

Exploring Cultural Capital in Agricultural Education Spaces that Provide Training to Military Veterans



Dr. Crystal Kyle
US Army Veteran/ Farmer
NC Agromedicine / NC AgrAbility
cakyle@ncat.edu

Agriculture Health & Safety Symposium
March 27, 2019
Raleigh, NC

Presentation Overview

- Introduction
- Background and Literature
- Theoretical Framework
- Methodology
- Findings
- Conclusions
- Recommendations

Self

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

Background



- There are **challenges**, including symptoms of PTSD and moral injury, are part of this **transitioning process** (PTSD, 2014, Brock & Lettini, 2012).
- Many of today's military clinical treatments do not include assistance in the formation of **specific cultural, organizational, and occupational identity** (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013).
- **Critical connections with military symbolism** may serve an important role for **educational success, civilian identity, and entry to a civilian society** (Ewalt & Ohl, 2013).
- Growth continues with military veterans seeking **careers in agriculture** (USDA, 2014)

Research Questions

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

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

Cultural Capital Theory



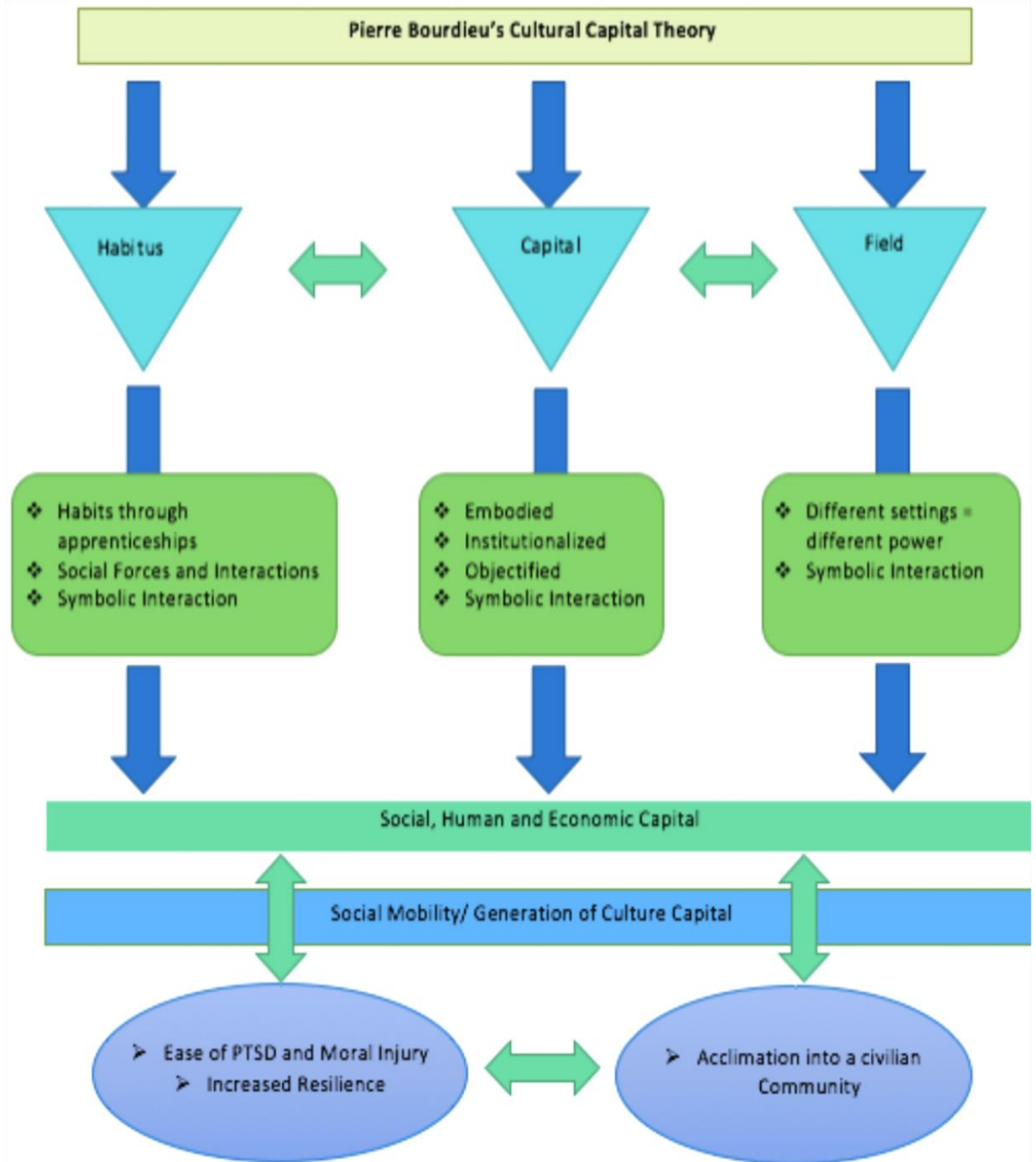
- **Cultural capital** is the collection of knowledge, behaviors, and skills that one uses to demonstrate their cultural competence, and standing in a society (Bourdieu, 1974).
- **Cultural Capital Theory**- established by Bourdieu (1974) to analyze these relationships between actions and social structures that impact cultures (Lamont & Lareau, 1988).
- Values power of symbolic representation of each.

