) defines community development as “a process where community members come together to take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.” The multidisciplinary nature of community development leads to different sets of visions and objectives such as: solving local problems (unemployment and poverty), addressing imbalances of wealth and power, promoting democracy, and building a sense of community (Rubin & Rubin, 1992). Problem solving together and taking collective action can generate a sense of empowerment and unity. The outcome is often resilient leaders, strong role models, and an enhanced cultural identity (Green & Haines, 2012).

Development should not to be confused with growth. Growth refers to increased quantities of jobs, population, and revenue (Green & Haines, 2012). Development on the other hand, includes structural change in the community, how resources are used, institutions, and the distribution of resources in the community (Green & Haines, 2012). Therefore, development and sustainability are usually intertwined. Green and Haines (2012) believe community resiliency should be the emphasis for community development. As Peet and Hartwick (2009) maintain, “hence, development can be used for many different political purposes, including some, and perhaps most, that conflict with its essentially egalitarian ethic a better life for all” (p.1). However, it must be carefully scrutinized and monitored, because without constant supervision, development can quickly take on the familiar definition of more money and power for the few (McMichael, 2008).

With this in mind, the goal is to strengthen communities by enhancing inclusion because as Green & Haines (2012) argue, all community members have a potential to improve the community, but such population as youth, senior citizens, and people with disabilities are often overlooked. By improving various aspects of their communities, it's members create a stronger and more resilient local community. The hope is that a stronger and more resilient community will prevents or minimizes social problems by making right investments in resources such as skills of military veterans. This supports Green and Haines (2012) notion that when communities invest in the correct resources, their community member's quality of life will improve. Sumner (2009) terms this concept “social sustainability. It enlists three views: commitment to “fair and just” labor practices, gender equality, and the conservation of communities and culture (Clark, 2006). With these tools, community members can accumulate sufficient knowledge, leadership,

and skills to efficiently and effectively face challenges leading to changes within their community and its community capacity (Green & Haines, 2012).

Economic development often leads to community development but similarly, community development includes a set of activities that can produce economic development (Green & Haines, 2012). It is essential for communities to focus on development and not just growth. Sustainable communities need to provide a suitable infrastructure including: housing, schools, jobs, and training in order to create jobs and independent incomes (Green & Haines, 2012). Creating space to develop careers and independent incomes can be facilitated by the community.

As change and improvement are the center to community development, then community education may be the tool to bring about that change. Therefore, community education links a community to resilience, equality, and empowerment. Community based education and development is utilized to promote knowledge and social work with individuals and groups in their communities (Green & Haines, 2012). Community education uses a range of formal, non-formal, and informal learning methods (Schunk, 2012). However, a lot of community education takes place through non-formal learning practices. Non-formal education is a kind of organized and structured education, which is planned by an educational provider, however it does not lead to a degree or formal qualification and is offered through courses, workshops, seminars (Schunk, 2012).

Community education programs are usually created in conversation with communities and participants and based on that community's unique needs (Green & Haines, 2012). The purpose of community learning is to develop the capacity of a variety of individuals to improve their quality of life (Green & Haines, 2012). This type of education is often less funded but can be funded by government agencies or grants opportunities (Schunk, 2012). It is also common for

community education to be funded or supported through local universities and extension programs.

According to Green and Haines (2012), community development and community education also consist of a deliberate effort to build assets that will subsequently increase the capacity of the citizens to improve their quality of life. Participation and education are both techniques to empower the citizens of a community and lead to community viability and essential change. Merely living in the same geographic space does not create community and community development can mean multiple things to different people. With no standard definition, it can be a complicated term to define. However, its overall goal is to take actions that will mold communities into viable and self-sustainable communities (Green & Haines, 2012).

Currently, communities have taken a deeper interest in their own sustainability and are looking for new ways to build and sustain their communities. Land grant universities (such as Virginia Tech) and state Extension services have filled that need with initiatives to aid beginning farmers. The USDA distinguishes beginning farmers and recognizes the need and importance to offer them support (Ahearn, 2013). Niewolny and Lillard (2010) stress that communities and practitioners are beginning to see the importance of supporting “the viability of new farms, and the economic, social, and environmental fabric of which they are a part” (p. 69). Beginning farmer training may be the single most important device to generating or maintaining social stability (Hamilton, 2011) and food security.

One area of critical importance to community education is in agricultural education. With the signing of the 1862, 1890, and 1994 Morrill Land-Grant College Acts, universities and colleges are designed in each state to meet needs of agricultural and industrial classes (USDA, 2005). Furthermore, in 1873, non-degree Extension programs started at Cambridge University in

part, as another way to provide training to farmers (USDA, 2005). Land grant universities operate under the mission of generating “research and education in an effort to solve everyday problems” (Colasanti, Wright, & Reau, 2009, p. 2). In 1914, The Smith-Lever Act began the Extension service as it is known today (Bailey & Kennedy, 1994). This is relevant because it demonstrates that agriculture education is a needed part to community education and needs to be funded also, it gives a space for universities and agricultural education programs to collaborate and lend their skills such as curriculum, funding, evaluation and research. Much of agriculture training occurs through non-formal learning.

Thus, one mechanism that can assist agricultural education is situated learning (Moore, 1998). Lave (1988) argues that cognition itself is an intricate social occurrence and culture and context should be considered when discussing learning. Learning occurs during routine practices that integrate the entire body and mind, to include activities and the culture of the participant and those interacting with the participant (Lave, 1988). Niewolny and Wilson (2009) contend that situated learning allows us to move away from concentrating on just formal classroom education and instead, focus on how learning and cognition are culturally organized through activity and power. It is one’s social surroundings that then becomes vital to their learning and cognition within a certain environment (Schunk, 2012). People can sometimes define this environment by using objects and artifacts to construct an identity (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Regardless of the method, it is important to consider what challenges veterans will face when forming an educational program in which veterans will participate. Although not all, some veterans will face challenges that go far beyond physical. It will be important to recognize this and find ways to assist veterans in their journey out of the military and into civilian communities.

## **Community Capital within the Veteran Population**

Part of this process of community building through education includes implementing the Community Capital Framework through assessing the seven capitals that construct this framework. The Community Capitals Framework is an essential part of community projects such as community development. The framework helps to quantify the local resources and assets so the cultivation of a viable community can occur (Jacobs, 2011; Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006). To do this, it is critical that communities “take stock” of their resources they already acquire in each area of community capital. This “stock” or resources are measured across seven community capital assets: natural, cultural, human, physical, financial, social, and political capital (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006; Green, & Haines, 2012). These seven characteristics can create a community that thrives (Emery, Fey, & Flora, 2006). The Seven capitals are interconnected to each other and to community development. Together, these capitals can facilitate healthy ecosystems, local economics, and social equality and empowerment (Olson, 2006).

After “taking stock” in each of the seven areas of community capital, it is my argument that veterans often already possess the social, human, and financial capital necessary for a successful community reintegration. Each area has been studied in works such as Negru’s (2007) essay on veterans’ human capital; Hinojosa and Hinojosa’s (2011) social capital research on the reintegration of military veterans; and Albertson, Irving and Best’s (2015) social capital. What is missing is cultural capital with reference to a civilian community. What must first be briefly discussed are some unique characteristics of a veterans financial, human, and social capitals.

**Financial Capital.** Military veterans have unique financial capital including access to government, as well as private loans and grants. The USDA often will give preference to veteran applicants when applying for loans to purchase land, farm equipment, and livestock, and/or other farm and family needs (Veterans in USDA programs, 2015). The Farm Service Agency (FSA) runs a Direct Farm Ownership Loan for veterans that assists them with loans for farms. The Department of Veteran Affairs' Farm Loans and Home Loans for Rural Residents in agriculture are also available (Veteran Farming, 2015). Military veterans may qualify for an exemption from direct term limits for microloans, and limits on the interest rate charged by the USDA operating loans (Veterans in USDA Programs, 2015). Veterans may additionally be able to seek assistance through Minority and Socially Disadvantaged Farmers, the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP).

Due to these advantages, the USDA has seen continuous increases in funding that now total over 30 million dollars (USDA, 2015). As of 2008, more than 6,500 veterans have secured over \$443 million farm loans to purchase farmland, buy equipment and make repairs and upgrades to farm businesses with help from the USDA (Brown, 2015 as referenced in Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2018). In addition, the USDA's microloan program has provided more than \$24.2 million to help 1,154 veterans grow their farming businesses (Brown, 2015).



**Human Capital.** Human capital is often in a non-tangible form and relies on knowledge or epistemologies of individuals (Becker, 2008). This non-tangible form of community capital can be just as important as the physical ones. Human capital consists of experiences, health, benefits, skills and education, as well as, traits that increase a quality of life (Green & Haines, 2012). When effectively developed, and used, skill sets and capacities that construct a community's human capital can be one of the most critical factors in building economic success (The Human Capital Report, 2015). Hence, military veteran's ability to produce goods, services, and social progress depends on their resources and the knowledge of how to use them (Weisbrod, 1966). A community that is rich in human capital, but cannot use their characteristics will not be viable for long.

Military veterans (already in that community) often hold skills and experiences that have yet to be exploited. Green and Haines (2012) discuss the way to have a better workforce is to invest in technical skills, skills that cost money to obtain. However, military veterans already possess these technical skills and do not need to be retrained. Employing new workers and/or new farm managers would cost a lot of money in training. These funds could instead be saved and put to better use in other areas of the community.

As we have read, perhaps one of the major contributors to human capital and the development of a community is education (Weisbrod, 1966). Education can greatly improve skills, imaginative ideas, techniques and empower residents to decrease unemployment and make changes. Military veterans have many opportunities to access education through the GI bill and Post 911 GI bill, ultimately enhancing their financial (or often called economic) capital, and the community. In 2005, three million dollars were awarded for military veterans' education (Negrusa, 2007). Additionally, veterans participated in elite training while in the service. They

went through many technical and leadership trainings, as well as numerous on the job trainings. These trainings are very compatible with agriculture careers, especially farming. Training often calls for learning in non-formal settings or learning in the experience. It is not often duplicated in the classroom.

The USDA supports veteran farmers and considers them a wise investment for agriculture (Wendle, 2015). USDA officials contend military veterans have a tendency to incorporate more educational and technical skills from the military and bring a unique skill set from their military experience (Wendle, 2015). Agriculture demands hard work and long hours with most of the time spent dirty, sweating, and tired. Farmers must think quickly to overcome many obstacles and make on the spot changes to current plans (Brown, 2011). They must be capable of multitasking to keep the business prosperous. Military veterans are ideal for these situations and often have spent years in conditions similar to or worse than these (Brown, 2011). Running a farm gives veterans an opportunity to use their military logistical training and leadership skills. (Gutter, 2015).

Many military veterans receive free or reduced health care through the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA). Services provided by the VA help to keep veterans healthier and able to work harder and longer. Weisbrod (2015) argues that a healthier worker will continue to be a more productive worker. This is because they will be absent from work less and not miss days due to doctor appointments or injuries (Weisbrod, 2015). Veterans will thus be able to spend more time on the job working, generating more income for the farm. If unfortunate accidents occur, VA medical benefits may be able to take care of a worker for little to no cost to the employer or the employee.

Military veterans and other residents who possess the ability, creativity, and vision to start and maintain a business exemplify vital human capital characteristics that are necessary within a community (Green & Haines, 2012). Many military veterans have started their own small farms, using them to educate their fellow veterans, provide local products to the community and a place to share information, in addition to growing crops. A large population of veterans come from rural communities and small farm operations (Farrigan, 2013). A host of them also have prior experience working on small or large family farms. The 2007 Ag Census reported that large and very large family farms produced over 63 % of the profits made from products sold, while non-family farms produced close to 21% (USDA, 2010). The 1.9 million small farms and ranches with sales under \$250,000 produced approximately 15% (USDA, 2014). Thus, small farms make up 48% of total farmland, and contribute significantly to our nation's food and natural resource and environmental policy (USDA, 2014). Small farm operations can be run by military veterans who are accustomed to farm life, chores, and hold qualities and experiences ideal for farming.

**Social Capital.** Social capital is a process that encompasses the trust, reciprocity and the development of social networks or community. While in the military, veterans often exhibit “esprit de corps” or the embodiment pride and loyalty towards each other and their organization (Lewis, 2013). However, upon separating from military service, veterans may find themselves needing to develop new ties and/or re-establish existing ties within the civilian community. A study by Gonzales and Nowell (2016) examined the desire for civilian retirees to return to the workforce after retirement and found that in addition to some retirees returning to work due to economic reasons, many returned to work specifically for social reasons. However, upon separating from military service, veterans may find themselves needing to develop new ties and/or re-establish existing ties within the civilian community.

A strong military force is dependent on the creation and maintaining of social capital. Conviction and unit pride between military members wins wars. So, in this day of age, when we are engaged in many wars and operations around the planet, it is critical that the military is focused on social capital development. If social capital declines, so too does the strength and readiness of the Armed forces (Lewis, 2013). Social capital is built through the close interactions of military members. The work day is 24/7. This means your off time is given when available. Military members do not have “time off” but instead, “down time”. This time is spent as a team. They are drilled together, work together, eat together, and often are housed together. As the saying goes, “there is no I in TEAM” Your unit becomes your community and your fellow military service members become your family.

Social capital within civilian communities has declined tremendously in recent years. Citizens often engage more with each other through volunteering, participating in religious groups, being involved with various memberships, and participating in both local and national

democratic processes (Putnam, 1995). This decline has been evident throughout America as one begins to look at the historic decrease in participation in each of these activities (Putnam, 1995). Considering the general decline in social capital among civilians, it can be inferred that it will be difficult for a military veteran to develop social capital within a new community that is already struggling with its development.

That being said, military veterans have developed networks to overcome this. Their enhanced networking skills that they acquired during their time in service, becomes critical. The act of networking itself is an example of social capital. Networks allow for the dissemination of knowledge and job opportunities. It is often these networks that play the biggest role in the attainment of a new job. Military personnel maintain great networks and exceptional capability to connect even after their service (Lewis, 2013), including in agriculture. These networks offer support, links to agriculture jobs, and information needed to start farms. Farmer Veteran Coalition supports military veterans with advice on farming in general, grants, and loans (Veteran Careers in Agriculture: A Resource Guide, 2015). Beginner Farmer and Rancher Programs train farmers and ranchers on some of the obstacles they will face during farm startup (Anderson, 2013).

The Center for Rural Affairs in Lyons, Nebraska conducts a Veteran Farmers Project, which offers in person training, and assistance, as well as additional aid via a national hotline (Veteran Careers in Agriculture: A Resource Guide, 2015). Recently, The National Center for Appropriate Technology received USDA funding by way of the Beginning Farmer and Rancher Development Program. This funding established the Armed to Farm training program, a new program geared toward veteran farmers. A new website entitled USDA's "New Farmers" also emerged from this funding and project. (Technical assistance and resources for veterans, 2015).

Within the “New Farmers” website is an abundance of educational resources which exist to support veterans with accessing market news, weather, and commodity projections, and produce safety and guides. (Veteran Farming, 2015).

**Cultural Capital.** Cultural capital is the gathering of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that an individual can access to validate one's cultural competence, and therefore demonstrate their social status or standing in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). To grasp the notion of cultural capital, it is pertinent to define culture. Culture is generally referred to as a way of life for a particular group (Green, & Haines, 2012), in this case military veterans. Soeters, Winslow and Weibull (2006) defines culture as a distinguished group of people who are a product of their social environment that incorporates a shared sense of values, norms, ideas, symbols, and meanings that help them see and navigate our world. Culture is a learned process of socialization through generations in a group of people (Harper, 2002; Leininger, 1985; McGruder, 2009). This group shares history, language, and beliefs. It is this that helps shape one’s culture identity and is every evolving (Straub, Loch, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Srite, 2002; Scott, 2015).

Cultural identity is described as the feeling of belonging to a group (Hall, 1986; Straub, Loch, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Srite, 2002; Scott, 2015). It helps to produce a self-image from our family, culture, ethnicity, and society of which we are a part. The development of cultural identity occurs to better understand our world, the relationships around us and to determine where we fit within our community (Hall, 1986). Cultural identity shares a system of symbolic language and behavior that incorporates both verbal and nonverbal codes and has specific meaning that is unique to that culture (Bourdieu, 1984). However, this identity is not stagnant and as people move, so can their culture identity as exposure to different cultures helps to create a space of understanding and learning between different cultures (Hall, 1986).

While almost all cultures integrate individuals on some level, the military in particular strives to create a unified, resilient and cohesive culture, allowing it to operate during times of traumatic events. Service members join the military having been exposed to different things and with varying experiences, therefore as an attempt to discourage uniqueness and promote a uniform identity, the military exposes the recruits to basic training or boot camp. The recruits go through a tough, humiliating, and physically and emotionally strenuous process (Jones, James, & Bruni, 1975; Moore, 2011; Soeters, 2006). They are quickly introduced to their new norms, language, codes, and identity. These norms and uniformity are cultivated through common haircuts or hairdos, common attire, shared living quarters and activities such as eating and sleeping, as well as isolation from friends and family. After such training, recruits express a greater commitment to the military (Soeters, 2006). Obedience, discipline, self-sacrifice, trust, and courage are recognized as key military values (Collins 1998; Hillen, 2000; Howard, 2006; Townshend, 1993). Continuous training to better the individual and military community are stressed through health and personal responsibility (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010).

Military veterans being discharged from what Goffman (1959) describes as total institutions need an opportunity to build upon their pre-existing community capital, especially social and symbolic, to transform their identity back from that of a military member to that of a civilian. The total institution effects can be broken down slowly and consequences such as anxiety, anger, low self-esteem and threats to individuality can be improved (Goffman, 1959). A soldier can begin to feel safe and take charge of their own goals and future as they build cultural capital. Adult agricultural education programs designed for veterans with their peers can be part of the answer. These programs can provide symbolic objects and meaning associated with the military that now are able to take on a new meaning and can be transformed into farming. This

association can be an avenue that allows veterans a slow-paced way to become acclimated to the community and create social mobility within that same community.

### **The Role of Veteran Peer Groups**

Veteran peer groups may assist the process. Veterans who have experienced the emotional trauma of battle may begin to change their thinking processes to better cope with their pasts, leading to the development or onset of mental illness. Humphreys (2004) reported that addicted or mentally ill persons often seek support from similarly afflicted individuals and groups. These peer groups offer a level of shared understanding that is not always obtainable from clinical services (Albertson, Irving, & Best, 2015). They allow for a shared space, experience, and ailments. Through social interaction, they are able to connect more and communicate their shared experiences. Often, it is in this type of program that veterans feel more comfortable.

This explains why many veterans are turning to peer organized groups over a traditional clinic setting. Brock and Lettini (2012) argue that serving in military combat together forms a close group of insiders and outsiders, insiders for whom they are willing to die for and outsiders who will never comprehend the horrendous situations in which these veterans have served. It is this comradery that could lead to better social capital in an adult agriculture education program and ultimately lead to veterans gaining confidence and self-esteem. Veterans will also be likely to move up and fulfill each level on Maslow's pyramid, ultimately leading to the ability to build cultural capital in a civilian community. As such, the community can gain confidence in the veteran and benefit off of his contributions, leading to less animosity, mistrust, and more social mobility for the veteran.



## **Responding to Veterans in Agriculture**

In 1982, 16 % of all family farm operators were under 35 years old, by 2007 only 5 % were under 35 years of age (Ahearn, 2013). The number of aging farmers ready to retire is increasing and the number of new farmers starting or taking over farms is decreasing (Agriculture Census, 2012). With declining agriculture operation, our local food security is at risk, giving way to the need for agriculture service to our country. Correspondingly, 92 % of veterans say they wish to continue to serve our nation (Brown, 2011). Their dedication to food security and service to our nation gives veterans a renewed source of purpose by securing our nation's food availability (Salerno, 2014). The practice of serving others breaks isolation of these veterans, and PTSD symptoms and moral injuries may improve. Nash (2013), believes restoration of a sense of safety in a dangerous world, and relearning and reconnecting with the world is central process of recovering from a fear-based trauma involving life threat. Therefore, it is critical that we find ways to foster educational programs that fill this need for service for veterans.

Adam Burke started a veteran's farm in Jacksonville, Florida. He is a Purple Heart recipient who served in both Operation Iraq Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (Gutter, 2015). The concept of combining therapy, work, education, and socialization through growing blueberries and blackberries began when Adam observed a depressed fellow homeless veteran on the street that was too proud to ask for help. (Military Veteran Farmer Training – Beginning Farmer, 2014). Serving others helps Adam adjust to his civilian life.

Adam is not alone. Alvina Maynard served in the US Air Force and now raises alpacas in River Hill Ranch in Richmond, Kentucky (Gutter, 2015). Agriculture for her is a way to continue to serve her community (Gutter, 2015). Aaorn (last name held for privacy) a marine veteran,

owns White Stock and Produce in Carlisle, Iowa (Gutter, 2015). He likes the structure and purpose agriculture brings to his life (Gutter, 2015). After serving two tours in Iraq with the US Army Reserves, Justen Garritty began Veterans Compost and converts food scraps into high quality organic compost in the DC area (Gutter, 2015). Justen too enjoys the purpose agriculture brings to his life (Gutter, 2015).

Farming also brings therapeutic benefits to veterans. After three tours in Iraq, SGT Colin returned to California and began working on a neglected avocado farm. He found farming to be therapeutic and helped with his reintroduction into civilian life (McEvoy, 2012). Mike Hanes is a veteran who was homeless and suffering from PTSD. He could not seem to acclimate back into civilian society (McEvoy, 2012). Participation in agriculture has begun the process of healing (McEvoy, 2012). Jeremy Ireland and his wife Emily, grow produce, raise laying hens and make maple syrup on Ireland Hill Farms in Swanville, Maine (Gutter, 2015). He served in the Army, National Guard and likes how farming allowed him to smoothly transition into civilian life (Gutter, 2015). Justin Deer is from a small rural town in Nebraska. As a veteran, he understands the sense of belonging farming provides. Justin reports, “I love that every day is a new day, that you can always try different things, and the lack of monotony that comes with the daily grind of a normal 9-5 job.” (Memorial Day Post: Military Veterans as Beginning Farmers - Beginning Farmers, 2012). Justin adds, “I am the happiest I’ve ever been right now.”

Testimonies like these show the importance of agriculture in the process of military veterans re-entering society and reducing suffering from PTSD symptoms. Agriculture allows veterans to become part of communities without making drastic changes from military life. In response to veteran testimonies, the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has begun to assign considerable resources to such programs that offer “a multidisciplinary approach [to community

reintegration], which also includes peers and family” (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010, p.1 as referenced by Besterman-Dhah, Chavez, Bendixsen, & Aspillaga, 2015).

While many veterans are happy to return to the civilian life, some miss the “grind” and fast pace the service provided. The duties involved in agricultural demands veterans work in a rigorous, but nonviolent setting. They know they are relatively safe from being attacked and can concentrate on the task at hand. In addition, it is thought that social relationships are important. Hinojosa and Hinojosa (2011) emphasized the importance of military friendships in overcoming the challenges of reintegration. Holding on to the military comradery and symbols of the military may serve a critical role. So, what makes agriculture a comparable move for so many veterans? Perhaps the study of symbolic interactions can help us to understand this phenomenon.

### **Summary of the Literature Review**

Multiple components factor into military veterans’ decision to enter agricultural communities. Reasons for their motivation to enter the demanding career of agriculture are often more personal and self-driven. Community leaders and members see veterans’ contribution in agriculture as positive because they encompass attributes of human capital which lead to a better agriculture and rural community. Veterans who are trained similarly while serving in the military have the maturity and self-discipline to contribute to the development of our agriculture community (The Human Capital Report, 2015).

Added to this, military veterans across the United States are finding opportunities in farming. This phenomenon, though intriguing, needs to be studied further with careful thought. Agriculture is expensive and often farmers do not receive the returns from what they have invested. Stress from daily chores, physical limitations, stress from memory loss, and stress from financial difficulties could complicate military veterans’ PTSD. It will be imperative to consider

the unique aspects of the military culture and this context when developing and implementing intervention efforts involving military members (Castro, 2014). In order to be successful, veterans will need continued support as they endure life on a farm. Support may be best served through networks, support groups, counseling, and a participatory approach.

In conclusion, most veterans will be considered beginning farmers, farming programs can provide a safe, low investment space for military veterans to obtain knowledge across the implementation of tools and practices, borrowing the idea from apprenticeships using situated learning. They can use community learning (acquired in the military and whom they are comfortable with) and work together to make meaning of the concepts and ideas involved in the many different challenges and rewards of farming. Ownership and empowerment can then be gained through participation. Moreover, such agricultural initiatives will reinforce rural communities through conserving traditional farming knowledge, leading to the increase in small farmers and ranchers, and the improvement of local food availability (Fursaro, 2010). It is in this space that veterans will be able to build social mobility through the development of cultural capital by using familiar symbols that will transform meaning. Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism theories were most appropriate for studying this meaning making and participation in these agricultural education programs and the social mobility it fostered.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**Cultural Capital Theory.** Bourdieu (1977) specified that community socialization and educational system contribute[s] “to the reproduction of the structure of power relationships and symbolic relationships between classes, to the reproduction of the structure of distribution of cultural capital among these classes” (p. 155). Educational institutions help to recreate systems of social structure that produce behaviors in individuals that are institutionalized (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Bourdieu (1986) focused on the community capitals and predominantly, on cultural capital. Cultural Capital Theory defines aspects of the dominant class. If countered or used properly, community members can increase the outcome of success in society by creating social, cultural, and economic gains. Pierre Bourdieu rethought this class and hegemony in terms of social class. He argued that this encompasses financial capital, social capital, cultural capital, symbolic capital or use of symbols (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) combined symbolic interactionism and Cultural Capital Theory to explain how cultural capital can lend to success and connection in a way that outsiders of that culture cannot access.

Cultural Capital Theory was established by Bourdieu (1974) to analyze the relationship between actions and social structures that impact cultures (Lamont & Lareau, 1988). Moreover, the interpretivist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). In taking an interpretivist approach, values, personal experiences, beliefs, and norms becomes essential to the exploration of a phenomenon.

Studying adult agricultural education programs that serve military veterans can similarly incorporate Cultural Capital Theory. Military veterans are schooled on their units’ history and social norms upon signing into their unit. Soon, there is a shared language and traditions between military peers. The positions that cultural capital sociologist Pierre Bourdieu put forth such as

cultural collections of knowledge, behaviors, and skills leads to a social status or standing in society (Bourdieu, 1984). Such positions can be applied to military veteran in and out of their socially constructed military culture.

Cultural Capital Theory's conceptual framework functioned as the foundation for this research. Habitus, capital, and field are the three concepts that make up the framework. These three themes are then aligned well with key principles of Symbolic Interactionism Theory. All components influence the educational attainment of the veterans in an adult agricultural education program and their ability to transition into the civilian community.

Bourdieu (1986) views power as culturally and symbolically created, and constantly changing in structure and agency. Bourdieu (1986) declares that this occurs through 'habitus' or socialized patterns that guide behavior and thinking. Habitus is "the way society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions, or trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (Wacquant 2005, p. 316). Habitus is the part of Cultural Capital Theory that connects with mentoring and the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism. One's habitus is formed because learned responses and social forces impact social interactions (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus refers to the physical embodiment of cultural capital, to the deeply ingrained habits, skills, and dispositions that we possess due to our life experiences (Bourdieu, 1984). Habitus is a result of free will and structures that interconnect and interplay over time to create characteristics that are both shaped by past events and structures, which mold existing practices and structures and condition our perceptions of each (Bourdieu, 1984).

Veterans across the country are being largely disregarded and prejudged as problems by many in the civilian culture, leaving the veteran to be conceptualized and represented in negative

ways. According to Bourdieu (1986), a community member who has processed and correctly used the notions of social, economic, symbolic, and cultural capital escalate their future within their society and will create their intended favorable outcomes. Cultural connections through commonality of agriculture can be made between participating veterans, veterans and agriculture, veterans and a program, and finally, farmer veterans and society due to a collective identity. Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that highlights these interactions. Symbolic Interactionism involves social interactions through exchanges with individuals and symbols (Blumer, 1969). These interactions have the potential to impact how individuals see themselves and are perceived in society. Social processes can be observed as they emerge and change, and qualitative methods maybe the strongest way to study and understand how veteran's identity is a product of civilian community social interactions. Symbolic Interactionism Theory follows a direct path from the self to self in society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Blumer (1969) agrees that humans are always learning and that learning is taking place in the social environment.

A second important concept introduced by Bourdieu (1986) is that of capital, which includes the notion that material assets are connected to capital that may also include social, cultural or symbolic. These forms may equally contribute to a community and transfer from one capital to another (Navarro, 2006). Among these, cultural capital and the means by which it is formed or transported from other forms of capital, typically plays a significant role in power relations within a community and may contribute to the transference from material to cultural and symbolic capital, leading to the construction of inequality of power (Gaventa, 2003).

According to Bourdieu (1986), this second concept of cultural capital exists as three types: embodied, institutionalized, and objectified. The expansion of skills and knowledge

creates embodied cultural capital, typically through education or training (Bourdieu, 1986). Institutionalized capital includes titles, ranks, and positions which indicate status (Bourdieu, 1986). Objectified capital is generated based on the collection and display of objects to include homes, decor, and clothing (Bourdieu, 1986). These three types of cultural capital are equally adaptable and transformable into social, human, and financial capital.

For example, getting an agricultural education can transfer among all three forms of capital. Financial capital can be converted into the cultural capital of skill. This embodied cultural capital become transformable to the position of farmer, which can help increase enough financial capital to join higher statuses in the community, and through contacts of higher status, improve the significance of available social capital. Therefore, economic benefits from property, social tractability in the creation of networks, and cultural fluidity in access to skills can lead to community development.

The social environment of the military existed within a hierarchal society that is constantly reinforced socially, and culturally (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull, 2006). However, veterans in a civilian community do not have to live by the same social and cultural constructs. Through access to education and skills, the creation of new social status and by the reinterpretation of displays of status and authority, veterans could create wider access to better cultural capital and then convert it to social and financial capital leading to an easier transition into the civilian world.

Embodied cultural capital is directly correlated with a person's identity (Bourdieu, 1986). The acquired skill becomes part of a name or label, resulting in an identity such as military rank, veteran or farmer. Many community members acquire vocational skills through their family, on the job, or more formally, as an apprentice. An apprenticeship can also become an access outlet



into the community for those from outside a community. The community could be introduced to the apprentice and their unique skills and contributions, leading a community to view the veteran from a different light.

Institutionalized capital is formulated by position or title that can either be gained through birth, acquired through investment of financial capital, or received through advancement of embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The differences between worthy community members and those who are not are typically enforced through stereotypes such as PTSD and “angry veterans”. This stereotype can then be converted to that of a worthy and critical server of the community, through food, enabling the increase of one’s individual self-honor, reputation and credit (Bourdieu, 1986).

Objectified Capital reveals itself in actions of demonstration or symbolic capital or possibly by challenging the order through counter-displays. Again, status in a community relies on reputation, wealth, and authority which is symbolized through dress, property, and behavior (Bourdieu, 1986). Displays of farmers highly valued status skills such as hard work and discipline may help veterans acclimate to a civilian community. Property or a display of a program diploma may offer trust, flexibility, and increase status into a community membership.

Bourdieu’s (1986) third concept under cultural capital is the idea of fields. These are diverse social and institutional settings where people demonstrate and reproduce their personalities, and also, compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (Gaventa, 2003). A field can be understood as a network or set of relationships which may be educational, religious, or cultural (Navarro, 2006). People experience power in different ways depending on which field they are in (Gaventa, 2003). Therefore, this theory “can be used to explain how people can resist power and domination in one [field] and express complicity in another”

(Moncrieffe, 2006, p. 37). An example of this could be power of military members within the military and the transition of that power to a civilian setting. Bourdieu (1984) explains this relationship as “an adherence to relations of order which, because they structure inseparably both the real world and the thought world, are accepted as self-evident” (p. 471).

A strong attraction of Bourdieu’s Cultural Capital Theory is its commitment to the process of change within communities. Research using this theory can aid in revealing the power relations that are often invisible by habitus and misrecognition (Navarro, 2006). The use of Symbolic Interactionism Theory can further investigate this change with a narrower focus. These different, but related fields can be used to study how veterans communicate through symbols to create meaning and change within themselves and within society through repeated, meaningful interactions based around symbolic objects.

***Limitations and critiques of Cultural Capital Theory.*** As with any research concept or theory, there are critics of Cultural Capital Theory. Many think the theory is too vague and does not speak to other influences. Sullivan (2002) argues that the CCT needs theoretical clarity (Sullivan, 2002). It has also been disputed that Bourdieu’s CCT and concept of habitus does not consider a person’s agency or consciousness (DiMaggio, 1979; King, 2000). Related to this, Van de Werfhorst (2010) contends that the major drawback of this theory is Bourdieu does not include the use of community education and other organizations that help increase cultural capital. There are counters to each of these critics. There are studies that effectively show a person’s agency and education leads to cultural capital and community mobility (Denzin, 1992). Community education programs research may contribute to the importance of community education.

**Symbolic Interactionism.** Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical framework that places interactions and human agency at the center of social life (Sandstorm, Martin & Fine, 2010) rather than on personality, or the influence of other individuals (Charon, 2007; Mead, 1939; Meltzer, Petras & Reynolds, 1975; Stryker, 1980). This framework argues that objects change meaning because the individual perspective of an object changes and therefore they change their definition of that object, not because objects themselves are being transformed (Meltzer, 1972). The same can be said about the self (Goffman, 1959).

An example of symbolic interactionism would be the swastika symbol. Many associate it's meaning with that of Hitler's Nazi Germany. It is perceived as a symbol of hate and tied to a specific identity of evil. I shared these views and was surprised to learn that instead, the swastika was used as a symbol of religion, peace, and good luck before Hitler's terror changed the meaning of this emblem. The symbol itself never changed physical form; however, its' meaning now carries a very dark and evil symbolic meaning because it is the meaning people in a society assigned to it. Thus, situations such as the swastika symbol can be examined through this theoretical framework to illuminate patterns of self-identity tied to objects and self that are unique in a social setting (Reynolds, 2003).

Symbolic Interactionism includes the construct of self and the assumption that people and groups are influenced by cultural and social processes (Cockerham, 1978). Symbolic interaction uses language or symbolic inter-changes to make and revise meaning of their self and culture (Prus, 1996). This process of interacting within a community allows one to develop definitions of their reality.

Familiar and common symbols of self and objects are used to build the view of community (Prus,1996). It is this concept along with the notion of self, practice reflectivity, the

practice of participating in human interchange, developing skills, and other collective behaviors that are essential to the view of interactionism (Prus, 1996). Furthermore, Symbolic Interactionism can be explored to illuminate patterns of self-identity tied to objects and self that are unique in a social setting (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Symbolic Interactionism Theory adds a micro-level perspective to the study of sociology and advances the understanding of sociological processes, and may either stand alone or add a link between micro and macro levels of theory (Manis & Meltzer, 1967). This means one can use Symbolic Interactionism Theory as a single theory and framework for studying a social phenomenon, or it can be used in conjunction with other larger theories to help explain a social phenomenon.

*Assumptions.* To understand the concepts of symbolic interaction, it is critical to understand the assumptions and key concepts. Though there are a few versions of assumptions related to Symbolic Interactionism, this study follows Larossa and Reitzes's (1993) description. This layout, while similar to others, allows for ease of understanding. Their work describes seven assumptions that reflect three central themes of Symbolic Interactionism (Larossa & Reitzes', 1993).

The first theme discusses the significance of meanings for human behavior. For this section Blumer's (1969) three premises include people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that the things have to them, meaning arises in the process of interaction between people, and meaning are handled in and modified through an interpretive process by the person in dealing with things he or she encounter. Thus, people give meaning to objects based on their encounter with the object. The meaning is then made through a process of interpreting, judging, and adjusting to their others, their environment and the situation. Obviously, this is a forever changing environment and so too is their meaning, based on the social context.

The second theme includes the development of a self-concept. Symbolic Interactionists do not believe our behavior is determined, instead they contend that it forms through our social and active self (Lorassa & Reitzes', 1993). This includes the following two assumptions that individuals are not born with a sense of self, they develop it through social interaction and once self-concepts are developed, they provide an important motive for behavior (Lorassa & Reitzes, 1993). This concept of developing self-concept not being predetermined, but learned through social interaction, was first considered by Cooley (1902). This includes the discussion of the looking glass self. Self-values, self-beliefs, self-feelings and positive self-assumptions are fundamental to Symbolic Interactionism and influence behavior.

The third theme relates to assumptions about society. All Symbolic Interactionism founders focused on social process as a vital part of understanding our world in relation to individual freedom and societal constraints (Maines, 1977; Maines, 1979). These assumptions included the idea that individuals and small groups are influenced by larger cultural and societal processes and it is through social interaction in everyday situations that individuals work out the details for social structure (Maines, 1977; Maines, 1979). Hence, for those who follow a Symbolic Interactionist view, think that individual behavior is constrained by societal norms and values. However, Maines (1977) and Maines (1979) believe that social structure is ever changing and therefore, does not completely determine behavior. For example, Thomas and Thomas (1928) argued that attitudes and situation also influenced human behavior.

These three themes of Symbolic Interactionism are described by seven assumptions that can lead to a better understanding of symbolic interaction studies. Understanding them can help develop a better research design and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Studies following Larossa and Reitzes' (1993) should consider incorporating human behavior, self-

concept, and society interactions. To study these many researchers began to organize into different schools of thought and research. The Chicago School is the school in which this research follows.

***Chicago School.*** Several variations of Symbolic Interaction Theory emerged in the 1950s and 1960s (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993; Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1975; Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Two main schools were suggested by Meltzer and Petras (1972): the Chicago School, headed by Blumer and the Iowa School, headed by Manfred Kuhn. Notable members of the Chicago school include Albion W. Small, William I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Burgess, Everett C. Hughes, Herbert Blumer, Howard Becker, Erving Goffman, Anselm Strauss, and Gary Fine (Lutter & Ackerman, 1996). Some important members of the Iowa school included Manfred Kuhn, Sheldon Stryker and Carl Couch (Carter & Fuller, 2015).

The Chicago School follows the ideals of reform and scientific social research. It was originally founded by Albion Small in 1892, before losing popularity (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). Later, in the 1950s its' popularity was reinvigorated (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). There were three important differences between the two schools: difference in methodology, view of human behavior, and process versus structure (Sandstorm, Martin & Fine, 2010).

As for the difference in methodology, Blumer's emphasis was on the interpretive process in the social construction. His inquiries were made through qualitative methods such as life histories, autobiographies and case studies including interviews and participant observation (Blumer, 1969). In contrast, Kuhn (1964) describes using positivisms views to form and test hypothesis using quantitative data and empirical analysis. Additionally, there are others who use

a combination of the two methods (mixed methods) for their research inquiry (Reynolds & Meltzer, 1973).

The schools also differ in their interpretation of human behavior. Blumer (1962) recognized the unpredictable features of human behavior in society through Mead's description of the "I" and "Me". However, Kuhn's focused on the "Me" and applied a version of role theory to explore the effects of self-image on one's behavior (Meltzer & Petras, 1972).

Finally, the third dispute was the difference in the importance of process and structure. In Blumer (1966), he emphasized the dynamic character of self and society and the negotiated character of social arrangements. Kuhn described the self as a structure of stable attitudes derived from social roles (Hickman & Kuhn, 1956).

*Symbolic Interactionism and the military.* Goffman (1959) describes the Army as one example of how individual judgment of self is almost completely in the hands of other people who are in control of their physical and social environment in isolation, which, he terms total institutions. These total institutions redefine a person's identity from civilian to combat fighter, which is necessary for the production of war fighters, through a series of humiliations, deprivations, and degradations of self by isolating them and taking away their property and name (Goffman, 1959). Gradually, a new obedient self-image replaces the past independent view of self (Goffman, 1959). Hence, a veteran's perception of their symbolic self relies on how well they listen and fulfill orders from higher ranking authorities. "Organized combat is the activity by which the Army and the military in general is most differentiated from other social organizations ... their function is to fight" (Cockerham, 1978, p. 1) Additionally, Charon (2007) designates our past as a social object that we use to work through situations. Pursing happiness

and freedom for our self is an important human quality that arises because humans possess a sense of self that is socially created (Charon, 2007).

Markus and Schwartz (2010) define choice as “what enables each person to pursue precisely those objects and activities that best satisfy his or her own preferences within the limits of his or her resources” however, they continue “there is bound to be someone, somewhere, who is deprived of the opportunity to pursue something of personal value” (p. 344). Thus, military veterans in a total institution can be denied choice and perceived as not being deprived of finding personal value and can be a key to difficulty in civilian adjustment.

In this light, veterans past military experiences with language, objects, and self could be classified as a total intuition. Symbolic interactionism is ever changing in the perception of self and objects. Therefore, it is in how agriculture changes the meaning of objects and self that may be most beneficial to veterans and enable them to confront anxiety, PTSD symptoms, and ultimately become part of a civilian community. Burton (2004) describes the “good farmer”, where he insists farming symbolizes (to the farmer and the community) that farmers become caretakers of the nation’s food supply: a service familiar to military veterans. He continues to discuss how farmers form an identity past a new farm and become accustomed to their new role of farmer, symbolic meanings morph from new meanings and behaviors to those of an experienced farmer (Burton, 2004). In this, we can see the symbolic meanings of military culture will morph to those of the identity of farmer with in a community and move away from that of fear, guilt, and constraints of total institutions and thus, fulfilling physiological, safety, belonging and esteem levels of Maslow’s pyramid to achieve their individual potential or self-actualization (Maslow, 1943).



*Strengths and limitations or critics of Symbolic Interactionism Theory.* For more than 80 years, Symbolic Interaction Theory has been used and admired by researchers both in sociology and in other disciplines. Its many strengths have led to deeper understandings about human communication behavior in a multitude of settings. However, Symbolic Interaction Theory is not exempt from criticism. Many of its opponents believe the theory is too broad and does not address other critical factors which lead to behavior (Meltzer, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975). Looking at both the strengths and weakness, we can better understand this theory.

The strengths of Symbolic Interactionism are in its ability to describe the individual at the small scale. The theory follows a direct path from the self to self in society (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). It highlights the connection between the meaning of symbols and a person's behavior that may be predictable (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003). It is critical in exploring small-scale human interactions (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Symbolic interactionism also acknowledges the dynamic perceptions of reality (Blumer, 1969). It agrees that humans are always learning and that learning is taking place in the social environment (Blumer, 1969). In this social environment, people are active participants who shape their social world through creativity and thought, changing their perception of objects of socialization (Blumer, 1969). It is because of these many strengths, that Symbolic Interactionism is widely admired and used.

While it is easy to see the strengths of Symbolic Interactionism, it is also imperative to discuss and address the criticisms. Some critics assert that Symbolic Interactionism's concepts are too vague to be useful and do not explicitly make any precise meaning-making processes and communication behaviors (Denzin, 1969; Kuhn, 1964; Lichtman, 1970; Meltzler, Petras, & Reynolds, 1975). Due to this vagueness or its subjective interpretations, Symbolic Interactionism can be difficult to quantify (or test) and can intensify methodological difficulties (Meltzler,

Petras & Reynold, 1975). Supporters justify its' use by asserting that Symbolic Interactionism is not one integrated theory, but a framework that can support many specific theories (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003; Charon, 2007).

Another criticism involves the weight Mead puts on the “self” having control over their reality (Huber, 1973; Kanter, 1972; Kuhn, 1964). This view, held by some objectors overlooks the observation that is typically ignored, whereas people do not become the makers of their reality and live in a world that extends beyond their control. Symbolic Interactionism theorists believe that if the ‘actors’ define the situation is real, it becomes reality (Blumer, 1969). However, this conceived notion is challenged by Erving Goffman (1974), pioneer of the dramaturgical approach, who argues that while this notion is true, it ignores physical reality. In opposition to Goffman (1974), Symbolic Interactionist theorists maintain the notion of a middle ground between the two beliefs. This area between freedom of choice and external constraint in which theorists still recognize the facts behind constraint, yet understand the underlining significance of shared meanings (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003; Charon, 2007) is commonly respected by those who follow this school.

Other critics hint at the absence of additional crucial concepts such as emotions and self-esteem exists in Symbolic Interactionism (Reynolds & Herman-Kinney, 2003) and is problematic. Their main objection is that while the formation of self occurs, the evaluation of self does not (Kuhn, 1964). Proponents of the theory suggest that Symbolic Interactionism fits well with the study of how emotions effect our behavior. However, researchers agree that self-esteem is not a focus. It was not part of what Mead and other Symbolic Interactionists chose to concentrate their inquiries.

Finally, opponents argue that Symbolic Interactionism is not appropriate for studies of large-scale social structures (Denzin, 1969, Gouldner, 1970; Manis and Meltzer, 1978). However, it is possible to investigate the macro-social structure of a community or society by observing the development through a micro-level of Symbolic Interactionism (Cohen, 1985). Symbolic Interactionists, as well as, social constructivists can conduct complementary integrated research that finds meaning in society through repeated, meaningful interactions based around symbolic gestures (Cohen, 1985). They're different fields, but related ideas. Symbolic Interactionism can serve as the link between a micro and macro theory. As an example, Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theory can be combined to study a society.

Symbolic Interaction has its' opponents, and yet remains a highly-used approach in research. The theory's attention to the micro-level is a sought-out as a deviation from other macro-theories. It is useful as a part of studies from many other disciplines that wish to study social interactions between individuals. Nevertheless, knowing the criticisms helps to define this study's research methods, stay true to the theory, and address the weaknesses.

### **Justification in using Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism in research**

Though it can be debated that it is not often or accurately utilized, I would argue that military veterans typically have the human, social, symbolic, and economical capital to acclimate to the civilian world. Each idea has been studied in works such as Negrus's (2007) essay on veterans' human capital; Hinojosa and Hinojosas's (2011) social capital research on the reintegration of military veterans; and Albertson, Irving and Best, (2015) social capital study on veterans' transitions in civilian life. Where veterans seem to lack community capital is in the area of cultural capital. This cultural capital could help veterans in their process of connecting to the civilian world. Their culture (the military unit) and thus, their capital has become a part of their

past. It was imperative that this study explored how military veterans are able to create a new career and life in agriculture, building cultural capital in a civilian society through adult farming programs. These programs offer training in skills, connection through networks, often resources or connection to resources for startup and sustainability of a farm. They are also helping to foster cultural capital. In response, the veteran and the community's perception of themselves and those veterans transforms.

However, it is between individuals that much of this work is done. By utilizing Symbolic Interactionism, I explored where cultural capital fails to inquire on the micro-level. This research uses these different but related fields to examine how individuals (veterans) communicate through symbols. These symbols are used to create meaning and change within themselves and within society (community) through repeated, meaningful interactions based around symbolic gestures. Pierre Bourdieu rethought class and hegemony in terms of social class. He argued that this encompasses financial capital, social capital, cultural capital, and symbolic capital or use of symbols (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) combined Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theory to explain how cultural capital can lend to success and connection in a way that outsiders of that culture cannot.

Symbolic Interactionism is a micro sociology or social psychology theory that can be used to investigate how veterans use symbols to interact and communicate with each other. Objects such as, the American flag and boots; and language such as acronyms are examples of symbolic interaction that often occur between military members or military veterans. On the other hand, Cultural Capital Theory with Social Constructionism views is a macro sociology theory. It investigates how we as a society use abstract concepts and principles, such as our beliefs and values in a symbolic way to build cultural capital. Thus, "the symbols of community

are mental constructs; they provide people with the means to make meaning. In so doing, they also provide one with the means to express the particular meaning which the community has for them” (Cohen, 1985, p. 19).

As Denzin (1989) states, this multilevel perception of interaction lends to a central problem of the examination of how interacting individuals connect their lived experiences to the cultural representation of those experiences (Denzin, 1989; Johnson, 1986). Denzin (1989) does not view the tension as a “show stopper”. Instead, he argues that change to the theory is needed: “I will argue that a tradition of cultural studies (and criticism) has always lurked beneath the surfaces in Symbolic Interactionism. It is necessary, then, to transform the interactionist theory of communication into an interactionist theory of culture” (Denzin, 1989, p.98).

Thus, Denzin (1989) calls for the increase in the seldom used practice of applying both Symbolic Interactionism and cultural studies to understand that symbolic interactions create figurative societies and that interactionists can fit this problematic merge into the greater picture or story; one in which, involves exploring the communication process that builds a shared meaning within a community (Denzin, 1989). As an example, he discusses Bourdieu’s (1986) use of Symbolic interaction with economic, social, and cultural capital, making it clear that the two have the potential to work well together to create well conducted qualitative research.

Specifically, this research explored the individual experiences of veterans who pursue the occupation of agricultural experiences and social structures in order to understand interrelations, as well as the co-effects on one another. This participation first occurred through interactions with other veterans within a shared social group (or the farming program). This then developed into relationships with civilian counterparts within the community. By using Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theory (or a social constructionist view), this study explored

the changes that took place due to the symbolic interaction both within the individuals as well as, adjustments of larger perceptions communities (Denzin, 1992) have on these veterans.

Bourdieu (1986) believed that symbolic interactions and social, cultural and financial capital were connected and reliant on each other. Therefore, to incorporate Symbolic Interactionism into one area of community capital is to incorporate them into all. Since community capitals operate on multi levels from small intimate groups (Bourdieu, 1986; Portes & Landolt, 1996) to entire societies (Putman, 2000), it is often misunderstood and most investigations omit the much-needed micro-sociological perspective (such as Symbolic Interaction) to show the path to building social and cultural capital (Patulny, Siminski, & Mendolia, 2014). Feigenberg et al., (2003) argues that there is investigational research which states that social interaction cultivates social capital. Considering social and cultural capital are so closely related, I contended that the same can be said for cultural capital and social interaction.

Thus, Symbolic Interactionism worked well in this study because it was applicable to studying interactions between veterans, their farming program, and their community. This study used the Symbolic Interactionism Theory in order to provide a foundation, as well as context for the questions I investigated (Herman & Reynolds, 1994). It used Symbolic Interactionism to show the growth veterans make as they journey through programs to become a farmer and build community capital within their new community. Cohen (1985) explained how the practice of cultural studies try to uncover the deep belief system that is not readily identified in daily life.

Examining a veterans' symbolic interactions was critical to understanding their change in behavior in addition to their ability to acclimate back into a civilian culture. Although there are studies that examined veterans in farming such as, Burton (2004) and there are additional studies

which have explored veterans with the lens of Symbolic Interactionism Theory such as, Cockerham (1979) and Faris (1995); to my knowledge, none have collectively used Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interaction Theories to explore the relationship between farming, veterans, a farming education program, and their community. Therefore, this study was unique in the conjoining of both Culture Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theory to explore veterans in adult agricultural educational programs.

To visualize how Pierre Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Framework was used to study military veterans Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interaction, I have constructed a concept map [Figure 1]. Here, the idea is that military veterans is using agricultural education programs to build cultural capital. This formation of capital is constructed through three main concepts, habitus, capital, and field. All three of these concepts utilize Symbolic Interaction to create meaning and construct an identity within a community. Actively learning agricultural skills and/or knowledge leads to new skills, new symbols of capital, and a new meaning within a new setting. Having accomplished this, the veteran has now built on their pre-existing social, human and financial capital leading to social mobility and finally and an increase in resilience. This resilience leads to the decrease in PTSD and moral injury symptoms. All of above, assist the veteran in acclimating to the civilian world with newly constructed cultural capital. This framework is below [Figure 1].

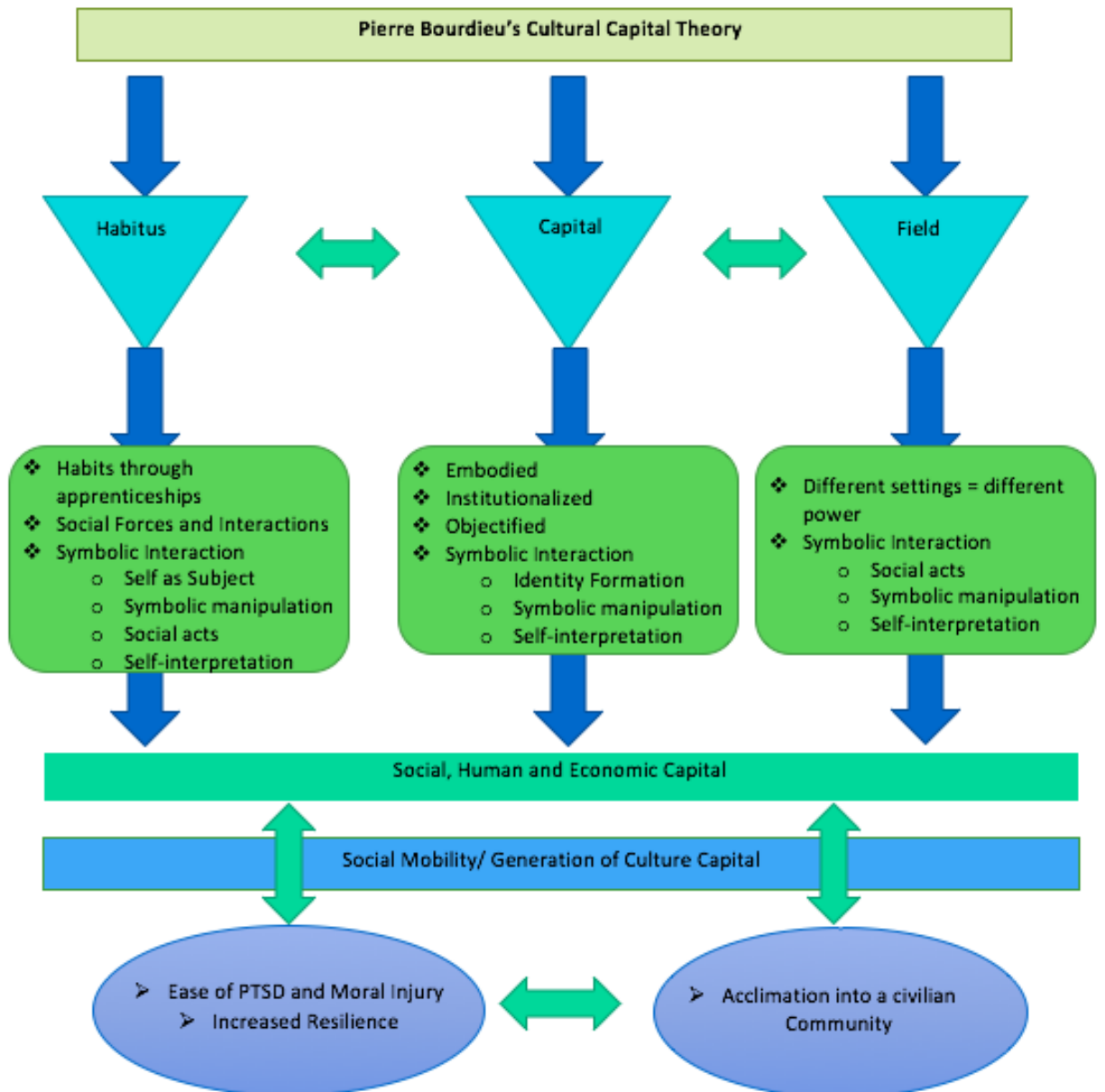


Figure 1. Research Concept Map

### Summary of Theoretical Framework

Cultural Capital Theory and Symbolic Interaction Theory provided conceptual frameworks as a way to view the social capital development in farming programs that serve



veterans. Formative work conducted in cultural capital and symbolic interaction by Pierre Bourdieu (1986) were reviewed. Vital cultural capital and symbolic interaction constructs which informed this study were discussed. Further investigation of the constructs which were identified, through a review of Cultural Capital Theory also occurred. The methodology utilized was derived from this study's research questions and these theoretical frameworks and will be discussed in the proceeding chapter.

Exploring interactions between military veterans participating in an agricultural education program are imperative to understanding changes taking place. Using Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theory, I illustrate how military veterans are acclimating to the civilian world. While Cultural Capital Theory research adheres to a macro-theory lens, Symbolic Interactionism Theory has the ability to look at veterans' interactions on a micro level. For this, it was important to review the historical foundations, assumptions, key concepts, strengths, and weaknesses of Cultural Capital and Symbolic Theories to ensure this research remains genuine to each.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how an adult agricultural educational program serves military veterans. It followed Creswell's (1998) bound ethnographic case-study design to capture the complex and in-depth understanding of this group. The methods utilized include naturalistic unstructured observer-participant observation, focus group, and semi-structured interviews (Yin, 2014).

This study investigated how military veterans are relating and making new meanings of familiar military symbolism in an agricultural educational context through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969) and Cultural Capital Theories (Bourdieu, 1986). The first step was collecting naturalistic unstructured observations of The Operation Veteran Farming program located at Sustainable Agriculture Farm Center (SAFC). This occurred over a four-month duration, one weekend a month for two days. Following the second observations, Veteran program participants were asked to participate in a focus group. If they signed consent to participate in the focus group, they were also asked to first fill out a questionnaire. Lastly, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore use of symbolism in program participation and identity formation. Particularly, the following research question and three supporting questions guided this study:

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

*Operational questions:*

1. How does this peer group of military veterans socialize within the adult agriculture education program?
2. How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program?
3. Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?

**The Case**

Sustainable Agriculture Farm Center (SAFC) was created to help attack the problem of food access and food security (SAFC, 2017). It has a goal of providing education that will lead to sustainable and equitable food (SAFC, 2017). Its farm's seasonal harvests are sold in mobile markets and taken to neighborhoods in DC that are considered a food deserts (SAFC, 2017). The center houses a few different programs. One of those programs is the Operational Veteran Farming program (OVFP). This program is a military veteran focused adult agricultural education program that aids veterans in the exploration of transitioning into a new career as a farmer in the civilian sector. The OVFP argues that farming takes a lot of resources and commitment; thus, this program allows veterans to explore farming without the use of their own resources (SAFC, 2017). This program claims that military veterans have the ability to lead, to work independently or as part of a team; to plan, adapt, overcome crises, and to accomplish the mission, which is needing in farming (SAFC, 2017).

The Operation Veteran Farming program is a 12-month training program that offers workshops and connections to land access. In addition, program participants are required to complete 40 hours of hands-on work at SAFC's farm. This work includes livestock, organic

produce, greenhouse production, business planning, and pest control training (SAFC, 2017). It links participants with food access and distribution, sourcing, opportunities to work with local chefs and retailers, and farm and nutrition education. Later, there is the possibility to complete a second-year of paid training.

This program educates its veterans on farming techniques through hands on training and small group lectures. This type of instruction mimics the education practices the military utilizes. This intentional tactic is used to ensure the veterans are comfortable with the instruction.

OVFP is located in Northern Virginia. It is in close proximity to D.C. and a military base. The mission is to train military veterans to be farmers. The program operated for the first five months of 2018 at Homestead, Cano Farms, Episcopal High School, and Plantation Park. The program encompassed both hands on and classroom instruction. The first meeting was held at Mount Vernon.

Homestead is a quite 500-acre plantation that is open to the public for touring. The estate is positioned on the Potomac River in Fairfax County, Virginia. It was original build and owned by George Washington's great grandfather and later expanded by George Washington (SAFC, 2017). The plantation consists of grand gardens and cultivated land. The farm grew tobacco, wheat, corn, hemp, cotton, and flax, and raised sheep (SAFC, 2017). The meeting room offered patriotic symbolism in the form of blue carpet with embroidered stars, a statue of an eagle, portraits of Martha and George Washington, and the American flag. The lecture took place in a u-shaped design. All the veterans faced each other with the instructor in the front middle of the room. Large Windows lined the room. From the window, you could see rolling hills that were green despite the cold, January weather.

An hour north of SAFC was a small farm that grew corn and raised cattle. Here, at Cano Farms, the veterans met to eat breakfast and learn hands on agricultural skills. Breakfast was served in a large, two story farm house. The wooden floors of a large living room opened up to a kitchen, both of which were lined with large windows. Outside the window was numerous acres of land that was recently planted. The cold rainy, February day limited visibility to only a few acres. Outside, a mile-long windy gravel path led to a grey metal greenhouse where seedlings were beginning to sprout. Two newly purchased orange tractors sat in front of the green house. A farm dog roamed around the property as rain began to set in and gain intensity. An old wooden fence divided the farm from the neighboring farms. The inside of the greenhouse had wooden pallets lined up along the walls. Down the middle of the greenhouse was tables that included planters.

Some of the instruction took place in a classroom on the campus of an Episcopal high school. During the week, the room was used for a general science course. The small windows along the side of the room housed small plants. The room was set up into two separate parts. The front part had tables and chairs in a U-shape. The back part of the room was tall tables with stools. The tables had lab equipment. The back of the room was a large cabinet filled with microscopes and glass tubes. Outside the classroom was a small greenhouse. Inside the greenhouse, lettuce and micro-greens were just starting to break through the soil. Roller carts allowed for the plants to be transported back and forth from the classroom.

Most of OVFP instruction took place on Plantation Park. Plantation Park is located in Fairfax County, Virginia. It was part of Homestead. It is now a museum owned and managed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (SAFC, 2017). The plantation encompasses 126 acres where the original house still stands. There is also gardens and a small sustainable farm.

OVFP uses the right side of the house as their headquarters (SAFC, 2017). Inside, the main classroom is set up with tables and chairs in a circle. Both sides of the room contain windows that line the walls. The front of the room looks out to a cobble stone circle drive way. Large bushes and trees that just started to bloom fill the well-manicured lawn. The back windows look out to acres of rolling pastures. Looking closely, a wooden fence lines the property in the distance. The winding drive into the property includes an incredible view of blooming Cherry Blossom trees.

### **Ontology and Epistemology**

The methodology of this study was shaped and influenced by my epistemological and ontological views. Creswell (1998) describe ontologies and epistemologies as ways of making meaning of the world. More specifically, epistemology is the study, theory, and justification of knowledge or how we gain knowledge of what we know (Daly, 2007; Creswell, 1998; Daly, 2007; Ramey & Grubb, 2009) or the philosophical assumptions we generate about the nature of existence (Daly, 2007).

As a social researcher, I align most with the constructionist or constructivist epistemology and ontology. Most literature does not make a distinction between these two and usually use the terms interchangeably. However, on page 58, Michael Crotty (1998) states, “It would appear useful, then, to reserve the term *constructivism* for the epistemological considerations focusing exclusively on ‘the meaning-making activity of the individual mind’ and the use *constructionism* where the focus includes ‘the collective generation [and transmission] of meaning...” (Patton, 2015, p.122). I interpret this to mean that the term constructivism is most normally used with psychological disciplines and constructionism mostly used in sociological disciplines. Because, the term constructivist is more often used in the field of cognitive

psychology or educational psychology and I am in more of a sociological discipline, I will stay consistent and use the term social constructionist.

A constructionist values each individual's unique experience (Patton, 2015). Knowledge is assembled by individuals through active and meaningful interactions within a social setting (Gergen, 1999; Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011; Patton, 2015). A constructionist understands the importance of our culture's influence on how we see and experience the world around us (Gergen, 1999; Patton, 2015). Simplified by Mead (1936), "if a thing is not recognized as true, then it does not function as true in the community" (p. 29).

Assumptions are important to understand constructionism more fully. Guba and Lincoln (1989) incorporated the following assumptions of constructionism: "Truth is a matter of consensus among informed and sophisticated constructors, not of correspondence with objective reality; facts have no meaning except within some value framework, hence there cannot be an objective assessment of any proposition; causes and effects do not exist except by imputation; phenomena can only be understood within the context in which they are studied... [and] cannot be generalized to another; data derived from constructivist inquiry... represent simply another construction to be taken into account in the move toward consensus" (pp. 44-45). It is through these assumptions that my research and meaning of the research takes form. Because, each case is assumed to be unique and not generalizable, I recognize that a constructionist uses primarily qualitative research methods to research how people see or create their collective truths between individuals within a culture or group. Facts will not stand alone within this culture and will need specific context to make sense of qualitative research.

Patton (2015) shared ten core elements of social constructionism that have framed my research. I used these to explore the culture within a farming program targeting military veterans.

Some critical elements that I shadowed included “inquire into the perceptions of reality shared by different groups of people; inquiry into how what is perceived as real is real in its consequences; capture and honor multiple perspectives; inquire in to the ways in which social groups come to share a worldview; be sensitive to the critical importance of context (including social, cultural, and economical) for understanding social constructions of reality; track the ways in which social constructions and worldviews change over time; deconstruct language and pay attention to the ways in which language as a social and cultural construction shapes, distorts, and structures perceptions of reality; and inquire into how power differentials affect and shape social constructions and perceptions of reality” (Patton, 2015, p.127).

Here, the focus is on interaction within social settings and specifically on the relationships between individuals with no single truth (Burr, 2003). Reality is then, created by the individuals in groups (Burr, 2003; Patton, 2015). I believe the learner arrives at his or her version of the truth and is influenced by his or her background and culture. Additionally, I reason that meaningful learning and understanding should be social or collaborative and include multiple individual perspectives being considered.

Therefore, I recognized an ethnographic case study approach as the best methodology to study my interest of symbolic interaction within the production of cultural capital between military veterans in an agricultural education program. Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1991) state ethnographic studies are mostly explored through the lens of Symbolic Interactionism Theory to understand communities. Ethnographers study how people communicate in a particular situation in which they find themselves and focus on the particular, instead of the general (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991). This methodology seeks to identify cultural



norms by observing the interactions and significant symbols of a group (Creswell, 1998; Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991; Murchison, 2010; Prus, 1996; Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

Furthermore, ethnography is used by many Symbolic Interactionism and Culture Capital theorists. Teague, Leith, and Green (2013) used an ethnographic approach to explore Symbolic Interactionism in safety communication in the workplace. Chong (2006) also used an ethnographic approach to study the ethnic identities and cultural capital of the Chinese opera in Singapore. Each of these articles examined the culture in which they were interested through ethnography methodologies.

Frey, Botan, Friedman, and Kreps (1991) underline Miller's (1969, p.9) definition of ethnographic research as "a particular tradition in social science that fundamentally depends on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, on their own terms" (p. 231). This conformed nicely with military veterans in a farming program. It was used to study the symbols and language they are mutually using to make meaning of their new civilian world and combat symptoms of PTSD and moral injury. Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps (1991) agree that the use of ethnography methodologies can be utilized to inform the reader about how a particular social issue is manifested in communication and conversely, can be examined on how it can be overcome.

Ethnography researchers often intend to study groups or cultures over a period of time. The goal of this type of research is to grasp the particular group or culture through observer immersion into the culture or group (Murchison, 2010). Various methods are used to complete this research much like case studies. The difference is in an ethnography, the researcher is often immersed at some level, within the group for an extended period of time (Murchison, 2010). This allows for more detailed data to be collected.

Case study and ethnographic data is usually analyzed by coding. Making the results, such as the ones in this study, typically not generalizable yet, transferable. Like ethnographies, generalizing is often not the aim of case studies because one person or small group does not represent all similar groups or situations (Yin, 2014). Results are usually only established about the participants being observed. The methodologies in this study are not meant to establish cause/effect connections between variables as is the case in a more positivist tradition. Instead the results are considered transferable because researchers "suggest further questions, hypotheses, and future implications," and present the results as "directions and questions" (Lauer & Asher, 1998, p.32).

## **Methods**

This study utilized a qualitative design to focus on the ways in which veterans engage while using symbols of self and objects within an adult agricultural program. The decision to implement a qualitative method was based on the desire to capture the unique, complex, and in-depth understanding of this group and also, was the best method for answering the particular research questions. Qualitative social research, such as case study methods, and ethnography, are well-suited to the study of "non-quantifiable features of social life" (Carspecken, 1994, p. 3). While ethnographic case studies can incorporate a wide range of methods (Zucker, 2009), I chose to rely purely on qualitative inquiry based on my ontological views that are dictated by the theoretical framework and my epistemological positioning. The methods of inquiry employed for this ethnographic case study included naturalistic participant observation, informal conversation within a focus group, and in-depth one-on-one interviews. This triangulation of methods is often associated with a case study.

Furthermore, this study followed a naturalistic assumption, which Frey, Botan, and Kreps (1999) state is the belief that phenomena should be studied in context. I chose to follow a naturalistic inquiry as a way to focus on how people behave when absorbed in genuine life experiences in their natural settings (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999). Naturalists also tend to use ethnography as a methodology in their study to produce a rich, naturalistic description of people in a culture (Frey, Botan & Kreps, 1999; Geertz, 1994). Geertz (1994) advises studying culture in a symbolic way directing attention to the core symbols, underlying structures, principles, behaviors, and social actions. This describes a more naturalistic designed research which is often correlated with or simply called an ethnography (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991, p. 231).

Ethnography is a research method based in anthropological and sociological traditions and is used to gain insight into “the detailed interactive and structural fabric of social settings that social researchers suspect to be sociologically interesting” (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 14). It is considered subjective rather than objective (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1991). This type of inquiry seeks to describe, understand, predict, and or illustrate the procedures regulating the processes of an individual, group and/or organization (Woodside, 2010).

The focus of such ethnography research is to describe how people communicate in a specific context (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1991). Specifically, “ethnography involves examining the patterned interactions and significant symbols of specific cultural groups to identify the cultural norms (rules) that direct their behaviors and the meanings people ascribe to each other’s behaviors” (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1991, p. 229). Further, ethnography is described as being most closely correlated with the Symbolic Interactionism approach to understanding communication and focuses on the particular rather than general interactions (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1991).

Case study research (CSR) is a specialized type of qualitative research inquiry method, in that it attempts to describe multiple information utilizing multiple processes to study a phenomenon which contains many variables of which the researcher cannot control (Yin, 2014). Case studies examine individuals or small groups in a particular setting to investigate a complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2014). These studies utilize research that is often gathered through a triangulation of data sources, theories and qualitative methods, such as interviews and observations to address questions of how or why (Yin, 2014).

Thus, because military veteran culture is often significantly different from civilian culture and may hold different value systems, it creates the space for ethnographic research (Collins, 1998). However, this study was designed as a single case, bounded case study as described by Creswell (1998) and Woodside (2010), meaning it is one case studied and bounded to that case. It followed a case study design in part because it used triangulation of data sources through participants and educators of the program, triangulation of theories by using Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theories and triangulation of methods such as observations, focus group discussion, and interviews were utilized. It was limited to the participants of this particular program and the time periods documented by the group activity. This particular study is therefore described and designed as an ethnographic case study. The reasons behind using an ethnographic case study design includes my decision to study a localized agricultural education program through the triangulation of different methods and its setting in which the theoretical implications may not be easily repeated among other similar programs and cultures that do not contain veterans.

Frey, Botan, and Kreps (1999) discuss the position an observer takes while observing participants, which can be categorized through four types that include: complete participant,

when the researcher is fully involved in a social setting and does not let the researched know they are being reviewed; participant-observer, the researcher is involved as fully as possible in a social situation and the researched know they are being studied; observer-participant, occurs when the researcher primarily observes and participates only to a limited degree; and complete observer, where the researcher does not interact with the group, they are strictly an observer. I chose the observer- participant role and only observed the participants. This also increased trustworthiness because, I attempted not to have influence on the behaviors, so the data collected was much more authentic. Thus, it is often assumed that people will project much more of their true feelings, reactions, and behaviors (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991; Murchison, 2010; Patton, 2015; Prus, 1996) Trustworthiness was increased because people were directly observed and data was recorded and collected through their own words. Another word, these data captured what people actually did rather than what the researcher perceives that they did. It also captured phenomena that were not picked up in an interview, which allowed for comprehensive data collection (Prus, 1996).

This inquiry allowed for real-world setting research. This real-world research can be used by participants and educators. Making the results critical to the participants and program that were observed and researched. This gave me, as the researcher the opportunity to make a true impact on adult agricultural education programs for military veterans. The data that comes from this “real world research setting” is much more detailed, trustworthy, and difficult would have been much more difficult to achieve with other types of experiments designs that can be conducted (Creswell; 1998; Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993; Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991; Huberman & Miles, 2002; Murchison, 2010; Patton, 2015; Prus, 1996).

Moreover, there are still many human behavioral topics that need to be studied in depth so that we can understand the processes taking place. However, some of these would be deemed unethical research methods. Naturalistic observation gave me as the researcher, the ability to collect data, without disturbing emotional well-being of the participants (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1991). In this case, I, the researcher had the ability to watch the natural process of veterans learning to farm without causing harm, specifically those veterans with PTSD and Moral Injury.

To summarize, my views align with that of social constructionism, and thus, I used triangulation of inquiry to gather all perspectives rather than the singular truth (Patton, 2015). I used, “a variety of data sources, ... different perspectives, and different methods [that] are pitted against one another in order to cross-check data and interpretations” (Denzin, 1978). Using both Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Capital Theories gave me different viewpoints on the same data. I interviewed and observed different perspectives of participants and non-participants. Finally, to be more specific, this research encompassed one-on-one interviewing, focus group discussion, and observation to ensure triangulation of methods. All of these together, helped ensure I completed a research project that was trustworthy, transferable, and answers some of the critiques of natural inquiry. The following chart shows the order my research was conducted [Figure 2].

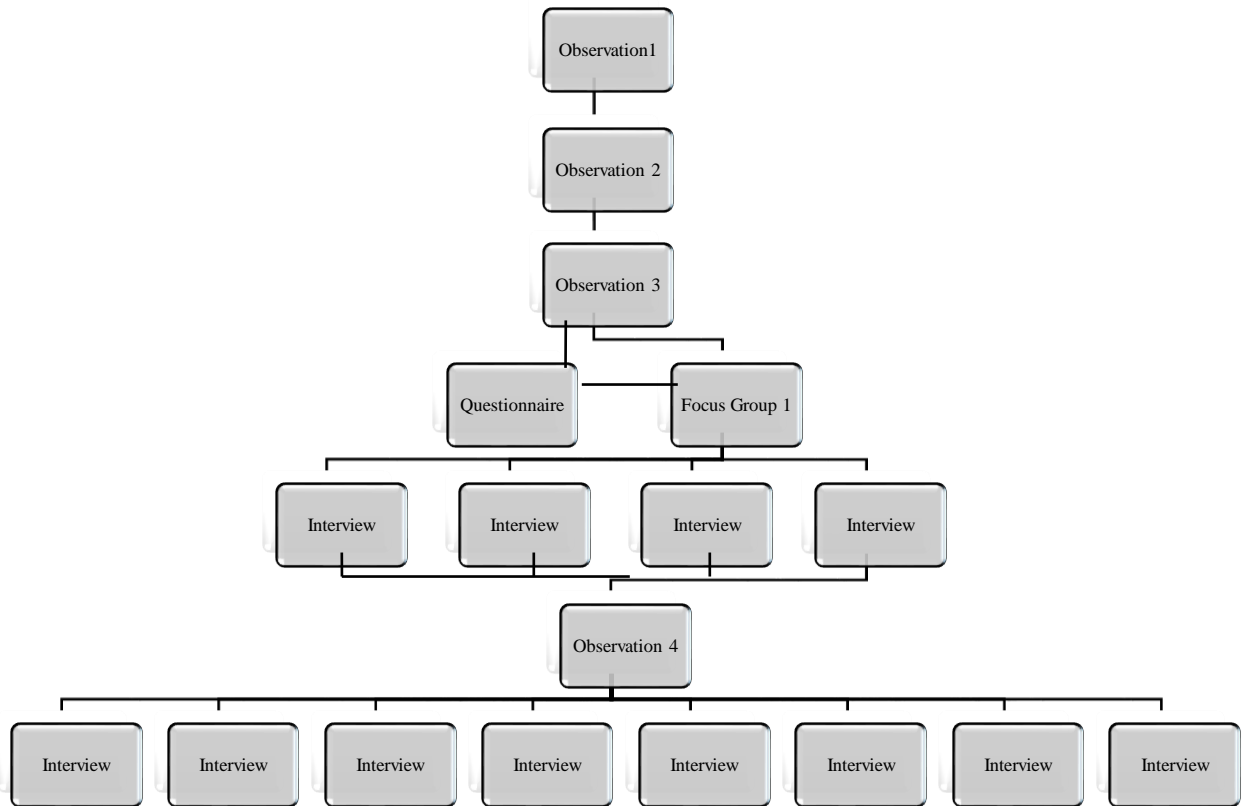


Figure 2. Research Design Map

**Data Collection**

An IRB request was filed with the Virginia Tech IRB prior to the start of the research (See Appendix A). Participants were informed of their rights to discontinue participation in the study at any time or request that their information not be used. The regular program participants (n=12), and program educators (n=3) were asked to participate in interviews and observations (See Appendix B and C). A request for members in the program to participate in the interview and focus group discussion was announced by the program leader. After the focus group had commenced, the first nine willing participants that were seen as key actors and responded to a request for interviewing were selected for further in-depth interviews (Bailey, 2007). Participants were interviewed in person and indicated consent by signing a consent form prior to the

beginning of this research. This informed consent outlined the risk and benefits of participating in this project. Participants were informed of privacy policies including the rights to anonymity and the protection of data as well as the potential uses for the data including the possibility for publication in the future.

The program I studied met only once a month for one weekend a month. I met every month for four months. The fact that I am a fellow veteran who is farming gave me a slight advantage to gaining their trust. The more I was present and around the participants the more they trusted me and did not see me as a threat during their participation and observations. This ultimately led to them participating in a more natural state.

Observations, focus groups, and interviews were used to explore the transformations taking place from different points of view, including military veterans in the program and leaders of the program (See Appendix G-K). The data collected during this process included audio recordings of interviews and focus groups. A consent form was signed and reviewed before each method (see appendix D - F).

My observational data was collected on the participants and everyone with whom they interacted, from the time the program started to the time it ended each day. The participants interacted throughout the entire day, and I holistically collected data to form a more complete picture of them and the program. Bailey (2006) describes structured and unstructured observations. The difference is the planning of what will be observed. I utilized unstructured observations thus, I observed all behaviors. To reiterate, my observations were natural observations, where I observed veterans participating in the program in their natural state. My focus of these observations included the environment, the objects within that environment, the



people involved, the activities they participate in, their goals, and their behavior. As Bailey (2006) suggested, I paid close attention to the smells, sounds, objects, body language and speech.

As predicted, it was important for me to conduct both a focus group and one-on-one interviews. This was to create a triangulation of data on the participants and the educators. I conducted a focus group that included 12 people. Prior to the discussion, veterans were asked to sign the consent form and fill out a quick questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed as open ended questions to overarching themes that needed to be answered. The veterans were then asked to speak openly. Veterans seemed to be more comfortable speaking in groups with their fellow veterans and this may have contributed to me yielding more data. To foster this type of conversation, I chose a comfortable place at the site of training. Prearranged prompts assisted the conversation. Focus group discussion lasted approximately 60 minutes. Individual semi-structured interviews were arranged after the focus group interviews. I chose participants who were willing to consent to an interview. These interviews lasted no more than 60 minutes and include participants of the program and program staff. Discussions from the audio transcripts were transcribed into word documents. Names were removed from the documents. Interviews were saved as an encrypted file on a university laptop and kept in a locked office drawer in my ALCE graduate student office. The following table includes the research activity that I completed and the month I complete the activity.

*Table 1*

*Research Timeline*

Month	Research Activity
November 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct “meet and greet” meeting with the gatekeeper and other key personnel</li> </ul>
December 2017	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Conduct Prospectus</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receive Feedback and edited first three chapters</li> </ul>
January 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visit site and took notes on program location</li> </ul>
February 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Received IRB approval for dissertation research</li> <li>• Met and explained study to the program participants.</li> <li>• Gain consent from participants</li> <li>• Observation 1</li> <li>• Write field notes and audit journal</li> <li>• Transcribed and coded data</li> </ul>
March 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation 2</li> <li>• Focus group</li> <li>• Wrote field notes and audit journal</li> <li>• Transcribed and coded data</li> </ul>
April 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation 3</li> <li>• Semi-structured Interviews</li> <li>• Write field notes and audit journal</li> <li>• Transcribed and coded data</li> </ul>
May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observation 4</li> <li>• Finished Semi-structured interviews with participant's program director</li> <li>• Write field notes and audit journal</li> <li>• Transcribed and coded data</li> </ul>
June 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conducted member checks</li> <li>• Finished coding</li> <li>• Found themes</li> <li>• Analyzed</li> </ul>
June/ July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write and revise</li> <li>• Finish remaining chapters</li> </ul>
July 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Finish final revisions</li> <li>• Turn into committee</li> <li>• Receive approval to defend</li> </ul>
July – August 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Defend research</li> <li>• Final revisions to the grad school</li> </ul>

### **Sampling and Recruitment**

As defined by Patton (1990), purposeful (nonrandom) sampling was implemented for the selection of participants based on membership in the program and their self-identification as a military veteran or educator of the program. This project was completed in person, at the program site. Participants were recruited using convenience sampling. This sample was selected

based upon convenience and existing relationships with persons involved in the group. As mentioned in the researcher reflection section, I served in the armed forces as a SGT in the U.S. Army. I am also a farmer and therefore, had natural established connections with the participants. Additionally, my advisor had an established relationship with the program director and she was able to make important initial introductions.

### **Research Analysis**

Observations, focus group, and one-on-one interviews were reviewed, transcribed, coded, themed, and analyzed. My analysis of the past four months is from what I observed taking place, conversations had during the focus group and data collected during the one-on-one interviews. The observations were conducted as close to a naturalistic observation as possible. As the observer-participant, it was my intent to stay separated from the activities and learning environment.

Interviews were conducted both as a focus group and as one on one interviews. There were twelve veteran program participants that joined the focus group. The discussion occurred March 24, 2018 in a high school classroom setting with lab tables and chairs organized into a U-shape. Some participants chose to stand, but remained near their chairs in the U-shape formation. The setting was a relaxed and inviting atmosphere with which the veteran program participants were familiar. They discussed the topic while sipping coffee and eating snacks. A few of the veteran program participants were sitting behind the U-shape seats and were asked to move closer towards the front, to ensure they were part of the discussion, most participants moved.

The twelve one- on-one interviews occurred throughout a two-week period. The time and location were chosen based on convenience of the veteran program participants. There were four participants who signed consent, but did not participate in an interview. The participants were

asked to provide two photos. The first photo was to represent their time in the military. The second was to represent their time in this program. That is the only instruction the veteran program participants were given.

### **Data Analysis**

The text was coded using four stages introduced through the model proposed by Bryman (2008). Following his outline, stage one included looking at the data as a whole and reading over the notes and transcriptions, making notes at the end, highlighting the overall idea, noting immediate major themes and any vital issues or events to group the cases into types and categories. Bryman's second stage included marking the text by using underlining, circling, and/or highlighting to begin the process of labeling for codes, highlighting key words, and noting any analytic ideas. Stage three comprised of compiling codes by marking the text to indicate themes or indicate what the text was about, review the codes for accuracy and to eliminate repetition and similar codes. After this process was complete, I added my interpretations, identified the significance, found interconnections between codes, and related the codes to my research questions and research literature (Bryman, 2008).

This research used code definitions to keep track of what is meant by each code I assign to the transcription. This definition's notebook was kept separate from the research. The notebook contained the name of the code, the date when the coding was completed, the definition, and how (if at all) the data relate to other codes. The codes came from selective coding. I transcribed them by hand and used Atlas. ti. I reported the findings using impressionistic tale, which blends realist and confessional tales to provide an account of the participants and the researcher as central characters (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 1999).

To code, I used both deductive and inductive procedures (Fereday& Muir-Cochrane, 2006). I started with deductive procedures and by reviewing the literature, and theoretical frameworks for ideas on coding themes. From there, I used deductive procedures to form new ideas about what to code for as I read through the interview transcriptions. I deducted a large number of codes from the works of Lofland et al. (2006) and Strauss (1987). The following [Table 2] are examples I deducted from:

*Table 2*

*Research Codes*

Lofland Data Analysis Coding Suggestions (Ethnographic Focus)		
Suggested Code	What to Code	Code Utilized
Acts	usually/ brief events	Team work Comradery Farming Conversation Walking Working
Activities	Of longer duration in a setting, people involved	Building Farming Planting Taking notes Listening Lectures Service Mission
Meanings	What directs participants' actions	Learning Military identity Military insignia Military patches Military uniform Military service Title Tools Language Education programs Symbolic tools Service Agricultural identity Autonomy

Participants	Peoples' involvement or adaption to a setting	Civilians Veterans Farmers Students Farm Educators Symbols Symbolic Meaning
Relationships	Between people, considered simultaneously	Veteran to veteran Veteran to educator Veteran to civilian Veteran to farmer
Settings	The entire context of the events under study	Farm Lunch Breakfast Class room Field trips Symbolic space
<b>Strauss Data Analysis Coding Suggestions (SI Theoretical based coding analysis)</b>		
<b>Code Suggestion</b>	<b>What to Code</b>	<b>Code Utilized</b>
Interactions	Interactions between people (Any meaning being made or symbols being used)	Veteran to veteran Veteran to educator Veteran to civilian Veteran to farmer Veteran to Farm Veteran to Symbol Veteran to Symbolic Meaning Veteran to education Veteran to the act of farming
Strategies and tactics	How participants complete task	Comradery Team work Tools used Symbols used to complete Language Body language Symbolic meanings Resilience Quality of life Decision making

## **Accountability and Sensitivity to Context**

The key to building trust and relationships needed to effectively conduct research is practicing accountability (Daly, 2007). It was imperative that I, as the researcher protected the participants in a number of ways and for a number of reasons. As military veterans, participants often have been involved in numerous hardships. Though there were no significant risks involved in their participation, some veterans could have found the topics and interview questions emotionally discomfoting. It was critical to protect interviewees from any harm that may have come from interviewing and asking questions that induce mental discomfort such as, bringing up difficult and inappropriate memories of service or readjustment challenges. Another essential consideration was ensuring that the names and identifiable characteristics of the participants were kept anonymous and that the interview was not identifiable to a particular person (Daly, 2007).

Because military veterans are a sensitive population and may offer sensitive information, I exhibited sensitivity to the context (Yardley, 2000). This was fostered by continued awareness of relationship building by way of introductions and light conversations with the participants before the focus group discussions and interviews. Sensitivity to the context also included close analysis and particular attention to the detail of the data. It was my intent to capture the holistic detail of observation data, focus group conversation, and interviews as so, the reader can assemble meaning and interpretation through this sound, reliable, transferable research.

## **Rigor, Trustworthiness, and Credibility**

Generalizability and transferability are two very different terms that are often mistakenly used interchangeably. Each are very important terminologies and confusion surrounding these two terms can lead to misleading results or misunderstandings of results (Marshall & Rossman,

2016). Research can be generalized, transferred, or, in some cases, both generalized and transferred. Understanding the difference helped me to convey these results correctly and avoid some criticisms by researchers and readers.

Quantitative research audiences can transfer the methods, results, and ideas from one study to their own research. Which means, a generalizable study can also be transferable (Huberman & Miles, 2012). Conversely, a transferable study is not always generalizable (Huberman & Miles, 2012). Transferability allows readers the option of using results in outside contexts. Generalizability is usually a difficult result to obtain in qualitative research because one person or a small group of people are not always reflective of a larger population (Huberman & Miles, 2012).

The intent is to make the results of this study transferable to another situation, so I kept a detailed record of the environment in which the research occurred to share in my final report (Huberman & Miles, 2012). Like this study, qualitative inquiry often involves human behavior research, which can be challenging to understand and often impossible to predict. Each individual is unique. These differences are not stagnant and change over a period of time (Daly, 2007) making comprehensive and definitive experiments in the social sciences impossible (Huberman & Miles, 2012). Therefore, this qualitative research (as most qualitative studies) did not aim to achieve predictable and controlled findings, but instead, a temporary understanding of the phenomena that maybe transferred in part to other studies (Patton, 2015).

Because human behavior is so critical, and applying research results to every future study is impractical, many researchers often aim to make their findings transferable or apply a similar method to a different study. Transferability does not involve broad claims; it hopes readers will make connections between parts of a study and their own life (Huberman & Miles, 2012). If



readers make enough of those connections, they may deduce that the results of their research would be the similar (Huberman & Miles, 2012). Therefore, they “transfer” the results of a particular study to another context. Readers may also decide that there are not enough similarities to make a study transferable to their own research, they may instead, decide to only use small parts of previous conducted studies.

Any research method can use transferability; however, it may be most appropriate in an ethnography and/or case study due to their size (Murchison, 2010; Yin, 2014). They often research only one subject or one group, and are unlikely to make generalized claims to other populations. The detail of the environment in which the study took place can make case studies and ethnographies excellent for transferability (Murchison, 2010; Yin, 2014).

It was my intention to highlight the culture of farming programs for military veterans. Though the purpose is not to generalize, I anticipate that my research will be used to look at the specific critical symbolic interactions taking place between military veterans in a farming program as they acclimate into the civilian world by building cultural capital. My research can be used as a starting point for transferable information across different fields and disciplines.

To complete this, I used purposeful sampling, collected thick descriptive data, developed thick description of the environment, utilized an audit trail, member checked, and practiced reflexivity. All of these can be used to increase transferability (Guba, 1981). Each of which add to the broader implications of my study and justify my claims of transferability.

It is important that this research included a rich “thick” description of the context or environment of which the research took place as well as, the data collected so, that readers could use the study in their own research. This “transferability” can only occur if characteristics match. This can only be assessed if the researcher provided adequate information necessary for others to

gain a “degree of fitness” (Guba, 1981, p. 86). My research contained a rich description of the farming program, the veterans participating in the program and the data collected from the program. This included how the data was collected. All in an attempt to increase trustworthiness of my research.

An audit trail helped with the description of the process and helped outsiders or readers to examine the processes I took to collect and analyze my data (Guba, 1981). Guba (1981) suggested field notes, journals, member checking and interview notes as a way of recording this audit trail. I compiled the field notes, journals and interview notes into a collective document. My advisor and doctoral committee served as my outside auditors or external to the project data collection.

Member checking occurred during the interview processes. As the focus group occurred, I asked if clarifying questions and repeated information back to the participants to ensure the data was correct. The one-on-one interview process was much the same. However, at the end of each individual interview, I reviewed the interview and asked the participants and educators for if there was anything they would like to change or if anything needed to be further clarified.

Finally, I practiced continuous reflexivity. During my dissertation defense as well as, in my dissertation document, I disclosed how my epistemological and ontological assumptions influenced my research and research questions (Ruby, 1980). Guba (1981) reiterates Spradley’s (1978) suggestion that a daily journal should be kept, recording self-analyses. Keeping this kind of reflexivity shows the reader that you are transparent about your bias (Starks, Brown & Trinidad, 2007). Audio transcripts were also analyzed to search for any biases indicated within dialogues amongst the participants (Patton, 2015).

The above methods were utilized to ensure my research stays true to rigorous ethnography research. It is my claim that other adult agricultural education programs that are being conducted for military veterans will be able to use aspects of my research to study their program to increase military veterans' participation in an adult agricultural education program. This "transferability" is possible because of the detail that went into my design, research, data, and overall depiction of the program.

### **Ethical Considerations**

All participants of this study were treated in accordance with the guidelines set forth by Virginia Tech Institutional Review Boards. As stated in the above section, there were minimal risk associated with this study. However, military veterans are a sensitive population that could have become uncomfortable with the questions that they are being asked. Their military experiences were not the direct focus of these interviews, but they could have decided to discuss a particular instance that they experienced while serving in the military. To ensure they felt as safe and comfortable as possible, interviewees were reminded throughout the interview that they did not need to answer any question they feel uncomfortable answering. Every effort was made not to pressure the respondent to answer a particular question. Furthermore, they were reminded that their identity will be kept confidential.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore how an adult agricultural education program designed for military veterans contributes to the formation of veterans' cultural capital and human development, such as overcoming PTSD and moral injury symptoms. The goal was to identify critical reinterpretations of objects and self in verbal and non-verbal communications among veterans and their influence on socialization, group interactions, and concepts of self that can be later applied to a civilian culture, creating opportunities for social mobility.

Findings from this study indicate participation and creation of a civilian identity is positively impacted when familiar symbols of the military are used in the implementation of agriculture education in this program. The symbols then take on new meanings supporting Blumer's (1969) Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Further, mutually beneficial experiences occurred between veterans and educators, the program's community, and their civilian community members, allowing for the veterans to build positive connections with civilians. This supports the concept of Pierre' Bourdieu's (1986) Cultural Capital Theory. To review, the following are the research question and operational questions that guided this study.

What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veterans' cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?

Operational questions:

1. How does this peer group of military veterans socialize within the adult agriculture education program?
2. How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program?

3. Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?

Findings illustrate that military veterans in this adult agricultural education program transformed their cultural identity through the reinterpretation of symbolic military objects and activities. Through the process of transitioning from military to civilian identities, the participants connected with familiar military constructed language, behaviors, and physical symbolism to represent their identity during and after their service. For these participants, expressing their military identity through comradery and team work was further indicated as an important symbolic activity for this transition.

The Operation Veteran Farming participants utilized a peer group of military veterans to socialize within the adult agriculture education program. Veterans within this program felt the process of socialization better occurred when they were able to use military symbolism in the way they spoke and dressed. These program participants indicated that they appreciated being around other peer veterans and often explained how this maximized their participation and their comfort level. Hence, military constructed language played a key role in increasing their comfort level and participation. These participants discussed that they valued the use of symbolic military language and connection to intentional use of military imagery. Their shared experiences were drawn upon in the context of the program through symbolic imagery, language and military culture, which was vital to the process of socializing beyond the borders of their educational program community.

For some of these military veterans, the program provided an essential educational experience to help them face physical and mental challenges, begin a new career in agriculture and build new civilian identities. The Operation Veteran Farming program participants' social

patterns changed as they learned new skills and habits within the program. As participants began to socialize more within their groups, they developed trust with each other, the program educators, and their civilian counterparts that make up the agricultural community within the area. The program provided the space and activities that fostered civilian connections, new skills, and habits to be formed. It also improved the participants' self-perception. With new skills and habits, these veterans felt they were better fit for civilian life which led to social mobility.

Finally, these veterans reinterpreted military symbols in this agricultural education context to assist them in forming a new cultural identity. For them, a critical concept was the transition of service. They indicated that this transition redefines service from that of a military context to a context of food availability and food security. Agriculture then, becomes the tool of this transition and participants felt they are being provided with a new mission. They indicated that they felt this agricultural education program influences the morphing of their identity and facilitates their ability to see themselves as a civilian.

The remainder of this chapter will express this study's findings. Because of the interconnection of these themes and subthemes, I will be addressing the overall question by organizing the following chapter by my observational questions. I will do this by first, orienting this research project by providing the overall context of the case study. The demographics of the program's participants and their background will be reviewed. This chapter will then situate these participant's military identity through discussing the symbolic meanings of objects, language, and behaviors to which they hold special meaning. Next, it will discuss the ways in which the military has influenced the participants after their time in service, including the challenges they face as they transitioned.

My intention for chapter four is to explain how veterans are participating in this adult agriculture program. After the participants have been situated, this chapter will answer the first operational question, how this adult agricultural educational program socializes participants by using military symbolism. These influences include shared experiences and the use of symbolic imagery, language, and culture in the agricultural education program. Next, this chapter will cover the second operational question by examining the changes participants social patterns make as they learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program. This will cover agricultural education programs influence social mobility. Finally, the third operational question, that examines how reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity, will be assessed. This will include concepts of transitioning the perception of service and mission. Finally, the reconstruction of their identity to an agricultural identity. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the analysis.

### **Context of Study**

In this ethnographic case study, I utilized Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theories to explore military veterans who participate in an agricultural education program. The Operation Veteran Farming program was designed exclusively for veterans who want to explore agriculture without committing to all the resources it would take to start up a farm. This veteran program last for twelve-months. It is run like the military reserves and meets one weekend a month. This is to give veterans who hold a regular job a chance to participate. It also requires a forty-hour service learning commitment, where veterans participate in hands-on farm work. In addition, veterans visit many farming operations that raise and work with livestock, greenhouses, and organic production. The Operation Veteran Farming program provides lectures that include

pest control, soil management, seed selection, marketing, and farm business planning to assist farmers in their knowledge of farm management.

Further, this qualitative study explored this veteran farming program and provided data in numerous settings and through triangulation of different methods. The method of data collection was designed to achieve a broader understanding of the group through observations and then collect more detailed information through focus group and finally, individual interviews. Observational data was collected first, as a way to begin to identify patterns and key information on participants, their use of symbols, their identity, and their surroundings. Focus group discussions were utilized as a way to bring a slightly smaller group of participants together to discuss this phenomenon. Next, this discussion and the accompanied questionnaires were analyzed for codes and themes. With this information, all willing participants of the Operation Veteran Farming program were asked to provide two pictures as part of an in-depth interview. They were asked that the first picture represent their time in the military, and that the second represent their time in this agricultural education Operation Veteran Farming. Interviews with the educators of this program were utilized to support the program participants' information. Data collected from the interviews were coded, themed and analyzed for more exclusive analysis.

As explained in chapter three, the context of the case included a nonprofit organization, Sustainable Agriculture Farming Center (SAFC) and specifically, one of its programs Operational Veteran Farming program (OVFP). OVFP provided veterans with agriculture education that included a variety of farming topics (SAFC, 2017). Additionally, concepts such as food access and opportunities to work with local chefs and retailers were explored through education that mimicked military education. This education took place in Northern Virginia. The



program operated for the first few months of 2018 at Homestead, Cano Farms, Episcopal High School, and Plantation Park.

### Demographics

This study included twenty-one initial participants. Due to attrition, the number of participants narrowed down to fourteen active program participants after the first month. Although, thirteen program participants filled out the questionnaire, only (seven males and six females) participated in the focus group. Their branch of service varied. Seven program participants served in the Army, three in the U.S. Marine Corp (USMC), and two served in the Air Force. One program participant is a spouse of an Army veteran. Program participants who filled out the questionnaire, self-identified as being African American (n=3), Latino (n=3), and Caucasian n=8). Twelve participants completed interviews. Of these, nine were program participants and three were educators. The following [Table 3] is a chart that summarizes the information collected by the veteran program participants through this questionnaire.

*Table 3*

#### *Questionnaire Results*

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Branch	Deployments	Military Symbolism Connection	Transition Challenges
Rob	44	Male	Caucasian	Army	AFR, AG, IR, HA, SA	Combat Patch, Unit code of arms	Physical health
George	54	Male	Caucasian	Army	KR, IR, BA	Hand gun, Coin	Loss of leg and part of hand, trust
Kylee	32	Female	African American	Army	IR	BDUs, Coin	Depression
Luz	50	Female	Latino	Army	IR, AG	Dog Tags, Uniform	PTSD, anger, Panic attacks

Ethan	40	Male	Caucasian	Army	IR, AG, KR	Unit Guide-on, Friendships	Family/ Military life balance, sitting still, finding a purpose
Jade	37	Female	Caucasian	Army	IR, AG	Friendship, Uniform	Civilian Connection Trust PTSD Anxiety, TBI, Depression
Sam	50	Male	Caucasian	Army	IR, AG, AFR	Maroon beret), Jump master star/wreath on jump wings	Lack of trust, lack of connection, Economic hardship
Kyle	27	Male	African American	MC	None	Comradery	Comradery Depression Anxiety, PTSD
Mya	54	Female	Caucasian	Army Spouse	None	Husband's Uniform	Husband's Initial Care
Jan	35	Female	African American	AF	None	BDU's, Coins	Comradery Anxiety Panic attacks
Selena	43	Female	Caucasian /Latino	MC	AG	Comradery	PTSD, anxiety, back pain
Keith	43	Male	Caucasian	AA	None	Comradery	Connection
Louis	44	Male	Latino	MC	IR, AG, AFR	Rosary, Ring, Photo	PTSD, Depression , Anxiety, Connection to civilians

IR=Iraq, AG= Afghanistan, AFR= Africa, HA= Haiti, SA= South America, BA= Bangladesh, KR= Korea, C=Caucasian, L= Latino, AA= African American, AF= Air Force, MC= Marine Corps

## **Operation Veteran Farming Participants and Educator Descriptions**

The following is a summary of the active participants in this program. Most of these veteran program participants filled out the questionnaire with the exception of Jack. His information was gathered during his one-on-one interview.

**Rob.** Rob is a 44-year-old Caucasian male that is still serving in U.S. Army as a Major. He is a Civil Affairs Officer and has deployed 14 times. His deployments included Africa (6 times), Afghanistan (3 times), Iraq (2 times), South America (2 times) and Haiti. Rob grew up in rural America and he says that is where he learned many of his values before joining the military. His wife and children now live in a suburban town; however, when he discharges they plan to move to a farm back in the country. He shared that he has physical health limitations that have become a challenge. Objects, possessions and/ or memorabilia from the military that hold special meaning for Rob include his unit patches and his Unit Coat of Arms. He sees this program as special because he is able to interact with other military members and veterans that have a common language, past, and mission. He says, “it is both rewarding and a blessing.”

**George.** George is a 54-year-old Caucasian male that served 32 distinguished years in U.S. Army as a Team Chief and Company Commander. His deployments included Korea, Thailand, Afghanistan, Iraq, Bangladesh and India. He grew up in suburban America and he says that he learned many of his values by watching his dad and uncle in the military. George and his wife now live in a rural town and plan to move to an even bigger farm. George lost his right leg and part of his right hand during his last deployment. He says, “If it wasn’t for my “suck it up” attitude I embraced from my 32 years in the Army, I probably would have had a harder recovery.” Objects, possessions and/ or memorabilia from the military that hold special meaning for George include his 1/504<sup>th</sup> brotherhood coin and his bullet penetrated M9 Berretta hand gun

that saved his life by stopping a bullet that was intended for him. He sees this program as special because he feels connected to other military members and veterans and that the content of this course is something that he uses on a daily basis on his farm.

**Kylee.** Kylee is a 32-year-old African-American female that served in U.S. Army in the behavioral health field. Her deployments included Iraq from 2005-2006 and Iraq from 2009-2010. Kylee grew up in rural America and she says that the military traditions she learned while there made her want to follow many of her family members and join the military, and to later, continue the family tradition of farming by moving out of an urban environment and into a suburban home. Kylee faces back pain, endurance, knee, hand, and trust challenges. Military objects, possessions, and/ or memorabilia that hold special meaning for Kylee include the idea of continuing the family tradition and things such as camo, that remind her of how important her service was to her and her family. She enjoyed this program because the staff always went out of their way to ensure she was taken care of. The director exposed her to opportunities and networks that has led Kylee to a job with National Resources Conservation Services.

**Luz.** Luz is a 50-year-old Latino female that served in U.S. Army as a 92A and a 31A. Her deployments included Iraq, Afghanistan, and Desert Storm. Luz grew up in an urban setting and now lives in a suburban neighborhood. She is not yet farming, but wants to farm in the city. Luz experiences insomnia, panic attacks, anger issues, issues paying attention, and PTSD symptoms. Military objects, possessions and/ or memorabilia that hold special meaning for Luz include her dog tags and uniform from the military. Through this program, she is learning to farm which she says will help her honor her ancestors and teach her to relax.

**Ethan.** Ethan is a 40-year-old Caucasian male that still serves in U.S. Army as a Lieutenant Colonel for the Army Staff MP Plans Branch Chief. His deployments included Iraq,

Afghanistan, and South Korea. Ethan grew up in a suburban neighborhood and currently lives in an urban neighborhood. He wants to move to the country and have his own farm. Ethan faces challenges balancing family and military life. He does not like to be stuck at a desk and wants a career where he makes a difference. Military objects, possessions, and/ or memorabilia that hold special meaning for Ethan include unit quide-ons from the units he has commanded and his friendships he has gained while in the military. This program has opened his eyes to the possibility of a new purpose and doing a job that is similar to the military, where he loves his job.

**Jade.** Jade is a 37-year-old Caucasian female that served in U.S. Army in the human intelligence field. Her deployments included Iraq and Afghanistan. Jade grew up in and still lives in a in a suburban town. She would like to farm a small farm in a rural community. Jade finds building connections and trust with civilians a challenge, she also has challenges that stem from a traumatic brain injury, depression, anxiety, and symptoms of PTSD. She did not keep many military objects, possessions and/ or memorabilia that hold special meaning for her; however, she did keep a gift from the local children that she met on deployment and that she cherishes. She enjoys the veteran to veteran connection in this program.

**Sam.** Sam is a 50-year-old Caucasian male that served in U.S. Army as a Sergeant Major. His eight deployments included 2 deployments to Afghanistan, a tour to Iraq, three deployments to Kosovo, Georgia, and Haiti. Sam sees economic hardships, finding likeminded civilians, and inability to have faith in the political systems as his biggest challenges after his military service. Objects, possessions, and/ or memorabilia from the military that Sam holds special meaning to include his maroon beret and his Jump Master star with the wreath on his jump wings. The veteran networking and connection has been key to Sam participating in this program.

**Kyle.** Kyle is a 27-year-old African-American male that served in U.S. Marine Corp. Kyle grew up in an urban neighborhood and wants to learn to farm in the same setting. Kyle faces challenges that include back pain, PTSD symptoms, depression, anxiety, and trust of surroundings. Kyle enjoys the connection and networking to other veterans in this program. He says he feels at home and is able to relax more than civilian settings. He knows that he cannot get a “regular” 9 to 5 job and sees farming as where he fits. Comradery is what he cherished most from his days in the military. This program has given him a way to relax, take out his frustrations, find a purpose, and continue to work.

**Mya.** Mya is unique to this group. She is the only non-military veteran. She is the spouse of another program participant and plays a vital role in his care and success. Mya is a 54-year-old Caucasian female. Her husband served in U.S. Army and she has spent a lot of time working on bases and with veterans. Mya and her husband have endured many deployments including his last, that led to him needing a leg amputation and a partial hand amputation. Their challenges stem from the care he initially needed. Mya also faces some physical challenges and need assistance with her back pain. This program is helping her and her husband realize their long-shared dream.

**Jan.** Jan is a 35-year-old African-American female that served in the Air-Force. Jan grew up in urban America. She now lives in a suburban neighborhood and wants to start a city farm. Jan only participated in this program because it was exclusively for veterans. Jan says her biggest challenge is finding ways to trust the civilian population. BDU’s (Battle Dress Uniforms) and a coin were among her most cherished military objects, possessions and/ or memorabilia that with which she holds special meaning.

**Selena.** Selena is a 43-year-old Caucasian and Latino female that served in U.S. Marine Corp. Her deployments included serving two years in Afghanistan as a contractor after her service. Selena grew up in an urban neighborhood and now lives in a suburban neighborhood. She wants to farm in a town that is in between a rural and urban setting. Selena's biggest challenges are PTSD symptoms, back pain, and anxiety that she attributes to her military service. Her friendships, which she calls family, is what she cherishes most from her time in service. She enjoyed this program because it is veteran exclusive and she doesn't have to deal with all the "BS" from civilians.

**Keith.** Keith is a 43-year-old Latino male that served in U.S. Air-Force. Keith grew up in a suburban neighborhood and currently still lives in a suburban neighborhood. He is not currently farming. Keith sees his biggest challenge is connecting with civilians. He enjoys the comradery of this program.

**Louis.** Louis is a 44-year-old Latino male that served in U.S. Marine Corp. His deployments included tours in Africa, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Louis grew up in an urban neighborhood and lives in one today. He is not yet farming and is not sure if he would like to have a small garden in a city or country setting. Louis discussed how the feeling of isolation, anger, distrust, and anti-social behaviors have led to feelings of disconnection with others. His PTSD symptoms and lack of social activities has led to deeper depression. This program provides him a purpose that he has been searching for. He also really enjoys the military comradery with service members. He noted that, "we can talk and share stories as if we have known each other for years."

**Jack.** Jack is a 50-year-old Caucasian Navy Veteran. He spent 30 years in the military. He deployed to various places around the world. His challenges mostly include how to connect

and relate to civilians and their work structure. He really appreciates how this program is veteran focused.

## **Educators**

**Kate.** Kate is the executive director of SAFC. She joined in 2013 right after working in the field of National Security Journalism. She edited a food magazine article about local food and local farmers, which included a long story on three veteran farmers. It was during this time that Kate became convinced that veterans and farming were a really great match. She then joined SAFC and began to work on a program for veterans who wanted to farm. In 2014, the newly formed group applied for money and was granted funds in 2016 from the USDA to implement a farmer and rancher instruction program. Kate is not a veteran herself but worked alongside veterans when she was imbedded with a unit as a journalist. Kate participates in the program as an organizer and instructor.

**Bob.** Bob has a twelve-year background working with veteran training programs that were not in farming. He also has worked with immigrant farmers. This gave him experience with working with historically underserved farmers. Bob and his associates wanted to organize a program what would fill some current gaps in farming instruction. A lot of different factors led to the decision to make this program veteran specific. Some of the people on the staff were veterans; they were located close to Fort Belvoir and their director was an embedded reporter during the Iraqi War. Once decided, they wanted to do something different than other programs. Therefore, they designed a basic farm training program for veterans. Bob is the director of the veteran program, an instructor, and provides advice to the veteran program participants.

**Patrick.** Patrick is an instructor for the Veteran Farming program. He started working for The Operation Veteran Farming program six years ago. Before then, he was teaching as a



principle in Massachusetts with a program for adults. He now is the instructor for the Veteran Farming Program. He did not participate in the SAFC's Military Veteran Farming program and is not a veteran.

### **Situating Participant's Military Identity**

The following concepts lay a foundation beyond the original questions. This is in order to better understand the program participants background and how they are participating in this program. They describe the complexity of the barriers and needs of the Operation Veteran Farming participants and supports the understanding of why such a program design is needed. The military is described as a total institution (Goffman, 1959) and understanding military identity as well as the re-assigning of meaning that is attached military symbolism is critical to understanding how some military veterans are utilizing such symbolism to overcome the institutionalization they experienced in the military. Situating veteran participants is imperative to understanding the identity changes taking place in this program.

Participants within this study came from varying military backgrounds. They had different levels of connection to service, but all of the veteran program participants strongly identified with their service. Their military identity formation occurred through interactions between military associated social acts, paraphernalia, language, and concepts to build an individual service member meaning of self and culture.

**Physical objects.** Physical objects that symbolize their service include the American Flag, their uniform, coins, and unit insignia. One veteran program participant expressed the symbolic meaning that he associates with the American Flag, his military service, and the idea of home by saying:

*"The flag means so much to me. I have been in situations all over the world where you see the flag and it gives you context that this is who we are and this is what it is all about."*

*It represents are service, our brotherhood, our home, our family” (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

George later, described the symbolic manipulation of home and safety through the use of the American flag. He continues this thought by saying:

*“Every time, when we would go out of that wire and we would get close to the death, then come back to a green zone or if we were going to FOB [Forward Operating Base], then you see that flag, you know if you're coming down a road or whatever and you can see the flag, that's home, man. That's home. Even if it's a piece of dirt stretched out there in southeastern Afghanistan, that's home. Even today, just thinking about it makes me well up. Because that's safety, that's freedom, that's everything I fight for and I love about this country, it's everything I am.” (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

The below field note reinforces this use of military paraphernalia to form a military identity. It is from the first day of observations, when I noticed the most use of military symbolism. This was through their choice of clothes and other items. The veteran program participants brought these items. These symbolic objects represented their military identity. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Most participants have some kind of military symbolism on their shirt, hat or materials they brought with them. This includes camouflage, American Flags on their hat, shirt, book bag, drinking cups and two shirts. There is a bag that has the Army branch of service emblem on it and a notebook with a Marine Corps branch of service emblem. Six of the participants are wearing cargo pants that are either khaki color or army green. Most of them are wearing baseball caps that have been removed inside the building. Most everyone of the veteran program participants are wearing military like boots and one has military issued eye glasses on and a military watch. It is clear that their military items or affiliated items were important to them and they were proud of their service.”*

Similarly, I noticed the use of uniformity in grooming and physical appearance to express these participants' military identity. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “All the males in the program except one, has a military haircut. All of the females have their hair back and neatly in a bun or pony tail and wore no visible makeup. This is similar to what you would see in the military.”*

**Use of language to represent military identity.** It was not just physical items that were important to the Operation Veteran Farming participants. Symbolic language learned during their time in the military was also critical to their identity. Many expressed their use of military constructed language to symbolize their military identity. Saying for example:

*“I use these words because they are a second language to me, it is no longer different, they are one in the same and this is how I talk. It is who I am. It's is my culture.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Similarly, another Operation Veteran Farming participant reinforces this use of symbolic language manipulation by saying:

*“It is funny, I use military abbreviations or acronyms all the time. My co-workers are always commenting.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

This Operation Veteran Farming participant utilizes military language as a “secret language” or code that only military members would understand. The ability to have this language makes him feel connected because this symbolic language keeps him connected to his military identity. This again, is an example of symbolic manipulation, where Ethan is using familiar language to identify with his community. He says:

*“I work with a lot of veterans and civilians. I use acronyms or military words. It is kind-of nice because the civilians do not know what we are talking about, but the veterans do. We kind of have our own secret language.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Military language often represents a learned behavior within a military culture identity. This language may contain the same words as civilian phrases, however represent different meaning to different people that are not in the same culture. Often, this symbolic language is used subconsciously and represents one’s identity that is tied to the military. This Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“I hear from my wife and children that they children are not in the military. It's hard to think of specific words that I say, because you use them so much that they are our second*

*language. After so many years in, they become one in the same.” (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

There are times when this symbolic communication formed by their military identity is carried out with little to no words. This example of social acts was demonstrated while I observed them working. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Today the military program participants are putting together a hoop house. Much like the tent, they went straight to work. Very little actual commands are being voiced. There are ones that are mimic quick military commands. One military program participant commands, “let’s get-her done” while, four respond with, “Hoo-hah!” and two others respond, “Roger that!”*

**Expressing military identity through comradery and team work.** A reoccurring military identity concept for these Operation Veteran Farming participants was the concept of comradery. This comradery was a highlighted benefit of their military service and contributed to their symbolic military identity formation. One Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“I was in an airborne unit. We were tough. We were tougher than regular units because they wanted us to be tough. I mean, because you're going to jump from an airplane, have to march hundreds of miles, fight all day and all night. And then, you build an outstanding comradery and togetherness with your buddies and the units. And most infantry units are pretty rough. There's no thin skin and we call each other ... You know, you hurl insults at each other because that's the way Army guys I guess say, "Hey. I love you, buddy." They don't give big hugs or anything, they just hurl insults. And so, we were part of this great unit” (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

In order to establish comradery, veterans identified the need to incorporate integrity. This conduct was used as symbolism for comradery. This military program participant declares:

*“Integrity, it is so important to accomplishing the mission and team building. We know that integrity is between us and so, it makes comradery easy.” (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

**Recognition of military identity by self and others.** The symbolic construct of being a military member was important to the Operation Veteran Farming participants. Their identity was tied tightly to this concept of self as subject and for some, was hard to separate from. This can make it even harder to form a civilian identity. One program participant, a civilian who is a spouse of an Operation Veteran Farming participant, explained this connection to her husband's military service by, saying:

*“The military definitely is embedded in George through and through, he's a soldier, he's a soldier's, soldier.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

Another program participant reinforces this concept of military identity by describing herself as a soldier. The symbolism of wearing the uniform held special meaning to her. She says:

*“I was a good soldier. It was a love/hate relationship. I got up and wore the uniform. I was a hard worker and I fast tracked on promotion. I got a lot of opportunities to lead and mentor soldiers. I was one of the only females that went outside the safe zone. So, for me, that sets me apart.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Interestingly, this military program participant describes his military identity as a “military issued personality”. This “military issued personality” or self-interpretation symbolically changed who he was as a person. He says:

*“In the Marine Corp, I got a new personality. My military issued standard personality. It made me very direct and mission oriented person.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

People who were not in the military described the Operation Veteran Farming participants' characteristics. They explained their perception of military identity and how they believe it was symbolically important to the veteran participants. Here, the program director of SAFC says:

*“One percent of the nation serves in the military. One percent of the nation is actually farmers. So, you have these two exceptional groups. And part of the reason why those numbers are so exceptional is that the work is hard. The bulk of these jobs are not for sissies, so it's a self-selecting group of people, and that number of people is pretty small. So, there's that connection”* (Kate, SAFC Director)

**Symbolic military identities through military behaviors.** Often, the symbolism to which military members strongly identify with can be described as behaviors or social acts. These behaviors can be used by veterans to form their identity and view life differently. To each veteran, the behavior can carry a different meaning. One example is the behavior associated with pride. I observed this and documented it in many of my field notes. Here is an example:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The walk to the greenhouse was about a mile. They each were offered a ride. Every single one of the veterans choose to walk. This included George with his prosthetic leg, Kyle with his cane, and Luz with her broken ankle. George remarked, “I don’t need to ride, I am perfectly cable of walking.” Luz replied, “It isn’t that bad, we are walking together.” Not one person took a break.*

Here again, I observed another example of military associated behavior taking place. This Operation Veteran Farming participant mentor decides to watch the halls while the program is in process. This behavior is very similar to the behavior that often occurs during military courses. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “One of the veteran mentors is walking back and forth in the class room and up and down the hall, as if to patrol a security detail.”*

I also observed the Operation Veteran Farming participants partaking in symbolic military behaviors as they participated in lectures. This was important to observe to get a sense of how they interacted and participated with the educational piece of this program. Here I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Most have their arms crossed, no one has hands in their pockets and almost everyone is sitting straight up and not slouching.”*

Behaviors learned through service were critical to understanding participation. One participant begins to get sleepy and stands, as she would in a military setting. I observe:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “One female stood behind her seat and looked tired. Perhaps to stay awake. This is a common military practice. One military veteran mentor is standing by window at parade rest.”*

Sometimes, even when veterans are behaving in familiar nonmilitary ways, they need to express their military identity. This veteran sent his wife a Valentine's picture expressing his love for her. At the same time, he held a machine gun and wore ACUs (Army Combat Uniforms).

Expressing military symbolism held special meaning to him. The spouse says:

*“One, the sweetest thing ever. It was five days before his injury. He was injured in February, so for Valentine's Day, he wanted to send me something so, he went out to a Conex and he made one of those giant candy hearts about the size of the Conex and he did it in chalk. He put Mya be mine, just like the little candy heart in his full uniform with his machine gun on.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant).

This participant identifies the importance of his military service through a picture he provided. It is a picture of his ranger tab. This ranger tab is simply a patch; however, this service member places special meaning on this uniform item and proudly identifies himself as a ranger member in the US Army. This, ranger tab is an example of self-interpretation. Rob changes the meaning of this patch to symbolize more than just a uniform item. He provided [Figure 3] the following quote and image:

*“The symbol is a ranger tab. For me it embodies excellence and hard work and always achieving goals and achieve excellence in all you do. It has been the symbol that has meant the most to me throughout my career. And the approach I've taken throughout my career regardless of what my assignments I have been on or what units I have served in and that's the way I've always tried to approach life.”* (Rob)



Figure 3: A Rancher Tab by Rob

**Military influence on identity formation after discharge.** Military veterans in this program often discussed how events in the military changed them once they discharged. These events or behaviors experienced during their time in service affected how they behaved after they left their service. Their military service influences nonmilitary identity formation. The outcome can be a positive or negative influence. In this positive influence example, an Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“The military help me to refine how I see things and helped me to become a great leader, be self-sufficient, and more dedicated to the mission with a purpose. This will help as I transfer to the civilian world.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Here is another example that illustrates the military facilitated change. This influence seems to be less clear on whether the military identity influence resulted in a positive or negative nonmilitary identity. This Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“The military made me stronger and made me look at life different. I had a purpose in the Army. I want that purpose again.”* (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Participants in this program frequently discussed how the military aided their process of completing a task. This occurred through providing a framework that was used to work through



problems. One veteran program participant expressed how his military service contributed to his life after the military by, saying:

*“And that's the whole thing is that ... I think what helped me was my military training. It taught me to be resilient and to think outside the box and there's got to be another way to do this because, you have to think outside the box and there's gotta be another way to do this. Because if you gotta do it, you have to do it. You don't have a choice. So even when I say things today on the farm like, "God, I'm gonna have to stay here late and finish this up." Well, yeah. I mean, you don't have a choice, you gotta do it.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

This participant underpins this concept by talking about her husband and his characteristics that he formed while he served in the military. She says:

*“You know the guy ... The troops that worked with him adored him, absolutely adore him and he is soldiers, soldier. He has been in every job, every position, every rank, up and down, across the board you name it he's done it. The military is in him, you can see it in his mannerisms, his actions, his talk, it's just part of who he is.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

This concept of a symbolic military identity and its influence on a veteran after service is emphasized by a spouse of an Operation Veteran Farming participant. She says:

*“But it's definitely something that is entrenched in his soul that he loves and one of the things that I noticed post injury and we went through a lot of pills ... He was on Opioids for five years, very, very high doses of Opioids until they did his amputation surgery and then he came off everything. We went through a lot of depression, we went through a lot of pain, of very high pain.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

There were times when veterans talked about the occurrence of negative events and how it could have changed them, but their symbolic military learned resilience and self as subject view aided them. Here one participant illustrates this by saying:

*“It's kind of weird that an inanimate object can bring up a lot of memories and the day of my incident, when I was shot. A Taliban guy that was posing as an Afghan national police turned a machine gun on three of us, bullets were just flying everywhere. I saw bullets go through the tough of my uniform on my sleeves and stuff like that, I could just see stuff exploding everywhere. I finally seen the “9” in the hospital and said, "Wow that thing took a bullet for me." So, a bullet raced across my back and it was so close ... it was probably less than inches from my spine. The 9 mil took a round for me. I did lose my leg and part of my hand. The point is that's just who I am. That's just a part of me. I went*

*through a lot of different emotions. Spent a lot of time in bed and in hospitals. Was way down, but the military taught me to be resistant. That's how I got through that time.”*  
(George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Many military program participants learned habits while in the service that aided them in their daily life. This military symbolic behavior was observed in the way the veterans were configured during the program. I observed and documented this in my field notes:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The veteran program participants sat in the living room in a wide circle. No one was in front of each other. The room was lined with windows on one side. Only Rob sat with his back to the window. However, he was not directly in front of the window, he sat where the wall divided the windows.”*

For some of these veterans, the military influenced their physical abilities and changed their symbolic identity. I observed physical challenges and noted them in my field notes:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “A few of the veteran program participants have visible physical challenges. George has a prosthetic leg, Kyle walks with a cane, and Luz has a broken ankle and a service dog.”*

In this field entry, hyper-awareness due to military service is highlighted. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “A man that was not part of the program came to the door. Matt went up to talk to him and one of the participants, Luz became very uncomfortable and said, “is he going to just let anyone in.” She stood there and watched to see if Matt was going to let him in.”*

The symbolism of their military service also seemed to influence the veteran program participants' resilience and pride. This field note entry documents this concept:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The temperature was 50 degrees and it was dark and raining. The lecture was set on a large open acre farm. The green house sat close to a manager farm house with a tractor. The pastures were slightly rolling hills and nothing had begun to grow. The intensity of the rain increased yet, none of the veteran program participants said anything about the rain and stood outside listening to a lecture. None of them chose to sit down. At one point, Kyle and Luz kneeled in place. Some of the veterans voiced that they had extra “rain gear” and offered it to the other veterans.”*

**Transitioning challenges.** Several of the veterans discussed the challenges that they faced once they transitioned out of the military. These challenges included physical, mental, and economic challenges that resulted in lower resilience. Some veterans described their challenges as mental health issues, such as PTSD, anxiety, and depression. One veteran said:

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

Likewise, this veteran expressed the challenge of PTSD and transitioning from service. He voiced:

*“Since, I am in the national guard I always transition back when we come back. Since most people have deployed multiple times, we have a common understanding that we have to look out for each other because it is hard out here. Not just the language barrier, but the sensitivity with our mind set. For instance, we are coming back with PTSD and we are finding ways to deal with that. So many of us come back broken in one way or another.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Some of these veterans are not only dealing with a mental health issue itself, but also how that effects their ability to obtain and sustain a civilian job. This can lead to a lower resilience and ability to feel a part of a civilian community. This participant explains:

*“I realized that due to my mental issues, I couldn’t have a regular job.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

It was discussed how these mental health challenges effected their ability to connect to civilians. Their inability to feel connected with civilians was leading to an inability to trust them. The symbolic meaning of trust in the military was a must, and for these veterans was missing in nonmilitary communities. This military veteran says:

*“Besides PTSD, the biggest challenge has been trying to figure out my own purpose and how to trust civilians.”* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming participants)

Not all veterans voice that they themselves have PTSD. One interesting perspective included that veterans are told that they have PTSD. In this program participant’s opinion, this constant influence leads to the symbolic idea of PTSD. One veteran says:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The class begins and immediately it was voiced that the problem is that “veterans need training after the military on how to become part of their civilian community. They are spoon fed to have “PTSD”. We need a different system. The ones that really need the help aren’t the ones identifying!” Another veteran speaks, “we need a lot more than math equations. We need to know what to plant, how much, diseases ect.” There were head nods from the other veterans”*

Connection to civilians was a major challenge after leaving the military for these program participants. This disconnect added to the inability to transition to life after the military and form a civilian identity due to their strong concept of a military identity. One example includes the symbolism of the military’s organization and their purpose and how these differences from that of the civilian world. This military program participant comments:

*“Trusting and organization of civilians is my biggest challenge, veterans’ lose their structure and are less task oriented or mission driven than they are used to.” (Keith, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

Another similar example illustrates how this veteran sees herself connecting with civilians. She also discusses civilian organization and their ability to complete a task. Here, transition to a civilian identity has not occurred. She says:

*“I mean just how civilians deal with tasks that need to be done. Watching civilians not take inventory or not specifically deciding how to complete a task drives me crazy. I like things to be done in a specific way and that way was taught to me by the military it’s hard to come into a civilian world and things are way different. Not to mention people that you are working with do not have the same set of mind and same dedication to a mission.” (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

This participant gives us a parallel example. His absence to a civilian connection is attributed to civilians’ inability to be organized. He says:

*“They civilian world is just so unorganized. Like going to the movies and there is a line, but there are not in line and you can’t figure out where the back of the line is. It is aggravating.” (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)*

Another corresponding example attributes this inability to connect veterans to civilians. In this example, the program participant points out how civilians are not dedicated to the mission. He describes this by saying:

*“In the military, there is no such thing as private anymore, it is now about team work. You work 24-hour work days. Something most civilians don’t understand. They don’t have this dedication to a task and mission”* (Jack, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Similarly, this Operation Veteran Farming participant discusses his perception that civilians lack the concept of accountability. This leads to the inability to connect with civilians. He says:

*“My biggest challenge transitioning was a lack of accountability in the civilian world. In the military, we have a clear chain of command, clear mission, and clear objectives. It is missing in the civilian world. You certainly have bosses, but some of those bosses are missing the leadership we seen in the military and they do not have the dedication that you see in the military.”* (Jack, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Some of the Operation Veteran Farming participants had challenges feeling comradery between themselves and civilians. They did not feel the same sense of symbolic comradery that they experienced with their peer military members. One military veterans said:

*“When you get out, that kind of comradery and being part of a unit, being a value-added member of the team, and stuff like that, is gone and you're just kind of hanging out there. And a lot of people don't know what to do or say, or whatever because they don't know if they're going to say something that's going to be offending or what not to a civilian. But you get cut off quick from being part of that unit, being part of a team, and having that purpose.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

George continues later by discussing the absence of shared experiences between himself and civilians. This symbolism of shared experiences was discussed throughout the programs study.

These veterans often connected through the discussion of them and felt very deeply connected to each other because of them. This participant explains:

*“And then, a lot of stuff civilians will never know. Not because they don't want to know, it's just they've never had that experience, I guess they do that out of, don't know how to answer or don't know what to talk about, or whatever. But at first, it was like, "Ah, civilians! Please go away.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

This participant has concluded that civilians have a preconceived perception of military veterans.

For him, this is another challenge. He says:

*“Coming home from being deployed we were nervous about how we would be perceived because all know what the country did when soldiers came home from Vietnam. The other side is that we come back broken, very broken, the feeling of being very honored and being told all the time, “thank you for your service” ... we are not hero’s and we have dark parts of our minds. People are going to have challenges speaking to us sometimes.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Similarly, another Operation Veteran Farming participant talks about how civilians are

“awkward” and their assumptions of veterans make him uncomfortable. He says:

*“Civilian perception is a little awkward. For instance, thank you for your service, it like OK thanks, but... They assume you are a bad ass and you have some kind of PTSD. They make certain assumptions about how you think. And not all of it is true.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Racism was mentioned as an additional challenge that veterans had to confront in the civilian community. This form of discrimination was new to this participant and led to feelings of disconnect. Kyle says:

*“Something that I dealt with in the civilian world is racism. It was a little bit of a shock when I got out. Racism existed in the military, but not that much at all. Out here the racism is different and visibly worse.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Similarly, gender related issues are a challenge veterans deal with as they attempt to acclimate to a civilian society. This can lead to them feeling isolated. One Operation Veteran Farming participant explains:

*“Transition was hard for me. I don’t know if my experience was different from a lot of other female veterans. I went on a lot of missions. A lot of civilians say, “thank you for your husband’s service.” I felt like the people I served with were family. But when we got back they still had their brother hood but because of their wife’s or girl’s fiends, I got left out. It is pretty isolating and I feel even more isolated than most.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Physical ailments are a challenge for military members who are trying to transition to a non-military community. One Operation Veteran Farming participant says in reference to her husband:

*“He had multiple wounds over multiple different places on his body. So, in 2012, he was actually hospitalized for a year and he had 35 surgeries. He was still in the wheelchair. He ended up ... he had two different years he was in a wheelchair for a year. One prior to his amputation and then when they did his amputation, it took his leg a year to heal. So, he was in a wheelchair for two years, two different times. That was a very different part of our life because it was physically demanding on me.”* (Mya, spouse of a military veteran, who is also a program participant)

For some, working in a closed, indoor physical space is a challenge to their mental health. Here a military veteran participant says:

*“That's why I could never work in an office, I would go berserk. I'd probably knock down a cubicle. “Here, file this TSP report.” Because you know, I've done some amazing things in the Army. I mean, I've delivered secret documents to the Ambassador of India. Who gets to do shit like that? Now, I have to sit at a desk and listen to.. “file this”.* (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

One of the most discussed challenges was the challenge of finding a purpose after the military. This purpose brings symbolic meaning to these military program participants and is a critical piece to why they experience challenges after the military. One program participant says:

*“Where I think, he struggled for a while is, he didn't have a purpose.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

Another way she illustrated this missing component of encompassing a purpose in the civilian world was described by this participant:

*“That is such a big deal. They had so much responsibility in the military and were in charge of million dollar pieces of equipment and now their struggling to get a job at Starbucks. You know, it's ... and for somebody to even understand that respect level that they had with each other and then going into the civilian sector and that's just a missing component.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

## Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming

This peer group of military veterans within this adult agricultural education program was studied to better understand their process of socialization. The findings show that these veterans are using military familiar symbolism and utilizing their shared experiences to connect to each other and this adult agricultural education program. The use of military symbolic imagery, language, and culture become critical for these veterans' participation and connect process. This indicates the need for veteran influence in this adult agricultural education programming. Thus, the findings signify that utilizing military symbolism aids veterans in the process of socializing, participating, and learning in this program.

Many of these veterans found it beneficial that this agricultural education program for veterans considered the complexities that they encountered as they transitioned from a military to civilian life. They appreciated being around other peer veterans and often explained how this maximized their participation and their comfort level that later, led to a formation of a farmer identity. One military veteran explains:

*"I don't think I would have participated if it wasn't for the veteran focus, because I would not have shown who I really am and been vulnerable in front of civilians. But the fact that there are veterans here and we are all working towards something very similar makes participation a lot easier."* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Another Operation Veteran Farming participant talks about how being around other veterans supports her ability to learn. This is due to the feeling of belonging and comfort she feels around other veterans. This program participant says:

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



### **Shared experiences in the agricultural education program design.** Operation Veteran

Farming program participants identified the necessity to experience shared experiences in this education program. These connections through shared experiences lead some participants to have a feeling of belonging. This symbolic feeling leads to better participation: One participant says:

*“I did this program in part because it was all veterans. It is nice to be around people that are like you and have the same base line experiences. They speak like you! There is something really satisfying about getting a mission, like putting together the hoop house. We all just feel in, someone took charge and we feel into a pecking order and completed the mission.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Similarly, another military veteran describes the need to be around other veterans and share similar experiences. Again, this ability to relate to other veterans and feel safe makes the learning setting more enjoyable. He says:

*“Because I could sit and talk to a veteran, and you we can bring up some, ”Hey, were you over here then?” Or, “Where were you at in 2004?” Or whatever. Or “What unit were you in?” You know? And so, there's kind of a point of reference that you can talk about. But with civilians ...” “It's like, ah this makes this easier, you know? Being everyone was a veteran, it was a great learning experience or something I have need for doing this. I think it makes it a lot easier because we can all relate to each other. We've all done like several different things, but we've all served. It's like raining and muddy, horrible weather, it's cold. But yep, got a job to do, we got to do it, it don't matter if it's rainy or not, I mean you got to get your butt out there and do it. I think that part of being with a bunch of veterans makes it easier to relate and to ... you know just joking around and stuff like that, death by PowerPoint, or somebody saying some kind of funny thing you know? Like embrace the “suck” or whatever. I think it makes it more enjoyable.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

**Veteran symbolism in the agricultural education program design.** Military veterans in this program utilize imagery, language and the concept of culture to form or reform new habits that helped modify their behavior. Veterans transform the meanings associated with concepts over time. This symbolic change of meaning plays a critical role in the connection that some of these veterans have to this educational program. One participant describes the use of this symbolism. He says:

*“Having the program start out at Mt. Vernon was a good idea. It got us in the frame of mind.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Various veterans discussed their satisfaction with how this education program includes the use of military language and how that aided in their comfort level. It helped the process of their participation. One Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“When I hear the language that I am used to at during this program, I am able to relate. It didn’t take me the extra time to get comfortable. Not every veteran here, but most you know that they are going to help you when you got issues going on or have a conversation when you need them. It is automatic feeling that you are going to be able to trust that person that you can relate to.”* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Relatedly, another veteran voiced that he enjoyed the use of military symbolic language in the agricultural education program because it is a language that he is familiar with. He explains:

*“When I familiar military language and those words being used by a member that was in the military or still is in the military, I definitely know where they’re coming from and feel their connection and I know, they had a lot of the same experiences. I can connect with them and trust them.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

This Operation Veteran Farming participant re-enforces this idea of utilizing symbolic language in this adult agricultural education program to participate. He explains this by saying:

*“When I hear phrases like, “you tracking” and things like that here at The Operation Veteran Farming program, it makes me feel like I understand more. I feel like I can connect more with the program. It’s weird, I don’t know these veterans and they don’t know me, but we’ve already formed groups and we already support each other.”* (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

The spouse of an Operation Veteran Farming participant discusses how communication with peer veterans in this program is important to her husband. She says:

*“This program having veterans that are able to communicate together in a program, but not to sit around and talk about their problems, but to actually have a mission and get things done like you said, give them a new purpose.”* (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)

The following program participant talks about social acts. He felt more comfortable with the use of familiar language being used during the building of a hoop house activity in this program. He connected this experience to his military career because saying it was similar to activities that he participated in while serving in the military. He says:

*“This program reminds me of the military. Putting the hoop house was probably the most military thing I have done without actually being in the military. We were outdoors, the structured the way that is easily identifiable and with patterns. The communication lines were very comfortable for me and allow me to participate in much more.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

This Operation Veteran Farming participant discusses how the veteran focus allowed him to connect to the civilian instructors. He says:

*“Being veteran focused appealed to me. It was nice not to have to climatize to anyone else other than the instructors.”* (Jack, The Operation Veteran Farming program participants)

To reinforce this idea, this veteran debates having a program that is exclusively for veterans. She finds the positive and negative side to this design. The participant says:

*“I liked that it [Operation Veteran Farming Program] is veteran focused and, I don’t like that it is veteran focused. A lot of times when you get veterans together it is a measuring contest and it can be tiring to talk about your service. At the same time, it is cool to be around people that have the same kind of background and language. I would not interact with people as much if it wasn’t veteran focus.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

Not only did the veterans themselves discuss the benefits of this veteran focus, but this educator of this adult agricultural education program echoed this phenomenon. Patrick support the program participants view by saying:

*“I think the fact that it is veteran only helps them participate. It seems that the vets tend to communicate with each other and civilians are not able to have that connection or communicate right off the bat.”* (Patrick, The Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

This same educator then explains how very little verbal communication took place during some of the activities. Verbal communication was not needed by these military veterans to complete a task. He says:

*“They [military veterans] can get a task done without even verbally communicating with each other. They take cues and accomplish a task. That dynamic is awesome. They use their own language and acronyms that I do not know. They are able to relate their experience to farming really easy, and sometimes it goes over my head and I have to learn their language to teach.”* (Patrick, The Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

Not only do the veterans themselves use language that they are comfortable with, the educators purposely used this symbolic manipulation of language in this program. The Operation Veterans Farming Program director says:

*“We definitely use military language so, that they are comfortable communicating. We don't want to sell the program with military imagery so, we try to keep some of that. We do try to make it comfortable for them by using a lot of the same tools and their language. We also use references to a lot of the military things that they had in their life. We want to use familiar terms in language as a general approach to the program. We do a lot of left seat right seat training and use a lot of the approaches that they are very familiar with.”* (Bob, The Operation Veterans Farming Program director)

It is also important for the educator to effectively communicate and utilize symbolic manipulation of military language with Operation Veteran Farming participants. These educators are nonmilitary and use such language to connect with the veterans and form a sense of an adult agricultural education community. This Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“The Military Veteran Farming program deliberately figured out how to communicate with us veterans. They seem to enjoy it. If they were not so good at it, I would not participate. If it wasn’t veteran focused, I wouldn’t be there. I get it and I know the other veterans get it. We are so similarly oriented. We are going to have the same questions. We have a natural affinity that transcends age, sex and culture and race. We have our own culture and that connects us. We have our own network.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming participant)

The learning environment of this adult agriculture education program intentionally imitated military learning environments. This was done to make the Operation Veteran Farming participants more comfortable and assist their process of learning. The instructor explains supports the program participants views by saying:

*“We initially teach a different way, we are improving as we go and learn. I have definitely noticed that with the veterans, they appreciate more of a hands-on learning experience and a diagram(ish) type of instructions or formulas. They enjoy the straight-line learning or recipe. They want to be outside and working in the dirt.”* (Patrick, The Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

Not just the instruction, but the entire layout of the program is set up to imitate the military reserves. Similarly, to the reserves, this program is set up to meet once a month and two weeks a year. The director of the Operation Veterans Farming Program illustrates this by saying:

*“We purposely set up the program to operate like the military reserves. We meet one weekend a month and two weeks in a year type thing. We decided yeah let's do this because there's something to veterans are familiar with. It's a structure that works for people that have other jobs and this is a part-time basis.”* (Bob, The Operation Veteran Farming Program director)

As an example of military symbolism is the programs instructors’ use of military time. To assist veterans, they communicate time via the 24-hour system. The veterans recognized this, and began to feel more comfortable around civilian instructors in the program through the use of intentional familiar language. The program director provides the following example:

*“One thing that we have changed is doing the schedule in military time as opposed to the 12-hour clock that we normally go by.”* (Bob, The Operation Veteran Farming Program director)

The program utilizes intentional symbolism to entice veterans to the program. This is done in an attempt to facilitate identity transition from a veteran to a farmer. The director explains why by saying:

*“We are training military veterans to be farmers on land that the world's most famous military veteran [George Washington] fought for and once cultivated. And then like that poetry in telling the story, and I think that it gives our program some gravitas. And I know that the vets dig it.”* (Kate, SAFC Program director)

This symbolic manipulation is seen throughout this adult agricultural education program. The learning materials and other items issued to the program participants include symbolic military colors and uniformity to which veterans are accustomed. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Shirts for the program were given out today. They are dark olive Army green and have darker green print on them. Many of the participants immediately put them on.”*

This program also utilized symbolism associated with tools and settings. These were used because it was assumed that they would make the military program participants more comfortable and feel a part of the farming community. The instructor says:

*“We [The Operation Veteran Farming Program directors and educators] do try to incorporate patriotic symbols, tools, or familiar comfortable settings for the veterans.”* (Patrick, The Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

In this observation, I overhear how being around similar symbols and settings helps Kylee’s participation in this program. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Kylee began to compare a lot of the farm equipment to that of her military tactical gear. She began discussing how this makes the transition and idea of agriculture a very “familiar” thing”.*

Many of the Operation Veteran Farming participants connected with the symbolism that was present on the first day of this program. Their self-interpretation of their military service was represented by the U.S. Flag. Seeing the same flag on the first day of this program, assisted their

association of their new concept of agricultural service to that same flag. One Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

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

In the military, rank and their military uniform carrying important meaning. Rank and other embodied, institutionalized, and objectified cultural capital is how they identify each other.

There were times when this was important to the military program participants. One of the times that this stuck out most was when we visited other veteran owned farms. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “One of the farmers was a veteran farmer. The veteran program participants seem to be wearing a lot of military memorabilia during these visits. This was more than they had in the past few months. George was wearing what he described as his “life story jacket.” It was a black jacket that included Army patches. Ethan had on camouflage pants.”*

For most of the veterans who participated in this program, they expressed the inability to work with civilians. They need a space where their military culture could be expressed and recognized before entering into a civilian community. The director explains this:

*“It’s veteran specific because before we started it and as we were getting rolling, we talked to a bunch of veterans who were expressing some difficulty in being able to work effectively with other civilians, they need a space to learn with other veterans who shared their culture and language.”* (Kate, SAFC’s program director)

Notably, all the veterans described the influence of interacting with peer veterans in an educational program. This experience improved their connection to the program and their learning environment. My field notes depict this. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “As conversations begin, I heard one veteran program participant state, “I love being around military people again.” Another veteran program participant replies, “yes! Just like old times, I love this, makes me feel alive.”*

Advice from former Operation Veteran Farming participants was valued. My field notes observed this advice. The entry states:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “A former veteran program participant and now a veteran mentor to the group, mentioned, if you are going to buy equipment, make sure it fits the mission and you do not just hold extra (useless) items.”*

Another field note entry discusses the way in which the military veteran participants organized as they participated in an activity. This organization was familiar of military formations. The field note entry reads:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Once everyone moved into the greenhouse they faced to the opening of the greenhouse and they stood close together. Most everyone was standing tall and seemed to be very proud. When they spoke to the farm manager, they stood at a modified parade rest and spoke loud and clear. Everyone had a pen, a required piece of equipment and part of your uniform in the military.”*

This field note entry reinforces how these Operation Veteran Farming participants configured themselves in a learning environment. Again, this is very similar to how military members are configured during their training. This configuration and learning starts off symbolic of a military setting, but the veterans soon associate this learning to a civilian setting. This assists in the identity change that they are making. The field entry says:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The first lesson is on seeds. Again, the room is configured into a “U” shape. The veterans did not appear sit in a specific pattern. Although, I did notice that they preferred to sit at the back of the U. This allowed them to see both the door and windows. Less veterans sat with their back to either.”*

Another field note entry illustrated the need for veterans to be engaged in hard work that is much like the hard work that they would encounter while in the military. This symbolism of military being connected to hard work now takes on new meaning. The hard work can now be connected to farming. This entry reads:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “A video about hand tilling was shown, in the video the author was talking about how hard this kind of work is, the veterans began to talk to each other and say how much they liked the idea of work.”*



Even for smaller task, it is important that veterans are able to display behaviors that they would while they were in the military. This gives them a sense of pride. This pride is not just something that they see themselves carrying out in the military, but now in civilian spaces. This field note entry observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: "A lady came out to take up dirty dishes from breakfast. Many of the veterans (including Rob) wanted to take his own dishes."*

I observed how the military program participants felt comfortable in settings where behaviors, social acts, and activities were similar to those of the military. This again starts off as a familiar military behavior, but soon the veterans in this program were associating this learning style with civilian settings. This is helping them to adjust to civilian life. This field note entry discusses this behavior:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: "The educators had the veterans put together a tent as a group project. George again lightened the mood by joking that, "some of us are really good at putting up tents, while some of us have never seen a tent so this should be interesting." Bob then instructed that if the veterans are up to walking to please come with him, and if not stay behind. All the veterans followed him. Luz (who had a broken foot) was slightly slower than the rest and moved a little slower. Louis stayed behind to help her. He said, "I won't leave a battle buddy behind. "All of the participants came back and laid them on the ground. All of them were parallel to each other with the same in facing the same side. This is a typical practice in the military. It is a way of doing inventory of your materials. Once all the equipment is at the site everyone is standing around gathered by the poles waiting for instruction. Without much communication at all, everyone lines up and executes the task before them. Luz called out, "okay first sergeant, what are we doing.*

*Immediately, without much verbal instruction, the veterans begin to work together form smaller teams to connect and place the tent poles. They worked through the challenges and found solutions to the problems. Camaraderie is clear. The tent came together fast. Once the frame was completed they started to add the canvas which needed to be tied down. Without a word, George got into his element and jumped on the table to tie them down. He started to move the table to tie more and many veterans came to his aid, helping him move the table to each spot to tie more. together quickly. One of the canvas straps broke and a pole slipped, many of the veterans ran to the aid of the person near the pole. The next task was to secure the poles. Someone said they needed a hammer and without asking or being told to do so, Jade ran to get a hammer. Again, without verbal communication, Jade went to find one.*

*This behavior is very similar to what you would experience in the military. Everyone works together to complete a common task. Not many verbal coos are needed. Everyone falls into a task and complete their piece of the mission. Often leadership roles switch as it is necessary and military members know that this occurs and are very comfortable with this behavior. Especially when a hierarchy has already been established.”*

Seeing themselves as subject modified some of these program participant’s behavior due to social acts. This illustrates the behavioral change that is leading to the process of an identity change taking place through the use of these symbols. My field notes depicted this behavior change. It read:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “This month veterans were moving around and sitting with others. They were well mixed and not divided by gender. The walls were light blue; the carpet is light blue with circle pattern. The room had a very calm atmosphere with light blue and white colors making it peaceful. There are windows on two sides of the room. Both of them face out to grass areas. The window in the front has a rock walkway and grassy areas with trees. The back yard is mostly trees. Again, the room is set up into a U shape. More people are sitting with their back to the windows than in any other month. All the veteran program participants are still very engaged.”*

The Operation Veteran Farming participants were more engaged when they were being instructed by a peer veteran. This is evident by the below field entry which discusses a few farm visits, one of which was a veteran farmer. The entry illustrates the need for veteran to veteran instruction. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The first farm visit took place at a non-veteran farm. Veterans seemed interested, but quiet. They stood very close together. They chatted amongst each other. There were not a lot of questions asked and the visit ended early.*

*The second farm was owned by a military veteran. The farm seemed very organized. The veteran opened up a lot and seemed to connect with the farm owner. The military veteran farm owner seemed to be very excited and engaged while talking to the veteran program participants. He wanted to answer a lot of questions and the veteran farmer participants were asking a lot. Most of the questions that were asked, involved how best to start. The military veteran farmer offered advice and at one point said, “I don’t normally share this with others, but because you are veterans. I will share....” Later, the military veteran farmer gave each veteran program participant his number to keep in touch and so that he could answer any other questions that they might have.*

*It began to rain fairly hard and all the veteran program participants stayed and continued to listen to the military veteran farmer. Time was running out and the program*

*director was eager to move everyone to lunch. However, many of the veteran program participants stayed behind and continued to talk to the military veteran farmer. A lot of military language was being used during the conversations that occurred. Military humor was also used by the military veteran to answer questions that the veteran program participant was answering. This visit seemed to relax the veteran program participants. Lunch was filled with a lot of conversation about the military and this program.*

*After lunch, the veteran program participants visited another non-veteran farm. The farm was very organized. The veterans seemed a lot more relaxed. However, initially they stood in a line parallel to the fence and did not engage with the farmer. Once the farmer had spoken, and the veteran farmer participants were able to look around, they seemed a lot more relaxed and split into two large groups. One was speaking to the female farmer and the other group stayed speaking to her husband.*

*The last farm the veteran program participants visited was very unorganized. It was obvious that the veteran program participants were uncomfortable. Most remarked about the inability to park like they wanted to and they were nervous about being able to get out if they wanted to. Ethan remarked, "there is just too much going on here, I need to step outside." Luz and Jade spoke about how the disorganization was giving them an "uncomfortable feeling."*

*However, the veteran program participants did pay attention and were all very polite. Most were standing by the opening of the barn and never went further than the door until the tour moved down stairs. Down stairs there were a lot of cobwebs and one veteran remarked, "give me a day and I will have this barn up to bar." The other veteran program participants laughed. Other than with each other, there was very little interaction and the veterans soon began to leave earlier than the given time."*

One very important aspect to the educational success of these Operation Veteran Farming participants was the need for others to acknowledge their attributes and recognize their benefits to a field of interest. This established trust with civilians and changed veterans' perception of civilians. This was discussed by a military program participant and noted in my field notes from my observations. He says:

*"One thing that I appreciated was how one of the [visiting civilian] instructor recognized how veterans have many good qualities and we don't need certain lectures told to us. We have similar skill sets from the military." (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

The military veteran participants in this program voiced the importance of recognizing their military culture and their military veteran human capital. Ethan says:

*“I don’t come the farthest, but I come seven hours to get there and sometimes I am gassed. But I come back, because there is valuable content and I know I will get what I need. It also made me feel comfortable when the instructor (who was a civilian) was aware that we [veterans] are safety aware, that we work hard, that we are not afraid to work, and that we are more adaptable than others. Because, it is more dangerous than any other career. It also has a lot of suicide. And we are always proactive to find other ways to be proactive with that. We are built in a way that the resilience is built in to us. And we have each other’s back and watch out for each other in a field that is very similar to the military. Because of that, I know I will be a successful farmer.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

The veteran influence is greatly enjoyed by these participants. One participant shared during the program. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Keith said to another program participant, “I love coming here I look forward to it each month. I am with my people again.”*

Reinforcing this concept of being recognized for their military veteran attributes. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The speaker for the one of the lectures remarked, teaching veterans is nice, you guys already know the importance of safety and equipment maintained. You are all very disciplined and much of this information we can quickly cover. I know you will do what needs to be done.” George commented, “yes! we will make it happen.”*

This participant decided to provide a photo of themselves in uniform [Figure 4]. This photo represented their time in the military. For Luz, the military was a hard challenge. Her identity formation did not come easy. The uniform represents overcoming that challenge in front of her Drill Sergeant and achieving a military identity. Luz provided the following quotes and images:

*“I chose this picture because it was my graduation day. I tried so hard. I’m standing next to a guy that was really hard on me during my time in service and I was like fuck yeah, I made it! This guy made my life impossible. So inside of me, I felt like haha, you didn’t think I could do it!!!!”* (Luz)



*Figure 4: Graduation Day by Luz*

Luz's second photo [Figure 5] was from the first day of the Operation Veteran Farming Program. She pointed out that this picture symbolizes the idea of patriotism. These patriotic symbols helped her to feel more comfortable and feel she could participate in this adult agricultural education program. This shift in her confidence was simply made by these military objects being present. She explains:

*"I chose this picture because it was our first day at Operation Veteran Farming program. We were at Mount Vernon and there were the flags in the front of the room, stars on the floor, an eagle in the back of the room, and pictures of George and Martha Washington on the walls. It felt very patriotic and I knew I was at the right place!" (Luz)*



*Figure 5: First Day by Luz*

This study indicates that social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within this agricultural education program. As these veterans develop new habitus, they begin to transform the meaning carried with symbolic objects and self. This agricultural education programs influences the societal mobility taken place with these Operation Veteran Farming participants.

### **Influence on Societal Mobility**

Multiple Operation Veteran Farming participants expressed that adult agricultural education program has helped them in overcoming challenges. One veteran spoke about how this program helped his combat veteran wife overcome challenges and participate in a prior year's program. This change occurred because his wife was able to change the meaning she associated

with transitioning to the civilian world. Before this program, she did not see the value in herself and was unable to move socially. In describing his wife, he says:

*“My wife helps me a lot too. She took the program last year. She didn’t know what she wanted and was at very high risk for self-harm. She became involved with agriculture and she began to cope and then with this program has really given her confidence that she could be successful.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This military veteran highlights the importance of the physical work during this agricultural education program. The symbolism he associates with himself as subjects includes that of hard work and now takes on a new meaning from a symbol of the military, to a symbol of farming and leads to an improved feeling of resilience and self-identity. He says:

*“I have issues with my mental health. I have bi-polar and deal with a lot of depression. Sometimes I feel like I don’t want to get up, but then I have to get up because something on the farm needs my attention. It also helps when I am there [SAFC farm], because I can work some of this energy out and on the days that I don’t need to be around people, I can go work alone and pick weeds or if I want to be around people I can go to the market or something. This is the kind of job that I can do and make me feel good. If I had a regular desk job, I would get fired.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

An important notion was that this adult agricultural education program provided Operation Veteran Farming participants in finding other opportunities or social mobility within a civilian community. One participant says:

*“This [Operation Veteran Farming Reserve Program] has been that security blanket. The job that I am doing came directly from [program director]. Before, I was kind of more of a recluse in the civilian communities.”* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Supporting this claim, the director explains how this program often helps participants realize a new-found purpose within the civilian world through job connections. She explains:

*“While he was training with us, we ended up helping him to get a job working with a company that was doing private farms for people, sort of a landscaping company, but they were doing farm work. And he got that job and they instantly saw ... He was a sergeant in the military, so they instantly saw his ability organize a crew and get work*

*done, and were, of course, immediately impressed with how much he got done.” (Kate, SAFC director)*

**Facilitating purpose through program participation.** The structure of this adult agricultural education program can also give participants a feeling of purpose and simply make them feel better by being supported. They are connecting to non-military groups and personnel. This participant says:

*“I think for me, my last duty station had me feeling like a piece of crap and then I transitioned out of the military. So, I really felt like a piece of crap coming out of the military. When I came into this, I was very afraid going into a civilian job. I want it to be respected and treated in a certain way. Operation Veteran Farming program served as and mitigating factor and I felt I was going to be taken care of. first thing [the director] said was, “is everything okay, what's going on, do you need anything? So that really helped me a lot and this program gave me the advantage and the structure I needed to transition into a community.” (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program)*

For the most part, these veterans appreciate that they are now serving their country in a different way through their social acts. This service takes on a new meaning and is now associated with growing food and providing food security. One military veteran participant says:

*“Operation Veteran Farming program helped me recognize that we served your country, now you're helping the people where you live locally with the food products that you make because everybody's gotta eat. And I think with that, that is kind of a service that it's not really recognized service.” (George, Operation Veteran Farming program)*

**Civilian connection through program participation.** A challenge for many of these military veterans was the challenge of making civilian connections. Their involvement in The Operation Veteran Farming program facilitated this connection. This connection or symbolism of connection changed how veterans were visualizing civilians. One participant explains:

*“Working with civilians here, I know I can interact with them with more ease.” (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming program)*



As you have seen above, many of the Operation Veteran Farming participant perceive that civilians have a negative perception of them. This program facilitated a change in this perception. For example:

*“I noticed the civilians we interact with while in this program are starting to see that veterans perform well and that we fit well for the needs in farming. I am not just a veteran with PTSD anymore.”* (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming program)

For one veteran, this program allowed them to feel comfortable around civilians for the first time. A symbolic trust formed that could lead to connections with other civilians. She says:

*“Even the ones here [Operation Veteran Farming program] that are not in the military make me feel more comfortable because I don't feel like they are watching me as much as other civilians do. They understand us because other veterans came here before us. I am (for the first time) comfortable around civilians.”* (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming program)

This Operation Veteran Farming participant attributes this new connection to civilians to the fact that the director of SAFC and the director of the Operation Veteran Farming program are both civilians and they care about the veterans in the program. This supports the idea that these veterans are changing how veterans portray non-military persons who live in their own communities. The following participants says:

*“It is nice that the civilian program directors truly want to help us veterans. I see a different perspective. This is a pretty cool opportunity for us.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This civilian/veteran connection is not only veteran to civilian, but civilian to veteran perception.

The OVFP director supports the veterans notion by explaining:

*“They are learning from experience and in a non-veteran community. Interacting with people that are not necessarily in the veteran community is helpful and gives them a perspective that they didn't have before. It also gives the civilians a little better of a perspective on who these veterans are and their good qualities.”* (Bob, Operation Veteran Farming program director)

A challenge for military veterans is overcoming the common misconceptions civilians have about veterans. This program exposes civilians through introduction to veterans in civilian instruction, civilian farm tours, and civilian markets. This helps break many of the set preconceived ideas. The program director explains:

*“It's been a delight to see civilian stereo types and their preconceived notions about people in the military really bashed upon meeting our vets; because most Americans don't have extension to anybody in the military.”* (Kate, SAFC director)

In this example, the SAFC director reiterates the above notion. She says:

*“Through the years our various staff members who haven't had those experiences have interacted with our vets, it's just then really nice to see oh, these guys are super smart and cool, and different from what I thought veterans would be like.”* (Kate, SAFC director)

**Knowledge and skill obtainment through program participation.** This program also allows military veterans to obtain the knowledge that they initially sought. They want to be farmers and although the military has taught them skills that they will need to be successful, this program is teaching them farming material that they will need and to be part of a civilian community. This illustrates social mobility. One program participant explains:

*“I know I am ready to get started after this program. I don't feel as intimidated about the civilian world and with civilians and how I will fit into it. The challenges that my peers faced with an unstructured civilian job and civilians doesn't seem like such a challenge that I will face in farming. It will be my operation and I will run it organized, structured and as a mission of hope and passion for farming. It will be a lot of work, which I am used to, but now it will also be a labor of love.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming program)

Another participant explains this concept of combining military skillset with the program farming knowledge, has created social mobility due to participation in this program. He says:

*“The military provided me with the personal drive, dedication and dedication to the mission and SAFC has provided me with the knowledge and network of how to find that knowledge if I need to. I am eager and ready to start my operation and really serve others in a community.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Some of the knowledge obtained in this program is simply awareness of how much work is needed to be successful. George explains:

*“But just doing this really has allowed me to understand how hard it is and how much work you put into it. Whether you're raising livestock or growing some type of crop, it's a lot of work and you need to be ready for this kind of transition.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This program not only facilitates social mobility for these program participants, but it allows them mobility in their chosen career. Here a program participant discusses her ability to gain certification faster due to the program materials. Mya says:

*“The organic class they gave us landslides ahead of where I need to be on the organic, came home, created all my logs, created my farm safety plan...ect.. The guy from the organic certification came out and he told me because everything is together so well, that he's going to try to expedite my three-year process so I don't have to wait the full three years.”* (Mya, Spouse of Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

**Recognizing military attributes through program participation.** As the program progressed, the veterans began to participate in more activities. This participant was very reserved in start of the program. However, this participant began to participate more as the program continued. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “One program participant, who is usually very reserved, volunteered to place soil in the planters. She talked to the instructor and other participants for the first time.”*

Not only did the Operation Veteran Farming participants participation increase, but their connections with each other was increasing. This shows that they were feeling comfortable, sharing experiences, and making connections. This helped them during their overall educational experience. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The veterans were becoming closer and were poking fun at each other. George began making fun of Keith for being in the Air Force and said he was issued golf clubs. He started telling a story about how the Air Force got to Ballard and asked where the hotel was located. George then started talking about traveling to*

*different countries and open up about his stories that included harder more challenging topics.”*

As the veterans’ connections to the program became deeper, they began to share more with each other and participate more and feel better about themselves. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “George prosthetic has (up until today) looked like a normal foot and he covered it with his pants. Today it is a sky like prosthetic and he seems to be proud of it. His pants are rolled up and he is ready to go to work. He is smiling and joking and moving around with a purpose to get work done.”*

Earlier in the program the veterans talked a lot about the military and their experience. However, as time progressed, the conversations during the break began to include more agriculture topics, including what their short and long term goals. This illustrates the beginning of a shift in their identity formation and their autonomy as a civilian. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “During the breaks, the veterans talked a lot about agriculture and their future plans. This was different. It was no longer just dreams, but was now plans. They included civilian companies that they would sell to or work with.”*

### **Transitioning of Service**

This study denoted that reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity. This is navigated through the transitioning of their service and identity formation through interactions which leads to social mobility.

Transitioning of service occurs through redefining service. Operation Veteran Farming participants in this program use agriculture as a transitioning tool to change their mission from a military mission to a food service mission.

**Redefining service.** For these veterans, their service was a critical part of serving in the military. They indicated that once they left the military many of them wished to continue some kind of service. They feel that this service is what gives them purpose. This participant says:

*“More important than an object was the concept of service. It was my job to help people and that is what I was good at. I had a purpose and it was service to others.”* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This participant relates his service to a specific symbol. He also sees that his concept of service is transitioning to a service that involves providing food. He says:

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

This notion of transition of service is echoed by this veteran. She views a new service to this country that includes agriculture. The symbolic manipulation of the idea of service and the objects associated with that service, motivates her. This program participant says:

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

One Operation Veteran Farming participant equates the word veteran with the responsibility to continue some kind of service and social act to his country. The service becomes an example of self-interpretation. George acts towards the word service because of the meaning he ascribes to the word service. He says:

*“Definition of a veteran to me is someone who, especially nowadays, decided that they would put aside their personal goals and ambitions to serve the country. Whether that's in peace time or in war time, they took the time out and said, I will volunteer to serve my country.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This participant provided this picture [Figure 6] to demonstrate his time in the Army. He is a proud service member that wanted to show a time when he was deployed and having fun. This identity as a military member is extremely important to Ethan. The military for Ethan, is about comradery and brotherhood. The cigar in the picture also takes on special meaning to

Ethan and his fellow peers, because it represents the idea of going home to the US. Here, Ethan and his peer are smoking cigars to symbolize a celebration. This symbolic comradery through service is portrayed in the following photos. Later, this concept of serving is visibly seen within the second photo. Ethan provided the following quotes and images:

*“I am smoking a cigar with one of my sergeants. It’s at a USO concert. It was on the Kandahar Air field. The cigar is very symbolic for us. It was symbolic of winding down. I don’t really smoke cigars, but this was about hanging out. It is a rough time, but a lot of soldiers go and just have a good time hanging together. That’s what the military is for me, comradery, and brotherhood!”*



*Figure 6: A Cigar in Afghanistan by Ethan*

His second picture [Figure 7] depicts the purpose Ethan feels as he participates in social acts while farming at SAFC. He feels that his participation is much more than learning information, he is reforming an identity from a military member that provides a security service to a servicing through agriculture. Ethan says:

*“This picture is one of me milking a goat. Working with an animal and it wants to give. That experience of actually doing it, literally hands on, and I am enjoying it. And being surrounded by the farm and the peaceful place that is relaxing Its about doing something for a purpose that is also fun and cute. What is better than that.”*



*Figure 7: Milking My First Goat by Ethan*

Some of the veterans have such a passion for service through food production that they equate this service with national security. The meaning they associated with the familiar concept of national security is so strong that they continue their service. This example of self-interpretation is illustrated by the SAFC Director who says:

*“It's that they want to serve their country, and there's no better way to serve their fellow man, the way that they have been in the military, than by taking the earth that is their country and by serving their fellow man good, quality, healthy food. So, they connect to the service of farming. Farming is a public service. And then I see another level, which is farming vibrant regional food systems as a national security issue.” (Kate, SAFC Director)*

This participant identifies his military service through a picture he provided of his ranger tab [Figure 8]. This ranger tab is simply a patch; however, this service member places special meaning on this uniform item and proudly identifies himself as a ranger member in the US Army. This, ranger tab means a lot more than a uniform item to this service member. We see that

continuation of service through the second picture he provides. Rob provided the following quotes and images:

*“The symbol is a ranger tab. For me it embodies excellence and hard work and always achieving goals and achieve excellence in your body excellence in all you do. It has been the symbol that has meant the most to me throughout my career. And the approach I’ve taken throughout my career regardless of what my assignments have been or what units I have served in and that’s the way I’ve always tried to approach life.” (Rob)*



Figure 8: A Rancher Tab by Rob

Rob provided a photo [Figure 9] of a pitch fork for his second picture. The pitch fork is a tool used in farming. This pitch fork takes on special meaning for Rob. He sees it as a symbol of him achieving his goals and continuing a service of hard work to provide food for his family and food security for his family. He explains this image of self-interpretation by saying:

*“The picture that comes to mind with The Operation Veteran Farming program was the weekend that we received our t-shirts. This was a couple months ago. The pitch fork on the T-shirt has kind of embodied to me, The Operation Veteran Farming program. And I think for me, the reason that takes so much meaning again represents hard work and labor. But for me, a labor of love because I have a great passion to support myself and this country through agriculture. So yes, it’s hard work, but his hard work with a goal that ultimately achieves some great results in a service to others and it keeps growing vegetables in fruits. It’s that bounty from the heart from all that hard work and labor that comes forth from the ground. This is the symbol of life, you’re watching your food go from field to table. It’s watching those beautiful eggs make it to our table. So, for me to*



*pitchfork represent all the hard work that goes into those efforts it's bounty in Harvest.”*  
(Rob)



*Figure 9: A Pitch Fork by Rob*

This idea of service was also expressed as finding a new purpose using the same kind of familiar symbols such as boots. Kyle voices this example of symbolic manipulation by saying:

*“Just putting on those boots, even though it’s not the same boots, you put them on and get into a state of mind and you feel like you have a purpose. Even though that purpose has changed.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Other veterans feel that the symbolic notion of putting on certain items relates to their military service. This helps them to transform to a new service. One participant says:

*“I have hat I wear all the time. It is like the military hat. There is something about putting it on. Its symbolic of who you are now and what your purpose is now. Even the tractor, it is our new equipment.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Many Operation Veteran Farming participants discussed how they have a new mission. This new mission now includes the feeling of being needed. This spouse says:

*“Now he feels like he has a new mission, and he’s got a purpose and he tells me, “That land needs me.” And “I need that land.” (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)*

This connection between farming and military service also included mentally and physical characteristics. This participant equated the focus needed to be successful in the military to the need of being focused in farming. Jack says:

*“This, like the military forces you have to stay physically and mentally in tuned. You have to stay dedicated to the mission” (Jack, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

This program participants discusses how this program reminds her of the military. She feels that she is serving in a new way. Jade gave a similar example:

*“This is like the military. It is like taking care of something. Now instead of taking care of your team, I am taking care of my chickens. You are watching out for something. Working with my hands is so much like the military. I am not afraid to get dirty like when you are in the Army or deployed.” (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

Kylee talks about how this idea of a new purpose is what she needs for her new life after the military. She says:

*“Moving with a purpose was always a special phrase to me. I want all my work to have a purpose and a serving component to it. It is because of that that I chose to be a veteran farmer. I have a purpose now and it’s to feed. I don’t have to say, I am a veteran...I am a farmer!” (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

The idea of service and mission led to some veterans talking about serving through food security.

Rob says:

*“When I hear veteran farmer, I think of being proud and being proud of being part of this movement and helping make a more food secure country. They [veteran and farmer] mesh well together and they complement each other. There’s so many similarities in the two professions. In terms of what it takes to be successful. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication. Veterans and farmers know what it means to carry out the mission.” (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

The program participants conversed about how the farming population is aging and how they see veterans as part of the solution to replacing them. Rob later continues:

*“It makes sense when you see the aging population of the farmers and they’re not being replaced and makes sense for veterans to take the place of a lot of those farmers and continue to serve. It is a matter of national security too, food security.”* (Rob, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This idea of serving through food security was observed through conversation that took place during the program activities. This excitement shows social mobility and self-interpretation of service. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “George and Rob discussed that they were excited to provide food security.”*

The veterans recognize their own human capital that they have after their military service and that it matches well with the human capital needed to be a successful farmer: Jade explains:

*“A lot of us are used to working in any condition, hot, cold, ect. A lot of us recognize the need and are aware of our surroundings, which you’re taught heavily in the military. If you can survive combat, then you can be good for agriculture.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This program participant uses symbolic manipulation to reassign meaning to the idea of veteran service. He also utilizes self-interpretation to decide that veteran farms to access how the farm is positively managed. Ethan explains:

*“Veterans have similar experiences, built in courage, sacrificed time and commitment to the service and mission. I have been to war! I considered myself a veteran before being deployed, but after I went to war, I felt like a true veteran and being a military veteran farmer speaks to that. It speaks to the way you know someone is operating a farm, and how to approach farming and deal with challenges. It is a set of shared values that make us unique.”* (Ethan, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Reinforcing this idea, Patrick explains how military veterans can make a great farmer because of the many characteristics and skills that they bring with them from the military. Patrick, the instructor explains:

*“A veteran makes a great farmer. They are able to use their military skills and have the ability to make quick decisions. There are times with tactical decisions making skills come into play with farming.”* (Patrick, Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

Patrick continues this idea of the good fit military veterans provide for agriculture by later saying:

*“As an outsider and a non-veteran, I think veterans are a great fit for farming. Having these people with a military background and know the importance of hard work and approaching farming as a mission with a purpose and something to tactile is really important.”* (Patrick, Operation Veteran Farming program instructor)

The next participant chose a picture of her family as a way to depict how she would describe her military service [Figure 10]. This picture shows Kylee’s family. Many family members chose to serve in the military. Kylee sees her service as a way to continue that tradition and make her family proud. For Kylee, her family is what she uses to identify herself and her service. She sees family pride and service tradition as a symbol of her dedication. It is this service that she wishes to continue. Though this service transforms to a farming focus, it is still a service rooted in a family’s traditional symbolism. Kylee provided the following quotes and images:

*“I chose it because one of the main reasons I joined the military was because of my dedication to the family. My grandfather served in the Army. Most of my uncles. My sister and some of my cousins. So, it has always been something that really represented the family. What drew me to the military was my family. This photo is funny because everyone is pointing to me and brings back a time when was together and brings back a lot of joy and happiness thinking about all our dedication to the military. The farming and the military are family traditions.”*



*Figure 10: Military Service as a Family Tradition by Kylee*

For her second image [Figure 11], Kylee chose a picture of her family farm. This farm takes on special meaning to Kylee because it represents family dedication and the practice of providing something for themselves and others. It is an example of symbol manipulation of tradition and motivation for being in this program and participating in life itself. It is a commitment to a transformed service. Kylee describes this why she acts towards this idea of service:

“The program allowed me to feel safe with other veterans while at the same time learning what it takes to be successfully and honor my family’s long tradition of farming. This picture is of my family farm. I chose it because it means so much to me and is my motivation for being here. I will not go to the farm, but I will start one of my own and honor my family traditions like I did in the military” (Kylee)



*Figure 11: The Family Farm by Kylee*

Some of these veterans are using agriculture as a tool to overcome some mental challenges. They feel their mental challenges are being addressed because the farm work reduces their stress. These veterans discussed how agriculture then becomes a symbolic tool which aids in overcoming such challenges. Luz discusses:

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

Luz continues by further explaining how agriculture helps her to overcome PTSD symptoms. She voiced that she was a strong soldier and her personality worked well with serving the military. It was hard for her to then stop being a soldier. It was who she was. Her identity.

Farming helped with her civilian identity formation. She equates farming to meditation which helps her to relax. Luz says:

*“I just had a strong personality that went well with the job I did and I was taught to be even stronger! Now I'm not doing it anymore. How do I change what I've done for the longest time? I can't make a 360 change in the person that I was because that's all I was. I was a damn good soldier. I think now if I would have wanted to meditate, I would have done better and not let my PTSD take over. But this farming in this program is a lot like meditating. I am finding out how to relax.”* (Luz, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Agriculture is being used as a therapy for many of these veterans. It is giving them purpose and they feel they now have a mission. George wakes up and works because of the meaning he associates with the farm. He sees the farm as his life and as a way to “get back” at the enemy.

Here George explains:

*“And I put on my leg and I choose to participate in life. It is my way of getting back at the guy who shot me like, you failed. You were supposed to kill me but you didn't. I win. Every day I wake up, every day I put my leg on, every day I give my 100% to working here on the farm, I win. I beat that guy. Agriculture gave me that purpose and for right now the farm is my life. It's my therapy. It's what gets me through the day and when I look at all the things that we have done here [family farm], it's just amazing that ... Even though I've got a bum leg and a bad hand, I can still do stuff. You just have to figure out ways to make it work.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Similarly, Mya talks about how agriculture has assisted her husband through mental challenges.

Without a purpose, Mya says that he was depressed and once he found farming, he felt that purpose. He began to work hard and long hours again that was similar to the work he completed during his service in the military. She explains how this made him feel excited about life again. He self-interpreted the idea of farming to that of a service and worked towards a positive meaning of life. He sees himself in a new light. Redefined by viewing himself as subject and modifying his behavior through new skills and habits. She says:

*“Because it physically taxed him that much, that he just couldn't ... it would just wear him physically out. That he just would be down for two or three days. And then that would depress him and was frustrating and he would always say, “It made him feel less of a*

*man.” After his transitioned after the amputation surgery, he is like the energizer bunny. He will come out to this farm and literally work a 16-hour days and he thinks nothing about it. He doesn't complain, he doesn't whine about it... in the morning he gets up and he's like, “I gotta go to the farm!” He is excited about it. Prior to his amputation surgery I would have to push him to get up and get out of bed.” (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)*

This program participant provided four pictures to show this transformation her husband made on his journey from a service member to a farmer. These pictures illustrate some of the changes her husband made in his identity after his injury and how he tied them to symbolic symbols or symbolic manipulation. These symbols gave George a specific identity that he felt defined him. In the first photo [Figure 12], we see how important her husband's military identity is to him. He is showing his love for his wife, but still at the ready with his machine gun. It was his choice to include himself in the photo with a machine gun and a full uniform. This choice provides an insight to how much the military meant to him. Interestingly, it also shows a change in Mya's identity. In the first picture, she takes on the role of the wife waiting at home while her husband serves. Mya provided the following quotes and images:

*“One, the sweetest thing ever. It was five days before his injury. He was injured in February, so for Valentine's Day, he wanted to send me something. He went out to a Conex and made one of those giant candy hearts about the size of the Conex and he did it in chalk. He put Mya be mine, just like the little candy heart in his full uniform with his machine gun on.”*





*Figure 12: My Husband on Valentine's Day by Mya*

In Mya's second picture [Figure 13], her and her husband are sitting outside of a baseball game. George was the guest of honor. This photo was taken after George's leg was amputated due to injuries he endured after being shot multiple times during his service in Iraq. He is in full uniform and sitting proud in a wheel chair. His dedication to his military identity is assumed through his full-dress uniform. During this time, George was beginning to transition out of the Army and began to face many mental and physical challenges. His resilience was being tested. He was separated from the career, comradery of his fellow soldiers, and military identity that he loved. He lost his purpose. This will be explored more in the interviews. However, this photo illustrates that Mya's role has now changed to that of a care taker. George is dependent on her for many of his needs. Mya describes the reason she chose this picture:

*“He was being honored at a New York Yankees game. They took him out on the field in the seventh inning and they presented him an electronic wheelchair from the Independence Fund. Just being out there in the stadium and everybody standing up in that stadium to recognize his service was humbling.”*



*Figure 13: My Husband by Mya*

The third photo Mya provides [Figure 14] gives us a glimpse at how George and Mya’s identity is shifting. We see that George is no longer in a wheel chair and his standing proud next to his wife. This photo was taken during The Operation Veteran Farming program. George is wearing a jacket that he says symbolizes his life story. On it is many patches from different units and movements he participated in during the military. However, he is also wearing overalls. He says that these overalls are now part of his new uniform. These overalls symbolize the identity change taken place with in George. He now identifies himself as a farmer. Mya is no longer his caretaker, but a partner. This partnership developed through the use of farming. George and Mya are proud of their partnership and their newly formed farming identity.

*“This picture means so much to me. This [Operation Veteran Farming program] has helped us move forward with our lives and we are really fulfilling something that's been a*

*six-year working goal. We've talked about this literally when he was in the hospital at Walter Reed back in '12. To actually finally, finally end, move forward, and to have this stuff happening, it's like we stand there at the end of the day when we, do all this work and we just almost cry and we're like, We are really doing this [farming]."*



*Figure 14: A New Adventure Together Farming by Mya*

In this picture [Figure 15] Mya provided, we see Georges sense of humor and that his resilience has now come close to full circle. Here, his toe is displayed. This toe has taken the place of his thumb which was shot off during his service. He is now able to talk about his injuries and feels connected to others inside and outside of the program. His identity continues to make changes towards that of a civilian.

*"This is a picture of George's reconstructed hand. They used his big toe for his thumb. He jokes that his name is Toemas now"*



*Figure 15: Survival: A Modified Thumb by Mya*

The idea of putting your hands in the dirt appeals to some of these veterans. They voice that their mental health benefitted from growing and creating food. Just having their hands in the dirt can help them feel better. This spouse says:

*“I totally get the psychological side of growing and creating, I get the psychological side of having your hands in the dirt.” (Mya, Spouse of military veteran and a program participant)*

Again, the idea of being in the dirt is important to the mental condition of these veterans. The symbolism of “making something better” provides mental ease to some of these veterans. This participant says:

*“I really like getting my hands in the dirt and doing something, a physical and mental purpose. I feel better and am making something better. And I don’t have to be around other people.” (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)*

Peaceful settings were also mentioned as a mental benefit to these veterans. They describe the peace and quiet that often comes with farming. It was also important to showcase how veterans

who run their own farms allows them to be in control of their own life. The director supports this concept by saying:

*“They [veterans] benefit from the peace and quiet and real work and physical benefits of farm work, as well as the exposure to light and soil and getting away from all the electronic devices and the short term, urgent demands on your time that non-farming jobs have. And I think that all of the other benefits to them is a lifestyle that so many of them have been deployed so many times, or just so accustomed to having to work these crazy hours and be at somebody else's beck and call. But to be in charge of their own farm is really great for them. It gives them a sense of control that they haven't had before.”*  
(Kate, SAFC Director)

Later, Kate provides a story to reiterate the notion of agriculture being used as a tool to overcome mental challenges that came from recovering from injuries. The SAFC director states:

*“A past participant said that the reason he wants to farm is after so many times being hooked up to machines in the hospital, he cannot be in an office anymore because all the beeps give him PTSD of his recovery. So, he needs to be outside where there's not lots of electronic beeping and people ... He just wants to be in a different environment because he's still recovering from his recovery.”* (Kate, SAFC Director)

Kyle faces a lot of challenges that started before, during, and after his military service. He provided this picture [Figure 16] that represents his military service. He ties it to a totem stick. This totem stick symbolizes who he was during his time in the military. He self describes himself as a Marine who was young and arrogant. That identity shifts and is illustrated in his second photo. Kyle provided the following quotes and images:

*“The first picture is one of me from early in my career. The thing I'm holding there is a sort of totem stick that myself and twelve other Marines made to carry in the place of a guide-on during a 200-mile relay out in Cali. It's pretty much a good single picture of who I was then as a Marine: young, arrogant, athletic, and fully assured that the world was mine. Ignorance was certainly its own sort of bliss.”*



*Figure 16: An Adventure in the USMC by Kyle*

This picture of Kyle self represents his time in the program. He explains how he has changed from the military identity to an identity which involves farming. Although, he has faced a lot of challenges, this program has given him a second chance. He says this is because he is now able to work again. This explains his change in identity. He sees himself connecting to a civilian career and his value in the community. He can begin to see himself as a civilian. He articulates this identity formation:

“The second picture [Figure 17] is one from just a few months ago as I started working out on the farm as a SAFC apprentice. It's a little crazy to see the difference between me now and the kid in the first photo. Lot more gray in the hair, and I'm generally tired and disillusioned with everything that I was once so passionate about. I no longer consider myself much of a patriot. The country I signed up to serve doesn't deserve the adoration I gave it as a child, and it's possible that it never did.”



Figure 17: A New Path through Agriculture by Kyle

**New mission.** For some military veterans having a new mission of farming is therapeutic. It can help them feel better about their lives and the connections they make. A new mission helps the image these participants have for their new career. George self-interpretation means sustaining his life. He says:

*“I could have taken my life, but then you're being selfish. So, for me, if I don't participate in life the enemy wins and working on the farm has been very therapeutic for me, because it gives me a purpose, it gives me a mission, it gives me something to do. And it takes my mind off what I went through.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This mission can be rewarding because the farm needs these veterans to prosper. Veterans feel they are needed and they say that the idea of that keeps them getting up every day. George explains this:

*“But it's rewarding because instead of shooting people I'm growing things. These hop plants need me. They need me to nurture them. They need me to water them. They need me to trim them and process them, and stuff like that. Or like the animals that we have, they need me to water them and feed them, and stuff like that. So that alone, right there, is*

*really important to me because it gives me purpose. It gives me a mission.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

George introduces the idea of using agriculture to transition into a civilian community. He believes that civilian perceptions of veterans can change when they see veterans farming as their mission. He says:

*“I think if they see your mission on your farm, or what you do, or see the product you grow, I think that is helpful because it goes a long way. It's like, "Not only is this guy was a veteran but damn, he can grow some good hops. And he's a good businessman." Or, "He works hard." And all those kinds of things. So maybe that will trigger like, wow they serve a purpose.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Rob restates this concept by stating that agriculture has had an effect on how some civilians see him and his new mission. He says that some civilians just see the challenges that they face, but agriculture allows them to see the benefits veterans bring to farming. Rob says:

*“I know there's a lot of perceptions of how the civilian community sees us. Sometimes they see us as group that has many challenges. I hope participating in agriculture and giving back in a different way and continuing our service through a new mission changes that. I think it does. I heard that people are going in the parts of this country that have those perceptions of this a program like this will help them and help provide those communities with a better understanding of what we do. We are normal like everybody else with many passions and goals.”* (Rob, OVFP participant)

### **Agricultural Identity Formation**

New identity formation is occurring for these OVFP through interacting in a socialization process and reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context. With a civilian identity, military veterans are feeling more connected to their civilian communities. Identity is a vital aspect to cultural capital mobility. Many veterans expressed how this adult agricultural education program has helped them change the meaning of the word veteran. One Operation Veteran Farming participant says:

*“The word veteran used to mean, just being someone who served in the military, now (after this program), I think it means being resilient, trustworthy and selfless and serving*



*my country in a different way.... food! What's better than that!"* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Finding their “new” identity was important to the participants. This participant says that these kinds of programs are helping veterans to do just that. This participant says:

*“It's really important that veterans find their space and their new identity. And I think programs like The Operation Veteran Farming program are helping veterans to do that.”* (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Many veterans expressed how their identity has now changed to a farmer identity. Kylee explains this symbolic manipulation and how it helps her self-interpretation of special meaning she holds for objects:

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

**New farmer identity.** Rob reinforces this identity change. To symbolize his self-identity, he now sees himself as a farmer. As a farmer, he also now has a new mission of growing and providing food. This self-interpreted identity of farmer enables him to act towards a new mission. He says:

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

Symbols are important to these veteran’s identity. They are reassigning their military connected symbols to farming through the socialization process of this program. The social acts help to generate a new identity. George says:

*“While some of the symbols like the American flag and boots are the same they also are very different once you get into this program. Like when I first seen these symbols and thought, Oh I'm at home, but now that I've been participating in this program, I see that I can serve in different ways and then the American flag become something that I'm serving in a different way. And the boots become something that I put on for a different purpose.*

*They're still boots but they're farming boots.*” (George, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Symbolic veteran identity and farmer veteran identity are expressed throughout this program.

Veterans argue this symbolic identity and symbolic manipulation was important to them.

Operation Veteran Farming program director clarifies:

*“I think it helps to see all the patriotic imagery that is around the site. It helps them feel familiar and give them the sense of patriotism that they are used to. We do see a lot of people that come in and say that this is a way of continuing their service. So, there's definitely a feeling around that and when you see the imagery it connects them with let's say, that portrait of George Washington and the American flag and the idea that this is veteran land. The idea that George Washington was not only a veteran, but a farmer!”* (Bob, Operation Veteran Farming Program director)

Their notion that this veteran farmer identity is entwined with serving their country was also critical for some of these veterans. Here a veteran explains:

*“A veteran farmer is a military veteran who now wants to give to this service of food and execute for a new mission and wants to succeed. Not only for himself, but for his country.”* (Jack, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This idea of veteran farmer is expressed again by Jade. She clearly defines herself as a veteran farmer. This use of language is critical to understanding how she sees herself after participation in this program. She says:

*“Because of this program and the things, I have learned, I am now a military farmer veteran, who has interest in doing something about the current food system, whether it is growing vegetables, raising cows or bee hives ect. And I get to use my military experience to improve that.”* (Jade, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

The tools are important to this identity re-formation. Kyle explains how these symbols are an extension of himself that now is identified as a veteran farmer. Kyle says:

*“Tools I use during this program parallel our military service. For instance, knives. I have so many knives, I wore one all the time in the military, now I wear it as a farmer. I always have it with me. I may not need it, but it my sense of capability. It acts as a symbol of knowledge and capability, it is who I am and I don't have to change that.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

This program is helping veterans see themselves as a farmer with a purpose. This identity change also improves how they see themselves as a civilian. Kate supports this notion and explains:

*“The physical work of participating in this program, helped him improve his processing, and he made him feel useful and like more than a veteran with issues, but now a farmer with a purpose.”* (Kate, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

Many veterans talk about how others see their new identity. They feel that now that they see them as a farmer and not a veteran, they are able to acclimate. One veteran program participant says:

*“After working for six months on the [SAFC] farm, I finally am not being seen as a “veteran” I am now identified me as a farmer.”* (Kyle, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

**New civilian identity.** This program has helped some of these veterans see themselves as a confident civilian through social acts and symbolic manipulation. This concept is important to reintegration into the civilian world. Many of the participants would not define themselves as a civilian at the beginning of this program. However, as the program progressed, the word civilian was used. This participant explains:

*“This program has helped me to find my purpose and redefined it. I think because of this program I have more confidence as a civilian.”* (Kylee, Operation Veteran Farming program participant)

During this program, I observed changes in the participant’s identity through observing their reduction in their reliance military symbols.

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The men of the group still had military haircuts for the most part, but I noticed something interesting. After three months, the program participants began to wear an assortment of colors and less military clothing and memorabilia. Two examples were Keith’s farming shirt and a colored ball cap and Luz’s lavender coat. Others, such as Jade still wore camo. Many wore the veteran farmer shirt that was given to them the prior month.”*

This observation reinforces this idea. Veterans in this program began to wear their hair differently and change the way they dressed. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “The veteran program participants are slightly changing how they are dressing. Jade veered from her usual camo to a pink purple coat and a straw farmer hat. Kyle has always had longer hair than the rest, but he has let it grow out more. George went from Khaki pants to overalls. Selene has her hair down and is wearing makeup.”*

On this particular day, veterans illustrated more farmer symbolism than veteran symbolism.

Their formation of a farmer identity was beginning to take place. I observed:

*[FIELD NOTE ENTRY]: “Today, the veterans showed their military memorabilia, but I observed it was much more subtle than normal. Many of the veteran were now wearing more shirts, boots and hats that represented farming themes. Kylee was in overalls and her veteran farming shirt. Ethan had on farming boots. I observed that some of the veteran program participants were now wearing Army green colors, but with farming themed hats. The veterans were spread around the room and many were sitting with their back to windows that led out to the front and back of the property.”*

This participant shared two photos the first [Figure 18] describes how and why he is attached to his 9-millimeter hand gun. The hand gun was just an object that George carried on him to protect himself before this particular incident however, after the accident, George assigned a completely different meaning to the gun. During his description, it is revealed that he attributed the gun as the thing that saved his life. George has become attached and given personal feeling to an object. This hand gun is part of how he connects his identity to the military. In the second photo we see George in overalls on a farm.

George provided the following quotes and images:

*“It's kind of weird that an inanimate object can bring up a lot of memories and the day of my incident, when I was shot. But it was on my right hip, because I'm a right-handed shooter ... I would either wear like a leg holster or, this particular day I wore what's called Uncle Mike's holster. Goes around your waist so it was like on ... above my ... right buttocks. So, when we were in the village in, village was called Robot Two. And we're checking out with this USAID representative, the schools and that type of thing. So, when that Taliban guy that was posing as an Afghan national police turned a machine gun on three of us, bullets were just flying everywhere. I saw like bullets go through the tough of my uniform on my sleeves and stuff like that, I could just see stuff exploding everywhere.”*

*“And I'd gotten hit and it felt like bees were going off in my pants because that was when I got shot both butt cheeks and just the exit wounds and stuff like that whizzing through. My pants I knew I'd gotten hit. I went to try to pull my 9 mil out with my left hand and I reached across my back to try to pull it out and I couldn't pull it out, for some reason, it just wouldn't come out. So, fast forward when I got my first leave from Walter reed after being there for about six months, the guy showed me my pistol because I went to meet him and they showed me the weapon, they go, "Hey your 9 mil we've got it," and I go, "Okay." And they go, "No you have to see this." So, they showed it to me with the bullet hole going through the pistol grip and then exiting out the other side, so even if I could use it I'd only get about one round off because it blew out the spring and a couple rounds and stuff like that.”*

*“Yeah, I know so I looked at it and I'm like, "Wow that thing took a bullet for me." So, a bullet raced across my back and it was so close ... it was probably less than inches from my spine. So, the 9 mil took a round for me. So, I had to have it.”*

*“And I said, "It's part of my history, it's part of my incident and what happened." And it's a good conversation piece to talk to people about it and that type of thing, because I feel every time I talk about my incident, it's kind of cathartic and allows me to relive that day. It's really weird because the wounded community is kind of interesting. So, some guys like to talk about their incidents some guys don't. There's like this tidal wave of emotion that sometimes is uncontrollable and it sometimes I have a good handle on it and other times I'll just start bawling.”*

*“And I don't know why but the point is that's just who I am. That's just a part of me.”*

*“So, the gun is ... the handgun is the, is a reminder and it's also something that's raw and it's real and you can see the destruction and you can see the flaring of the bullet ripping through the ... ripping through the handgrip just like it ripped through my body.”*

*“Kind of a bittersweet thing. But when I think about it, every day that I wake up?”*



Figure 18: A 9-millimeter Berretta by George

For George’s second picture [Figure 19], he provided a picture of himself and his wife. In this picture, you can see how military symbolism is important to him. However, the images of the camouflage and American flag on his cap, and the patches on his jacket is paired with the image of George wearing overalls. These overalls have become part of his uniform and in turn, part of his farmer identity formation. In his portrayal, he labels his ability to farm as a “gift”.

This “gift” has become his symbol for how he approaches farming. He explains:

*“My wife and I are documenting our time at The Operation Veteran Farming. It's me and Mya. That my team! She's just as important and integral part of my recovery and who I am today, as I am a veteran, because she's always been there for me. So that's that ... we're a team and we get stuff done. I mean we're working on this thing together here.”*

*“I like any picture with me and my wife, because it's like here we are on this adventure, on this odyssey that we're starting up on our own. We're getting educated. I mean I love it. I am a fortunate man. I've got a retirement, I've been given a wonderful opportunity, just in life, and to live this next chapter of my life here, the way I want to live it. I mean there's not a lot of people that can get it to ... because this farming stuff takes a lot of money. I mean it's not cheap. This has been like a blessing, it's like a present.”*



*Figure 19: George and Mya by George*

Again, another program participant provided a picture of herself in uniform [Figure 20]. This picture represented her time in service. The photo shows Jade sitting in a circle talking to women from Iraq. She felt proud and like she was making a difference. After her service, she dealt with PTSD symptoms and depression. Now, in her second photo, Jade is feeling that pride through farming. Jade provided the following quotes and images:

“This picture is me in Iraq and I was talking to woman in the village. I was having a good time doing what I was doing.”



*Figure 20: Tea in Afghanistan by Jade*

The following picture [Figure 21] represents Jade using what she has learned during her time in The Operation Veteran Farming program. She is holding a spider. This is something she would not usually do. However, she sees herself now as a farmer. She is connecting with the earth and soil. Her identity has shifted from a soldier, to that of a farmer. In the photo, she is happy and smiling. Here, she says:

*“This picture is me clearing out my yard and preparing for a garden next year. I am holding a giant spider. Which I would not usually do, but I am doing it now. Being a farmer makes me feel good.”*





*Figure 21: My Transition to a Farmer by Jade*

### **Summary of the Analysis**

This study occurred during a four-month period. The observations were conducted as naturalistic as possible. As the observer-participant, it was my intent to stay separated from the activities and learning environment. The focus group and one-on-one interviews were conducted in that order to get a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena taking place. The following summarizes the observational findings.

The veteran program participants recognize and celebrate the importance of each other's service. This recognition is displayed through symbols of service such as camouflage and the unit insignia, but also it is displayed through a common military language. Each veteran holds a

different meaning to the symbols utilized. This is important to for individuals to both recognize and to practice. For the most part, they respect each other deeply.

Individual use of military emblems takes on additional meaning than just a symbol of the service. Military symbols are critical to these veteran's resilience. It is a part of their dress and identity. Without their use, veterans feel disconnected from themselves and have lower resilience to change. Their use may provide an easier transition to a civilian community.

Engagement increased as the program progressed. Veteran participants become more comfortable as their time in the program progressed. They witnessed their own transformation taking place and began to act and dress different. They also felt more connected to the civilians around them.

Dependence on military symbols decreased as the program progressed. As important as the military symbols were, most veterans began to use them less or replace them with farming symbolism. This was a fairly fast process that took place on their own terms. They were in control of when and how they used symbols which gave them autonomy to change.

The concept of a strong comradery among members in the group was essential to their participation. These veterans felt a deep connection to each other. Not everyone got along all the time, but they knew that the veterans in this program were there for each other. This idea of watching each other's six was critical at times, as some participants were reluctant or uncomfortable participating with civilians.

Military structure and language was critical and was used to communicate in this program. Every veteran participating in this program used military language and at some point, commented about how without the structure, language, and veteran focus, they would not be in this program. Acknowledgment of physical and mental challenges was best established from the

very beginning. Most of the participants of this program expressed that they had mental and physical challenges. They were very open to each other's conditions as the program progressed and it was important for them to acknowledge each other's strengths and weaknesses and then move on with the educational part of the program.

Engagement increased when the speaker understood veterans and even more so, when the speaker was a fellow veteran. This included many of the external site visits and speakers, including the visited farmers. If a visited farmer was a veteran, the participants felt connected to them and reached out to them after the visit. This was to stay connected and to receive additional advice on navigating a farm in their civilian communities.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Introduction

The research results recognize the importance of military culture and its influence on how these participants perceived and experienced the world around them (Gergen, 1999; Patton, 2015). Participants are using this symbolism within this adult agricultural program to participate in an essential educational experience, help them face physical and mental challenges, begin a new career in agriculture and build new civilian identities. The Operation Veteran Farming participants utilized a peer group of military veterans to socialize within the adult agriculture education program. This socialization occurs when veterans are able to express military symbolism and conducting adult agriculture education programs in the context of shared veteran experiences. For these participants, social patterns change as they learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program. These military veterans recognized their new skills and habits and the perception of their own attributes from military service. With new skills and habits, these veterans felt they were better fit for civilian life and civilian's perception which leads to social mobility. Finally, these veterans reinterpreted military symbols in this agricultural education context and formed new cultural identities. A critical concept was the transition of service. For them, this transition redefines service from that of a military context to a context of food availability and food security. Agriculture then, becomes the tool of this transition and provides them with a new mission. This adult agricultural education program became the needed bridge to transform their identity and facilitate their ability to see themselves as a civilian.

To review, the following are the research question and operational questions that guided this study.

What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veterans' cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?

*Operational questions:*

1. How does this peer group of military veterans socialize within the adult agriculture education program?
2. How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program?
3. Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?

**Summary of the Study**

This study included a total of twenty-one Operation Veteran Farming participants in a northern Virginia adult agricultural education program. Three participants were program educators. The remaining participants were military veterans themselves. Fourteen military veterans agreed to participate in the observational study. Twelve participated in focus group discussion and semi-structured interviews.

This study involved seven male and five female military program participants. They self-identified as being three African Americans, Three Latinos, and seven Caucasians. These military program participants included seven Army, three US Marine Corp, and two Air Force service members. The program educators did not serve in any branch of the military, but have worked for a number of years with military members or veterans. This data was analyzed through coding that led to critical themes.

**Discussion**

Military symbolism and how military veterans identified themselves was the basis for studying how this program was utilized to facilitate social mobility. Thus, military identity was first identified. Military symbolism was then examined through this theoretical framework to

illuminate patterns of self-identity tied to objects and self that are unique in this social setting (Reynolds, 2003). Symbolic Interactionism Theory supported Cultural Capital Theory and included the military and agricultural constructs of self and the assumption that people and groups are influenced by cultural and social processes to form a new identity (Cockerham, 1978).

For this study, it was first, important that we understand how military veterans established their military habits. Military symbolism and ceremonial acts of discipline are deeply embedded into military culture (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibull 2006). Veterans in this program made visible connections to military symbolism. Their hairstyles, dress, patches, clothing, language, and their behavior all mirrored military representation. These military veterans strongly identified with their military character.

Transitioning in this study referred to the transitions made during a military veteran's life cycle. The military veteran participants of this program illustrated multiple transitions in their life. This included transitioning of service and transition challenges. Transitioning of service relates to experiences these veterans encountered as they moved from a member of the military to a civilian. Some of the transitions were not positive and encompassed challenges they faced as they switched from a service member to a veteran or civilian.

Transitioning is a regular accordance for military members. However, they voiced that it was difficult for them to adjust to a completely new and different civilian identity because of their strong connection to the military. This concept reinforces Military Medicine (2014) report that about 44% of veterans reported a difficulty readjusting to life after the military. Therefore, their cultural identity stays associated with the military and not a civilian community and they do not feel that they belong in a non-military society. This supports Hall (1986); Straub, Loch, Evaristo, Karahanna, & Srite (2002), and Scotts' (2015) ideas that culture identity can be

described as a feeling of belonging to a group. The veterans in this program describe how this feeling has led to multiple barriers to their process of reintegrating.

As Cascardi & Vivian (1995); Gelles & Cornell (1985); Riggs, Caulfield, & Street (2000); Seltzer & Kalmuss (1988), and Strauss (1990) reported in earlier studies, this research exposed that some transition challenges included stressing over economic pressures, chronic debt, and lack of income. That, combined with mental and physical ailments added to their inability to see themselves as civilians (Hassan & Flynn, 2012). Many of these military program participants discussed their PTSD symptoms and how that was a barrier to how they connected with others. Though, Tanielian & Jaycox (2008) stated that 31% of current veterans are suffering PTSD, this program's participants reported a much higher occurrence of these symptoms. Most participants of this program indicated that they did not seek professional help. This supports Sharp et al., (2015) study that reported 60 % of current military personnel experiencing mental health problems do not seek professional help.

However, as Humphreys (2004) reported, these veterans sought support from individuals and groups were similar to themselves. Their colleagues provide shared experiences and understanding that is often absent from clinical services (Albertson, Irving, & Best, 2015). They voiced that their participation and ability to learn or achieve social mobility was improved by the fact that the program was military veteran specific.

Operation Veteran Farming participants used symbolism to socialize within this adult agriculture education program. This designates the importance of using military symbolism to increase participation. This also includes the critical significance of creating spaces that are familiar to military veterans. This backs Castro (2014) argument that it is critical that educational programs consider the unique aspects of the military culture and this perspective when

developing and implementing intervention efforts.

Social patterns of these participants changed as they learned new skills and habits within an agricultural education program. Interactions and human agency between military veteran participants created critical social acts and increased their social life (Sandstorm, Martin, & Fine, 2010). Military veterans within this group started this program exchanging with only their peer veterans. As the program progressed, these veterans interacted more through social acts with members outside of the military veteran community. This included civilian farmers, civilian instructors, and civilian instructors. They focused on learning new skills and implementing the skills they learned from this adult agricultural education program. This provided them with a purpose and they felt more connected to civilian societies.

It was critical that veterans in this program construct connections and build trust with their civilian counterparts and that the civilians had confidence in their ability to successfully integrate (Leventman, 1978; Fontana & Rosenheck, 2005; Waller, 1944; Wecter, 1944). The military veterans in this agricultural education program are experiencing this identity change through the symbolic parallels or symbolic manipulation that were provided by participation in agriculture. They reinterpreted military symbols in this agricultural education context to assist them in forming a new cultural identity.

This includes the parallel use of symbolism such as hard work and service, but also the introduction to non-military personnel that facilitates trust and connections between the two groups. This symbolism led these military program participants to participation in this program and ultimately, to re-assign their military connection to symbols with agriculture symbolism. The symbol itself never changed physical form; however, its' meaning now is re-assigned (Reynolds, 2003).



The notion of using agriculture as a transitioning tool was identified by these military veterans in this program. They acknowledged a parallel between their military service and the concept of agricultural service and the desire to continue to serve. This corresponds with Brown's (2011) findings that 92 % of veterans wish to continue to serve their nation. This self-interpretation needs to occur so that veterans in this agriculture program would act towards things that connected them to special meaning. More specifically, many of them used agriculture to identity or make connections with others. They expressed a sense of renewed purpose and the sense of fulfilling a mission in food production and security. It also reflects Salerno's (2014) study that shows that a new dedication to their nation's security and service through procuring a nation's food availability is beneficial.

These finding corresponds well with The Human Capital Report (2015) that states that OVFP veterans are matched well to contribute to the development of our agriculture community due to their similar training while serving in the military and their self-discipline. This also reflects Niewolny and Lillard's (2010) study that stresses the importance communities and practitioners supporting "the viability of new farms, and the economic, social, and environmental fabric of which they are a part" (p. 69). Beginning farmer training was therefore a critical part of generating or maintaining social stability (Hamilton, 2011) and food security for these veterans.

Nonetheless, military veterans hold strong ties and identities with their military service. In order to acclimate to other cultural and communities, it is important that their military identity be recognized and that new civilian identity formations are facilitated. This agricultural education program allows this to occur. It gives them a space to learn and connect with others and create an agricultural identity and finally, identity to their new civilian community.

This agricultural education program facilitated the building of trust between these veteran program participants and civilians. It also facilitated social mobility through the use of symbolism, in which the veterans transform the meaning that an object carries. This is not because the objects themselves are being transformed, but because the individual perspective of an object changes and therefore, they change their definition of that object (Meltzer, 1972). The same can be said about their symbolic image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). This is critical to understanding how some veterans are utilizing this agricultural education program to socialize with in a civilian society and create new identities outside of the military.

Symbolism of the education itself was also important. This program allows for Operation Veteran Farming participants to utilize non-formal education to which they are familiar. They voiced that this improved their self-reliance and self-esteem. These program participants reported an improvement in their own power over their life and new identity. Rotter (1966) argued this idea of a self-held belief regarding how much power one has over their own life and the events that occur in it, by defining locus of control. This aided in the forming a new identity. As a result, social and cultural capital were developed.

New coping strategies were formed to deal with life's varied complications as described by Lazarus, Folkman, & Stress (1984); Moos, Schaefer (1993); Sharkansky, King, King, Wolfe, Erickson, & Stoke (2000); Wolfe, Keane, Kaloupek, Mora, & Wine (1993). Resilience, which refers to positive adaptation and is commonly perceived as a quality of character, personality and coping ability (Agaibi, 2003) and implies a strength and flexibility that leads to “normal” functioning after stressful challenges (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Rihardson, 2002) was generated and demonstrate through their social status or standing in society (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). This critical piece of the community capital framework was fulfilled. Bourdieu

(1986) argues that a community member must correctly use social, economic, symbolic and cultural capital to improve their future within their society and create their intended favorable outcomes or civilian identity formation.

Thus, culture capital was built (Bourdieu, 1986) through this adult agricultural education program. To summarize, first, Habitus, or habits were developed (Bourdieu, 1986). These veterans were able to form new symbolic habits to serve agricultural settings. Developing skills led them to see themselves as subject (Prus, 1996). Veterans were able to form new habits, and modify their behavior (Prus, 1996). Next, was the concept of capital. Embodied Cultural Capital which is directly linked with a veteran's identity (Bourdieu, 1986) was achieved. The deeply embedded characteristics and skills that were acquired through the military were reassigned in this program. This created the ability for these participants to self-reflect and create new names or labels for themselves, resulting in an identity of farmer which aided in the modification of their behavior through symbolic meaning of self as subject (Prus, 1996). The use and improvement of these veterans Objectified Capital was displayed by their symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These displays of highly valued military physical objects and skills, such as hard work and discipline assisted these veterans' perception of themselves and their increased status into a community membership. Institutionalized capital which in this case was expressed by title that veterans gained through their advancement of embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1986) led to their perception of an improvement of worth with the program's surrounding civilian community members and eased stereotypes such as PTSD and "angry veterans". This stereotype was transformed to that of a server of the community, through food. As the veterans participated in human interchange, they modified their perception of self as objects through social acts (Prus, 1996; Sandstorm, Martin, & Fine, 2010). Now known as a veteran farmer, enabled them to

increase their individual self-honor, reputation and credit within the agricultural and local community (Bourdieu, 1986). Finally, a field can be conceptualized as a set of relationships which may be educational, or cultural (Navarro, 2006). Veterans of this program experienced power and identified with civilian counterparts in a new field (Gaventa, 2003). These Operation Veteran Farming participants expressed how being in a position of power now that they are farming, has abetted them in creating their new civilian identity. The identity formation included the use of their new and reformed power that was identified through the use of language and symbolic inter-changes to make and revise meaning of their new civilian self and their new civilian culture (Prus, 1996).

In conclusion, veterans in this program are using familiar and common symbols of self and objects to build their new perception of community (Prus,1996). This reflects the need for this program to utilize symbolic notions of self, objects, the practice reflectivity, practice of participating in human interchange, developing skills, and other collective behaviors to increase participation (Prus, 1996) in this adult agriculture education program. This in turn is being used to create non-military cultural capital and identity. The following map [Figure 22] illustrates how this adult agricultural education program utilized symbolism and shared experiences to educate veterans. Redefined skill sets and purpose aided in connecting veterans with their own attributes that the farming community began to recognize. This was accomplished through the symbolic transformation of their service or reassigning of their purpose and mission. Program participants created new farming identities that lead them to seeing themselves as civilians. These veterans reported that this process built resistance, eased their symptoms of PTSD and moral injury and aided in their ability to successfully place themselves in a civilian society.

## Connecting Themes to Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theories

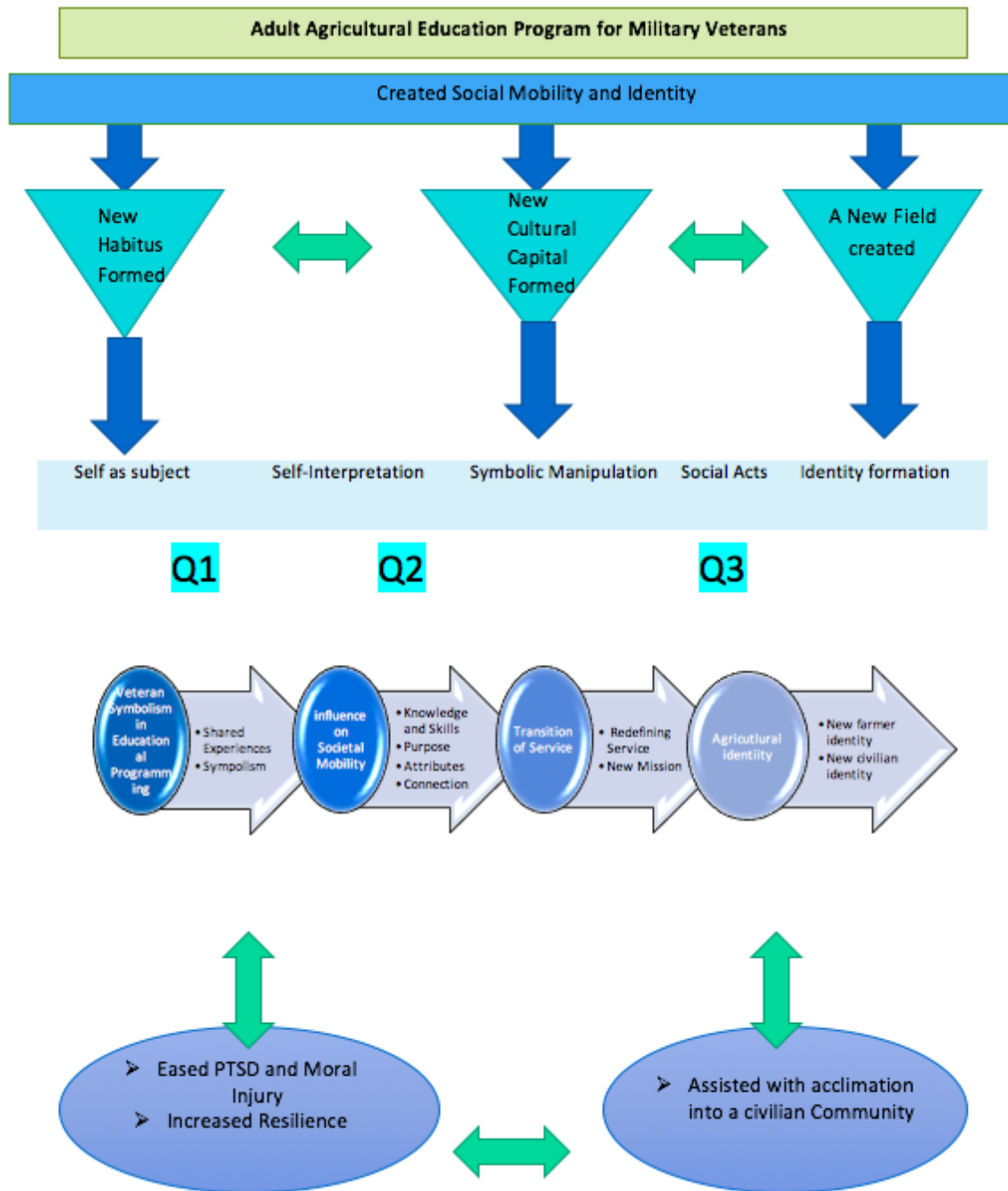


Figure 22: Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Framework based on study results

### Significance of the Study

This study of adult agricultural education programs designed specifically for military veterans is unique. Moreover, this study explores the agricultural education program facilitation

of military veteran civilian identity formation and social mobility. Through the research of Ewalt and Ohl (2013) it is reasoned that cultural, organizational, and occupational identity are critical to military veterans that connect with military comradery and symbols of the military. This research illustrates that these connections provide educational success.

Therefore, the significance of this study presents itself in five different ways. First, it illustrates how adult agricultural programs may provide an essential educational experience to address physical and mental challenges and needs of military veterans. Second, it shows how symbolic military memorabilia plays a role in facilitating participation in an adult agricultural program that can lead to a new career in agriculture. Third, it shows how this use of symbols and participation in an agricultural program can lead to the construct of new civilian identities. Fourth, this study acts as a model for how ethnographic case study methodology is beneficial to study military veterans in an adult agricultural program. Fifth, its collaborative use of Cultural Capital and Symbolic Interactionism Theories can be used to study social mobility of military veterans.

### **Limitations of the Study**

It is essential to recognize the limitations of this study. This qualitative inquiry employed an ethnographic case study methodology and as such, this study is not intended to, generalize studies involving military veterans in an adult agricultural education program. Instead, this study was meant to explore one such program designed for military veterans participating in an agricultural program and provide transferable methods and offer a framework on which, future studies could employ. That being said, the two main limitations of this study include time and participation.

As with most studies, this research would have benefited from a longer time line on

which to collect data. A longer time line would have collected a significant more amount of data leading to the possibility of additional data on identity change and participation. A more in depth time line of identity change could have been observed and identified in the interviews. More time would have also led to a more in depth establishment of relationships between the researcher and the participants. This established relationship may have led to more data.

Similarly, participation was a limiting factor. Out of the original twenty-one, there were sixteen regular participants. Fourteen agreed to participate fully in this study. However, only twelve participated in the focus group and the semi-structured interviews. More time to recruit these remaining participants may have led to a more complete understanding of the phenomena. Some participants indicated that they were unable to participate in research due to constraints set by their profession. One participant dropped out of the program due to family issues.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

This research shows participants of this program comprised of multiple physical and mental challenges that needed to be addressed before social mobility could occur. This adult agricultural education program helped to navigate these challenges. This supports the concept that community education can greatly enrich community development, programming development, capacity building, and community capitals (Kenny, 2002).

It is also recommended that non-formal environments are utilized. Veterans are familiar with this type of education and voiced their comfort while participating in this type of education. Niewolny & Wilson (2009) argue that situated learning allows us to move away from the formal classroom education and instead, focus on learning cultural concepts through activity. It is one's social surroundings that becomes critical to learning a new cultural (Schunk, 2012).

This study illustrated how the use of familiar symbolism in these spaces assisted Operation Veteran Farming participants in moving past challenges that kept them from forming civilian identities and social mobility within their communities. Although, these veterans embodied many of the human, social, and financial capital that is needed to be successful in the civilian world, they lacked the cultural capital.

The recommendations for practice include the need for the establishment of a military veteran community, culture, and use of familiar military symbols and language in agricultural programs. This agricultural program is developing military veterans' agricultural skill set and allows military veterans to become engaged in their education and improve or create social mobility. Using these symbols and utilizing a veteran community creates a familiar atmosphere which empowers veterans and allows for the formation of a new civilian identity to formulate.

These initiatives in agricultural programs that serve veterans will allow for increased participation, the develop of new skillsets and knowledge in agricultural fields, and the formation of new civilian identities that are critical to military veterans physical and mental health. Additionally, it is recommended that these types of programs create spaces that include involvement in food security which leads to the idea of a reassigning the notion of service through the production of food, civilian identity, and social mobility. for military veterans.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

As a result of this study, several recommendations for future research are proposed. First, these conclusions could benefit from replication. Therefore, future studies of this program are recommended. Second, a limitation of this study was time, thus a future study of this program that last for the deration of this program (12 months) is recommended. Third, conducting this study with more participants will allow for the collection of more data and further evaluation of



the social mobility occurring in this adult agricultural education program with military veterans.

Additionally, more research is needed in similar adult agricultural education programs to better understand how gender and race play a role in this phenomenon. One participant remarked that race in the civilian world is a challenge. Another participant described the challenge of being a female in the military and how feeling isolated due to the gender difference led to an increased challenge when she discharged. Research in these areas could provide more insight.

Fifth, the differences in branch of service should be more closely researched within this adult agricultural education program. This difference includes the type of service, rank, position, status of service (active, national guard or reserve), and type of deployment to which these veterans served. Lastly, many of these participants felt the program led to a change in how civilians perceived them. It is therefore recommended that the perceptions from the civilian community are observed and incorporated into this type of research. The above recommendations would likely allow a fuller depiction of the changes taking place with military veterans in this adult agricultural education program.

## **Conclusion**

Military veteran interest in seeking careers in agriculture is growing. The USDA sees the benefits of veterans in agriculture and is providing support. This support is evident in their newly appointed USDA Military Farming Liaison, veteran specific grants and grant priorities, and dedication to the development and research of educational and organizational programming growth. While not all, some of these military veterans are returning from their military service harboring both physical and mental challenges. This study shows how an adult agricultural education program provides an essential educational experience to address Operation Veteran Farming participants' needs and assist them in beginning a new career in agriculture, while

facilitating the construction of new civilian identities.

In response, this study explored the relationships between an adult agricultural education program and military veterans. It implemented two theories to form a framework on which to conduct this research. These two theories included Cultural Capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969). As part of this analysis, I sought to gain insights on how civilian identities of military veterans within the program are formed, how they use symbols and symbolic interactions to form them, and how this leads to social mobility. However, the veterans in this program discovered that what was missing was their connection to the civilian community. This concept of cultural capital and use of Cultural Capital Theory's conceptual framework functioned as the foundation for this research, because it is argued that cultural capital is what inhibits social mobility and civilian identity formation for some veterans. Habitus, capital, and field are the three concepts that make up the framework (Bourdieu, 1986). These three concepts are associated with the principles of Symbolic Interactionism Theory, which operated as support this research. All components influence the educational attainment of the veterans in an adult agricultural education program, the formation of a civilian identity, and their ability to transition into the civilian community.

Bourdieu (1986) views power over oneself as culturally and symbolically created, and it continuously changes in structure and agency. This supports need to create spaces for veterans to transform their use and connection to military symbolism. This symbolic interactionism includes social interactions through exchanges with each other and civilians as well as, with symbols in an agricultural education programs. These interactions have the potential to impact how individuals see themselves and how they perceive themselves in society.

This research indicates that the use of military symbolism can lead to social mobility. This is

critical to changes in the meaning that an object conveys. This is not because the objects themselves are being altered, but because the individual perception of an object modifies and leads to the change in the definition of that object (Meltzer, 1972) and symbolic image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). Understanding this phenomenon is vital to understanding how these veterans create a new civilian identity. Engagement increased as the program progressed.

This study depicted how symbolic interactions are needed to engage veterans in an educational program. Engagement increased when the lecturer was a fellow veteran and used important familiar symbols, structure, and language. This dependence on military symbols decreased as the program progressed, which illustrated this educational program facilitated changes taking place in individual identities. Further, this study shows the importance of the perceptions of individuals within the community on the veterans' social mobility and that this educational program facilitated this social mobility. Findings include responses from participants that indicate their participation is positively impacted when familiar symbols of the military are used in the implementation of agriculture education and that these symbols then take on new meanings supporting Symbolic Interactionism Theory. Further, mutually beneficial experiences occurred between veterans and community members, allowing for the veteran to build positive reputations with civilians. This supports the idea of social mobility within the Cultural Capital Theory.

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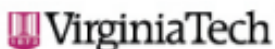
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*Footnote:* SAFC was used as the incite citation in an attempt to keep the program and its participants confidential. It is not the real name of the program and will not appear in the references.

## Appendices

### APPENDIX A - IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Office of Research Compliance  
Institutional Review Board  
North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
300 Turner Street NW  
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
email [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)  
website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 22, 2018  
**TO:** Kim Niewolny, Crystal Anne Kyle, April L Few-Demo, Thomas Greig Archibald, Sarah Baughman, Tiffany A Drape  
**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)  
**PROTOCOL TITLE:** The Formation of Cultural Capital using Symbolic Military Meanings of Objects and Self in an Adult Agriculture Program serving Military Veterans  
**IRB NUMBER:** 18-008

Effective February 22, 2018, the Virginia Tech Institution Review Board (IRB) approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
Protocol Approval Date: **February 22, 2018**  
Protocol Expiration Date: **February 21, 2019**  
Continuing Review Due Date\*: **February 7, 2019**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

## APPENDIX B- PROGRAM DIRECTOR CONTACT LETTER

DATE:

Program Address:

Dear Program Director,

Greetings, my name is Crystal Kyle and I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. I am contacting you about the opportunity for your program's participants, educators and mentors to participate in a study about their experiences in this adult agricultural education program. This research will be conducted by myself under the direction of Drs. Kim Niewolny, Tom Archibald, Sarah Baughman and April Few-Demo. The research has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. I am contacting you for your permission to proceed with contacting the individual participants for their consent to be observed, participate in a focus group and to be individually interviewed.

This study was developed to explore the role that this program has on the reinterpretation of military symbolism of objects and a person's self-perception of themselves as they transition to a civilian community. I intend to explore this by observing four weekend trainings, conduct focus groups, and interviews with you, the program's mentors and the program participants. Each of these will be audio recorded. The observations will last the entire day during the training days. The focus groups will take about ninety minutes and the interviews will last about an hour each, which will be scheduled at a time of convenience during the spring months. During this time, if you or your program participants attend workshops or meetings, I would appreciate attending those as well and recording will be optional. We will work together throughout the data collection process to fill in gaps we identify or seek further clarification of topics. I will compose a narrative of the program and its participants at the completion of my research. I will come to the program site to conduct all research so no travel will be required from you. I will work with you to find convenient dates and times to conduct this research. Data collection will occur during the months of January, February, March, April, and May.

There are no financial benefits to participating, but there may be several indirect benefits. The reflection this research provides you could benefit your practice. Additionally, you will receive a narrative account of your participants, mentors and your experiences. I am also willing to compose other documents for publication that we agree on. I reserve ownership rights for the dissertation document I submit based on this research as well as presentations and professional

journal publications. Ownership of other documents can be negotiated between us. I do not anticipate any negative effects of this research on you.

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate at any time. Your identity will be kept confidential. Only I, my research committee, and the other research participants will know your identity. You will be given a pseudonym in all dissemination materials. All data will be kept on my password-protected computer.

For more information, you can contact me at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or (336) 587-5871 and/or my faculty advisor Kim Niewolny at [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or (540) 231-5784. For information about your rights as a participant, please contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at (540) 231-4991.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity. I very much look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Crystal

## APPENDIX C- PROGRAM PARTICIPANT AND MENTOR CONTACT LETTER

DATE:

Program Address:

Dear Program Mentor or Participant,

Greetings, my name is Crystal Kyle and I am a military veteran that is currently farming and a graduate student at Virginia Tech in the Department of Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education. I am contacting you about the opportunity for you to participate in a study about your experiences in this adult agricultural education program. This research will be conducted by myself under the direction of Drs. Kim Niewolny, Tom Archibald, Sarah Baughman and April Few-Demo. The research has been approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. I am contacting you for your permission to be observed, participate in a focus group, and/or to be individually interviewed.

This study was developed to explore the role that this program has on the reinterpretation of military symbolism of objects and your self-perception of yourself as you transition to a civilian community. I intend to explore this by observing four weekend trainings, conduct focus groups, and an interview with you. Each of these will be audio recorded. The observations will last the entire day during the training days. The focus groups will take about ninety minutes and the interviews will last about an hour each. During this time, if you attend workshops or meetings, I would appreciate attending those as well and recording will be optional. We will work together throughout the data collection process to fill in gaps we identify or seek further clarification of topics. I will compose a narrative of the program and its participants at the completion of this research. I will come to the program site to conduct all research so no travel will be required from you. I will work with you to find convenient dates and times to conduct an interview. Data collection will occur during the months of January, February, March, April, and May

There are no financial benefits to participating but there may be several indirect benefits. The reflection this research provides you could benefit yourself or future participants of this program. It could also show justification for funding of such programs. Additionally, you will receive a narrative account of your experiences. I am also willing to compose other documents for publication that we agree on. I reserve ownership rights for the dissertation document I submit based on this research as well as presentations and professional journal publications. Ownership of other documents can be negotiated between us. I do not anticipate any negative effects of this research on you.

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate without penalty. Your identity will be kept confidential. Only I, my research committee, and other research participants will know your identity. You will be given a pseudonym in all dissemination materials. All data will be kept on my password-protected computer as well as an external device that will be locked in a cabinet or drawer.

For more information, you can contact me at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or (336) 587-5871 and/or my faculty advisor Kim Niewolny at [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or (540) 231-5784. For information about your rights as a participant please contact the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board at (540) 231-4991.

Thank you so much for considering this opportunity. I very much look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Crystal

## APPENDIX D- OBSERVATION CONSENT FORM

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Formation of Cultural Capital using Symbolic Military Meanings of Objects and Self in an Adult Agricultural Education Program serving Military Veterans

<b>Investigator(s):</b> Crystal Kyle	<a href="mailto:cryak79@vt.edu">cryak79@vt.edu</a>	(336) 587-5871
Kim Niewolny	<a href="mailto:niewolny@vt.edu">niewolny@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-5784
Thomas Archibald	<a href="mailto:tgarch@vt.edu">tgarch@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-6192
Sarah Bachman	<a href="mailto:baughman@vt.edu">baughman@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-7142
April Few-Demo	<a href="mailto:alfew@vt.edu">alfew@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-2664

#### **I. Purpose of Project**

The purpose of observing this program is to study an adult veteran farming program and the influence it may have on the formation of veterans' cultural capital and human development through symbols.

#### **II. Procedures**

You are being asked to partake in a research study that involves observation of your participation in SAFC's Operation Veteran Farming program. The researcher will observe your activities for the duration of up to five weekends of the reserve weekend trainings. During the observation, field notes will be written and recorded for accuracy.

#### **III. Risks**

This study and its procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. Individual answers and identities of the participants will be protected all times. This research involves no more than minimal risk.

#### **IV. Benefits**

There are no known benefits to participants. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity or Confidentiality**

Your identity, and that of any individuals who you mention, will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to the researcher. The above-mentioned notes will be reviewed later and transcribed by a member of the research team. When transcribing the observations, pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for your name and for the names of any other people who you mention. These pseudonyms will also be used in preparing all written reports of the research. Any details in the recordings that could identify you, or anyone who you mention, will also be altered during the transcription process. After the transcribing is complete, the notes will be stored in locked offices used by the research team. These notes will be destroyed after the analysis is complete. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech will view this study collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for overseeing the protection of human subjects who are involved in research.

**VI. Compensation**

No compensation will be offered to study participants.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Similarly, you are free to withdraw from this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the research, any information about you and any data not already analyzed will be destroyed. You are free to choose not to answer any question at any time.

**VIII. Subject's Responsibilities**

Observations will be conducted as you participate in the program. During this, you will only need to participate as you normally would.

**IX. Participant's Permission**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to:

(Check all activities that you consent to)

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you shadow my work for the day

\_\_\_\_\_ Have our conversations recorded throughout the day

\_\_\_\_\_ Have you take notes throughout the day

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

**Researcher**

Crystal A. Kyle, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(336)-587-5871  
cryak79@vt.edu

**Principal Investigator:**

Kim L. Niewolny, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(540) 231-5784  
niewolny@vt.edu

**Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board:**

David Moore, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board  
(540) 231-4991  
moored@vt.ed



## APPENDIX E- FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Formation of Cultural Capital using Symbolic Military Meanings of Objects and Self in an Adult Agricultural Education Program serving Military Veterans

<b>Investigator(s):</b> Crystal Kyle	<a href="mailto:cryak79@vt.edu">cryak79@vt.edu</a>	(336) 587-5871
Kim Niewolny	<a href="mailto:niewolny@vt.edu">niewolny@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-5784
Thomas Archibald	<a href="mailto:tgarch@vt.edu">tgarch@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-6192
Sarah Bachman	<a href="mailto:baughman@vt.edu">baughman@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-7142
April Few-Demo	<a href="mailto:alfew@vt.edu">alfew@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-2664

#### **I. Purpose of this Research Project**

The purpose of this focus group is to examine an adult veteran farming program and the influence it may have on the formation of veterans' cultural capital and human development through symbols.

#### **II. Procedures**

You are being asked to partake in a research focus group. During this focus group the researcher will be interested in your discussion on topics that relate to your military service and your participation in this agricultural program. Your participation will also involve a short demographic questionnaire prior to the discussion. The focus group will be audio recorded and for accuracy. The focus group will take approximately 90 minutes to conduct.

#### **III. Risks**

This study and its procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. Individual answers and identities of the participants will be protected all times. This research involves no more than minimal risk.

#### **IV. Benefits**

There are no known benefits to participants. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity or Confidentiality**

Your identity, and that of any individuals who you mention, will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to the researcher. The above-mentioned audio recordings will be reviewed later and transcribed by a member of the research team. When transcribing the focus group recordings, pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for your name and for the names of any other people who you mention. These pseudonyms will also be used in preparing all written reports of the research. Any details in the recordings that could identify you, or anyone who you mention, will also be altered during the transcription process. After the transcribing is complete, the audio recordings will be stored in locked offices used by the research team. These recordings will be destroyed after the analysis is complete, but the transcriptions will be stored for twelve months. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech will

view this study collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for overseeing the protection of human subjects who are involved in research.

**VI. Compensation**

No compensation will be offered to study participants.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this focus group is entirely voluntary and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Similarly, you are free to withdraw from this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the research, any information about you and any data not already analyzed will be destroyed. You are free to choose not to answer any question at any time.

**VIII. Subject's Responsibilities**

As a participant, you are responsible for participating in a 90-minute focus group discussion.

**IX. Participant's Permission**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

**Researcher**

Crystal A. Kyle, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(336)-587-5871  
cryak79@vt.edu

**Principal Investigator:**

Kim L. Niewolny, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(540) 231-5784  
niewolny@vt.edu

**Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board:**

David Moore, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board  
(540) 231-4991  
[moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)

## APPENDIX F- INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title of Project: The Formation of Cultural Capital using Symbolic Military Meanings of Objects and Self in an Adult Agricultural Education Program serving Military Veterans

<b>Investigator(s):</b> Crystal Kyle	<a href="mailto:cryak79@vt.edu">cryak79@vt.edu</a>	(336) 587-5871
Kim Niewolny	<a href="mailto:niewolny@vt.edu">niewolny@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-5784
Thomas Archibald	<a href="mailto:tgarch@vt.edu">tgarch@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-6192
Sarah Bachman	<a href="mailto:baughman@vt.edu">baughman@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-7142
April Few-Demo	<a href="mailto:alfew@vt.edu">alfew@vt.edu</a>	(540) 231-2664

#### I. Purpose of this Research/Project

The purpose of this interview is to examine an adult veteran farming program and the influence it may have on the formation of veterans' cultural capital and human development through symbols.

#### II. Procedures

You are being asked to partake in an interview. The interviews will take approximately 60 minutes to conduct and will be audio recorded for accuracy.

#### III. Risks

This study and its procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. Individual answers and identities of the participants will be protected all times. This research involves no more than minimal risk.

#### IV. Benefits

There are no known benefits to participants. The results of the interview will highlight interaction within agricultural programs. The data collected from participants during this research will be used in a dissertation paper for Virginia Tech and maybe developed into subsequent publications or documents. No promise or guarantee of benefits has been made to encourage you to participate.

#### V. Extent of Anonymity or Confidentiality

Your identity, and that of any individuals who you mention, will be kept confidential at all times and will be known only to your interviewer. The above-mentioned audio recordings will be reviewed later and transcribed by a member of the research team. When transcribing the interview recordings, pseudonyms (i.e., false names) will be used for your name and for the names of any other people who you mention. These pseudonyms will also be used in preparing all written reports of the research. Any details in the recordings that could identify you, or anyone who you mention, will also be altered during the transcription process. After the transcribing is complete, the audio recordings will be stored in locked offices used by the research team. These recordings will be destroyed after the analysis is complete, but the

transcriptions will be stored indefinitely. It is possible that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Virginia Tech will view this study collected data for auditing purposes. The IRB is responsible for overseeing the protection of human subjects who are involved in research.

**VI. Compensation**

No compensation will be offered to study participants.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

Your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary and your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Similarly, you are free to withdraw from this research at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the research, any information about you and any data not already analyzed will be destroyed. You are free to choose not to answer any question at any time.

**VIII. Subject's Responsibilities**

As a participant, you are responsible for participating in a 60-minute interview. You will be asked to bring two pictures with you to the interview. These pictures can be on your phone or a printed copy. However, I will need a copy to keep as part of my records for analysis purposes. I ask that I keep a printed copy or take a picture of the printed copy. If the pictures are digital, I ask that you send me a copy via my university email ([cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu)). The first picture should have special meaning and represent your time in the military. It can be of yourself, an object, or any other thing that symbolizes your service. The second picture should also have special meaning. However, it should represent your time in this agricultural program. It too can be of yourself, an object or anything that represents your time participating in this program.

**IX. Participant's Permission**

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

**Researcher**

Crystal A. Kyle, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(336)-587-5871  
[cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu)

**Principal Investigator:**

Kim L. Niewolny, Agricultural, Leadership, and Community Education, Virginia Tech  
(540) 231-5784  
[niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)

**Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board:**

David Moore, Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board  
(540) 231-4991  
[moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)

## APPENDIX G- OBSERVATIONAL PROTOCOL

### Dissertation Research Observation Protocol.

#### Stage1: Organize and Set up

- Confirm Consent
- Turn on audio recorder.
- Spend a few minutes in the beginning of the day and throughout the day to observe and record in the field journal the environment at SAFC. I will answer such questions as what time of day it is, what are the smells and sounds, the lay of the land, what are the animals or produce being grown or produced, where are the participants, how many are there, describe the participants, what are they wearing and what is the weather like? This will be to describe the environment and surroundings of the participants.

#### Stage 2: Observe the program through video, audio and field journal recording.

1. Unstructured – I will monitor and record all behavior and interactions.
2. Time sampling- I will sample behavior and interactions from the time the participants get to the site, till the time they leave.
3. Naturalistic – I will observe participants in their natural state. I will not interfere with activities.
4. I hope to capture descriptions of environment, the objects within that environment, the people involved, the activities they participate in, their goals and their behavior.  
As Bailey (2006) suggest, I will pay close attention to the smells, sounds, objects, body language and speech.

## APPENDIX H- FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOL

Focus group discussions will be conducted because military veterans are often more comfortable talking to other veterans and discussion may yield more information or unique information than the one-on-one interviews.

### Stage 1: Introductions and Set up

- Spend a few minutes with the group. Introduce myself and the study. Review IRB consents that (by this time) have been signed. Review and ask the participant to fill out the open-ended survey. Take notes on the description of where participants are sitting and turn on the audio recorder.
- Proceed with the proceeding script. “Good morning/afternoon, thank you for agreeing to be a part of this discussion. Your input and comments are vital to my study and I appreciate you taking your time to be a part of this dialogue. This focus group will last no more than 90 minutes. It will be audio recorded, transcribed, and later edited into a report for my dissertation. On the final draft, any questions I pose will be edited out and only your words will remain. This is meant to be an open conversation with minimal input and questions from me. If need be, I will pose certain prompts to encourage conversation. Your comments will remain anonymous in the final draft. I will not use your responses in any way that you do not approve. You were selected because of your involvement in The Operation Veteran farming program. There are no wrong or right answers; I am interested in your points of views and opinions.”
- At this time is there any questions or comments?”
- “You will notice plane paper in front of you. Please take a few seconds to place your name on the folded paper and we will begin by introducing ourselves, where we are from and with what branch of service you served.”

### Stage 2: Prompts

I will now ask questions openly to the entire group. If someone does not answer, I will attempt to include them by saying, “have we heard from everyone” Or “would anyone else like to add anything?”

1. I would like for each of you to describe your military experience in a way that makes sense to you. For example,
  - What were some of the best parts of being in the military?
  - What were some challenging parts of being in the military?
2. Can you describe your civilian experience before starting this educational program?
  - What was your immediate transition like?
3. Why did you select this program?
  - What features of this program make the most sense to you as a military veteran and why?
4. Do you feel this program has assisted your transition from the military to the civilian community? If so, how? If not, why?
5. What are your goals for after completing this program?

*Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your answers to these questions. I will follow up with you once a transcription of this discussion has been made. If you have any questions, you may contact me Crystal Kyle at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or Kim Niewolny at 540.231-5784 or [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)*

## **APPENDIX I- PARTICIPATION QUESTIONNAIRE**

### **Program Participant Questionnaire**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect important background information about your service in the military and participation in this program. The results from this questionnaire will be used in conjunction with research to better understand the participants of this program. Responses will remain confidential. You will be asked to identify yourself for the purposes of building a character description with in my report. However, all names will be changed to protect your true identity.

#### **Who should take this questionnaire?**

You should consider taking the questionnaire if you are a veteran and a participant of the Operation Veteran Farming Program.

#### **Instructions**

Your participation in this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or you may refuse to answer certain questions. You can choose to discontinue your participation at any time. There are no significant risk or benefits associated with participation in this survey. Completion of this survey will constitute informed consent. Results from the questionnaire will be compiled and maybe published as a report. All information collected as part of this survey will remain confidential. Should you have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, please contact the Virginia Tech IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or 540-231-4991

This questionnaire should take 15- 20 minutes to complete.

Thank you for considering participating in this survey. If you have any questions or comments about this survey, please contact Crystal Kyle at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or Kim Niewolny at [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu) or 540- 231-5784.

## Questions

1. What is your name?

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2. Please indicate gender in the space below.

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3. What is your age?

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**For questions 4-7 circle the response or responses that best indicates your answer for the corresponding question.**

4. To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you identify with? Please circle all that apply.

African-American (non-Hispanic)

Asian/Pacific Islanders

Caucasian (non-Hispanic)

Latino or Hispanic

Native American or Aleut

Other

5. Please indicate the type of community where you grew up?

Rural

Urban

Suburban

Military Base or Community

6. Please indicate in which area you currently live?

Rural

Urban

Suburban

7. Please indicate in which area you currently farm or plan to farm?

Rural



Urban

Suburban

Not farming yet

8. What was your branch of service?

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9. What was your MOS, Rank and Position?

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10. In the space below, please indicate any deployments in which you participated.

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11. Can you tell me about any objects, possessions, or memorabilia that held special meaning to you while in the military?

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12. Describe anything that holds special meaning to you in this program?

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13. Please share any challenges you have had or currently face that you attribute to your military service?

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## APPENDIX J – PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following script is a guide for each interview.

### Stage 1: Organize and Set up

- Spend a few minutes with the interviewee. Re-introduce myself and the study. Review IRB consents that (by this time) have been signed. Ensure the interviewee is comfortable.
- Proceed with the proceeding script.
  - “Good morning/afternoon, thank you for agreeing to this one on one interview. Your input and comments are vital to my study and I appreciate you taking your time. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes and will be similar to the focus group discussion. It will be audio recorded, transcribed, and later edited into a report for my dissertation. On the final draft, any questions I pose will be edited out and only your words will remain. Your comments will remain anonymous in the final draft. I will not use your responses in any way that you do not approve.”
- “At this time is there any questions or comments?”

### Stage 2: Questions

“To begin, I would like to ask you some questions to get a better sense of your life after the military and the symbols in which you have connected with during this program.”

1. Please tell me about the first picture (representing your military service) that you brought with you today?
  - a. Why did you choose this photo?
  - b. Describe the meaning this photo brings to you?
2. How did being a part of the military change you as a person?
  - a. Please give me some examples of special words or phrases you used while in the military?
  - b. Why did you use these specific words or language?
  - c. Describe how you feel when you hear the language being used by members in the military now that you are discharged?
  - d. Were there any specific possessions or memorabilia that you connected with that represent your identity with in the military. If so, can you please describe them and the meaning they held for you?
  - e. Tell me who you were in the military. What experiences/ interactions influenced the way you identified yourself?
3. Tell me about your experience after leaving the military and transitioning into a civilian community before joining this program.
  - a. Did you face any challenges?
  - b. How did you deal with these challenges?
4. Please tell me about the second picture (representing your participation in this agriculture program) that you brought with you today?
  - c. Why did you choose this photo?
  - d. Describe the meaning this photo brings to you?
5. Describe what the words veteran and veteran farmer mean to you?
  - a. Were there any aspects of this program that reminded you of the military? Did this motivated your decision to participate in this program and become a farmer?

- b. Were there any specific ways that your participation in this program has helped you make meaning of your civilian community?
- 6. Describe who you are in this program and the team you belong to here?
  - a. While in this agriculture program, how did you interact with other participants, the program staff and the civilian community?
  - b. How (if at all) have you altered the meaning of objects and your identity while participating in this agriculture program?
  - c. How has this program influenced who you are as a person?
  - d. How do you see yourself as a result of being in the program?
  - e. How has participating in this agriculture program with your community of peers influenced how you see yourself and your future?
- 7. Reflecting on the program, how has the experience affected your feelings about transitioning into a member of a community?
- 8. Describe any local civilian community interactions (not to include program interactions) you have had while participating in this program?
  - a. What is your perception of how the local community sees your service now that you are serving through food production? Can you please elaborate?
  - b. Do you believe you are better able to be a part of the community and the civilian world now that you have participated in this program? If so can you please explain?
- 9. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview that we any have not covered?

*Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your answers to these questions. I will follow up with you once a transcription of this interview has been made. If you have any questions, you may contact me Crystal Kyle at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or Kim Niewolny at 540.231-5784 or [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)*

## APPENDIX K – EDUCATOR AND MENTOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following script is a guide for each interview.

### Stage1: Organize and Set up

- Spend a few minutes with the interviewee. Re-introduce myself and the study. Review IRB consents that (by this time) have been signed. Ensure the interviewee is comfortable.
- Proceed with the proceeding script.
  - “Good morning/afternoon, thank you for agreeing to this one on one interview. Your input and comments are vital to my study and I appreciate you taking your time. This interview will last no more than 60 minutes. It will be audio recorded, transcribed, and later edited into a report for my dissertation. On the final draft, any questions I pose will be edited out and only your words will remain. Your comments will remain anonymous in the final draft.
- “At this time is there any questions or comments?”

### Stage 2: Questions

“To begin, I would like to ask you some questions about how this program has influence its participants.”

1. Where you in the military yourself?
2. Did you participate in this program?
3. In your opinion, how has this program affected your participants’ feelings about transitioning into a member of a community?
4. Describe any local civilian community interactions (not to include program interactions) that your participants have had while participating in this program?
  - a) Are these interactions intentionally set up for the participants? If so, why?
  - b) What is your perception of how the local community sees the veterans’ service now that they are serving through food production?
  - c) Do you feel their status in this local community and the view the community members have of your participant has changed sense participating in this program? If so, can you please explain?
  - d) Do you believe they are able to interact and better become part of the community and the civilian world now that you have participated in this program? If so can you please elaborate?
5. Describe any other changes taking place in the participants after being involved with this program?
6. How does this program purposely use military imagery to entice veterans to participate or to comfort them?
7. What military imagery or memorandums do you think your Operation Veteran Farming participant connect with most?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add to this interview that we any have not covered?

*Thank you for your time today. I appreciate your answers to these questions. I will follow up with you once a transcription of this interview has been made. If you have any questions, you may contact me Crystal Kyle at [cryak79@vt.edu](mailto:cryak79@vt.edu) or Kim Niewolny at 540.231-5784 or [niewolny@vt.edu](mailto:niewolny@vt.edu)*

**APPENDIX L – A PRIORI AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK TABLE**

Position/Assumption	Supporting Literature	Construct	Research Question	Example Operational Questions	Method
<p>If individuals are capable of forming new habits, they are also capable of modifying their behavior</p>	<p>It is in symbolic interaction that the notion of self, practice reflectivity, the practice of participating in human interchange, developing skills and other collective behaviors that are essential to the view of interactionism (Prus, 1996).</p>	<p>Self as subject</p>	<p>What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veteran’s cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?</p>	<p>How did this program assist your transition from the military to the civilian community?</p> <p>Describe important meaning you have developed while participating in this program.</p> <p>Were there any aspects of this program that reminded you of the military, did this motivated your decision to participate in this program and become a farmer?</p> <p>Were there any specific ways that</p>	<p>Focus Group Observation</p> <p>Focus Group</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>

				your participation has helped you make meaning of your civilian community?	
People live in diverse social and institutional settings where they demonstrate and reproduce their personalities, and also, compete for the distribution of different kinds of capital (they experience power in different ways depending which field they are in)	A field can be understood as a network or set of relationships which may be educational, religious or cultural (Navarro, 2006). People experience power in different ways depending which field they are in (Gaventa 2003).	Fields	What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veteran's cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?	Do you believe you are able to interact and better become part of the community and the civilian world now that you have participated in this program? If so can you	Interview

				please elaborate?	
The expansion of skills and knowledge creates capital, typically through education or training	Educational institutions help to recreate systems of social structure that produce behaviors in individuals that are institutionalized (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).	Embodied capital	What is the role of an adult agricultural education program in transforming a military veteran's cultural identity and reinterpreting symbolic military meanings of objects and self?	Describe who you are in this program and the team you belong to here?	Interview Observation
The meaning of symbols is derived from, or arises out of the social interactions that one has with others and their society.	The core of Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical framework that places interactions and human agency at the center of social life (Sandstorm, Martin & Fine, 2010).	Social acts	How does this peer group of military veterans socialize within the adult agriculture education program?	Describe your military experience?  What were some of the best parts of being in the military?	Focus Group  Focus Group
Social patterns are learned through social life experiences resulting in ingrained habits, skills, and personalities	One's habitus is formed because responses are learned and social forces impact social interactions (Bourdieu, 1984).	Habitus	How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural	How did being a part of the military change you as a person?  Tell me about your experience after leaving the military	Interview  Interview



			education program?	and transitioning into a civilian community before joining this program.  Can you tell me about specific language and hierarchy you utilized while in the military?  While in this program, how did you interact?  Can you tell me about specific language and hierarchy you utilized while in the program?	Interview  Interview Observation  Interview Observation
People that hold more capital are better entwined in a community.	Cultural capital is the gathering of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that an individual can access to validate one's cultural competence,	Social mobility	How (if at all) do social patterns change as military veterans learn new skills and habits within an	Can you describe your civilian experience before starting this program?	Focus Group  Interview

	<p>and therefore demonstrate their social status or standing in society (Bourdieu &amp; Passeron, 1990).</p>		<p>agricultural education program?</p>	<p>What is your perception of how the local community sees your service now that you are serving through food production?</p> <p>Do you feel your status in the community and the view the community members have of you has changed sense participating in this program? If so can you please explain?</p> <p>Do you believe you are able to interact and better become part of the community and the civilian world now that you have participated</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>
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				in this program? If so can you please elaborate?	
Individuals are not born with a sense of self but develop self-concepts through social interactions.	Symbolic interaction uses language or symbolic interchanges to make and revise meaning of their self and culture (Prus, 1996).	Identity formation	Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?	<p>Tell me who you were in the military.</p> <p>What experiences/interactions influenced the way you identified yourself? Where did you fit into the overall military hierarchy?</p> <p>How has this program influenced who you are as a person?</p> <p>How do you see yourself as a result of being in the program?</p> <p>How has participating in this agriculture program with your</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>

				<p>community of peers influenced how you see yourself and your future?</p> <p>Reflecting on the program, how has the experience affected your feelings about transitioning into a member of a community?</p>	Interview
We motivate others to take action through the use of symbols	Familiar and common symbols of self and objects are used to build the view of community (Prus,1996).	Symbolic manipulation	Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?	<p>Were there any aspects of this program that reminded you of the military, did this motivated your decision to participate in this program and become a farmer?</p> <p>Tell me about your experience once you left the military and transitioned</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>

				<p>into a civilian community? Were there any challenges that you faced?</p>	Interview
				<p>How did you deal with these challenges?</p>	Interview
				<p>Tell me about your experience after leaving the military and transitioning into a civilian community before joining this program.</p>	Interview
				<p>Were there any specific possessions or memorabilia that you connected with that represent your identity with while in this program. If so, can you please describe them and</p>	Interview

				the meaning they held for you? Did you face any challenges? How did you deal with these challenges?	Interview Observation
Capital includes titles, ranks, and positions which indicate status	Institutionalized capital is formulated by position or title that can either be gained through birth, acquired through investment of financial capital, or received through advancement of embodied capital (Bourdieu, 1986).	Institutionalized capital	Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?	Describe what the words veteran and veteran farmer mean to you?	Interview
Capital is generated based on the collection and display of objects to include homes, decor, and clothing and behavior.	status in a community relies on reputation, wealth, and authority which is symbolized through dress, property, and behavior (Bourdieu, 1986).	Objectified Capital	Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?	What is your perception of how the community sees your service now that you are serving through food production?	Interview

<p>Humans act towards things on the basis of the meaning ascribed to those things.</p>	<p>This framework argues that objects change meaning because the individual perspective of an object changes and therefore they change their definition of that object, not because objects themselves are being transformed (Meltzer, 1972).</p>	<p>Self-interpretation</p>	<p>Through this socialization process, how (if at all) does reinterpreting military symbols in this agricultural education context assist in forming a new cultural identity?</p>	<p>Please give me some examples of special words or phrases you used while in the military?</p> <p>Why did you use these specific words or language?</p> <p>Describe how you feel when you hear the language being used by members in the military now that you are discharged?</p> <p>Were there any specific possessions or memorabilia that you connected with that represent your identity with in the military. If so, can you please</p>	<p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p> <p>Interview</p>
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				describe them and the meaning they held for you?	
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