Symbolic Interactionism Theory

- Explains social behavior in terms of how **people interact** with each other through the **use of symbols** (Blumer, 1969)
- People **respond** to symbols based on the **meanings** they have for specific symbols; and these meanings are derived from **social interaction** and **modified through interpretation** (Blumer, 1969)
- Uses **language** or **symbolic inter-changes** to make and revise meaning of their **self and culture** (Prus, 1996).

Theoretical Framework

Blumer (1969)
Bourdieu (1986)



Situating The Case

- This agricultural farming center is a non-profit organization designed to educate emerging farmers on techniques that are needed to be successful in pest control, soil management, seed selection, marketing, and farm business planning.
- This veteran farming program is a 12 month program designed for veterans who want to explore agriculture, it is ran like the military reserves and meets one weekend a month plus, requires a 40-hour service learning project.

Data Collection

Methodology

- Qualitative
- Ethnographic bounded case study as described in (Creswell, 1998)

Methods

- Observer-participant observations (4 months)
- Focus group (1 FG; n=12)
- Semi-structured interviews (n=12) with photos

Demographics

- 21 initial participants
- 14 agreed to participate in the observational study
- 12 participated in the focus group discussion
 - 7 males/ 5 females
 - 7 Army, 3 USMC, 2 Air Force
 - 3 African American, 3 Latino, 7 Caucasian
- 12 completed interviews

Major Themes

- Situating Participant's Military Identity
- Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming
- Influence on Societal Mobility
- Transitioning of Service
- Agricultural Identity Formation

Situating Participant's Military Identity

- Utilized to understand program participant **background** and participation in the program
- **This incorporated**
 - Use of physical objects to represent military identity
 - Use of language to represent military identity
 - Expressing military identity through comradery and team work
 - Recognition of military identity by self and others
 - Symbolic military identities through military behaviors
 - Military influence on identity formation after discharge
 - Transitioning challenges

Situating Participant's Military Identity

Physical Objects *"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 service, our brotherhood, our home, our family"* (George, OVFP participant)

Military Influence *"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, OVFP participant)

Language *"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 my culture."* (Rob, OVFP participant)

Q. 1: The military veteran program participants utilized a peer group of military veterans to socialize within the adult agriculture education program.

Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming

- Shared experiences in the agricultural education program design
- Veteran symbolism in the agricultural education program design

Veteran Symbolism in this Educational Program

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

Military Symbolism through Patriotic Imagery *“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 there is 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)

Veteran Symbolism in Educational Programming

Symbolic Military Patriotic Imagery

“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, OFVP participant)



Q:2: Social patterns changed as veterans learn new skills and habits within an agricultural education program.

Influence on Societal Mobility

- Facilitating purpose
- Civilian connection
- Knowledge and skill obtainment
- Recognizing military attributes

Influence on Societal Mobility

Connection to a new Purpose *“Operation Veteran Farming program helped everyone recognize that we served your country, now we're helping the people where we live locally with the food products that are made because everybody's gotta eat. And I think with that, that is kind of a service that is a recognized service.”* (George, OVFP participant)

Influence on Societal Mobility

Connection to a civilian Job *“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, OVFP participant)

Civilian Connection *“I noticed the civilians around 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)

Q:3: These veterans reinterpreted military symbols in this agricultural education context to assist them in forming a new cultural identity.

Transitioning of Service

- Redefining Service
- New mission

Transitioning of Service

“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, OVFP participant)

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

Transition of Service



“..one of the main reasons I joined the military was because of my dedication to the family... The farming and the military are family traditions.” (Kylee, OVFP participant)

Transition 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.”

(Kylee, OVFP participant)



Agricultural Identity Formation

- New farmer identity
- New civilian identity

Agricultural Identity Formation

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

New Civilian Identity *“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, OVFP participant)

New Farmer Identity



"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... There's 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"
(George, OVFP participant)

New Farmer Identity



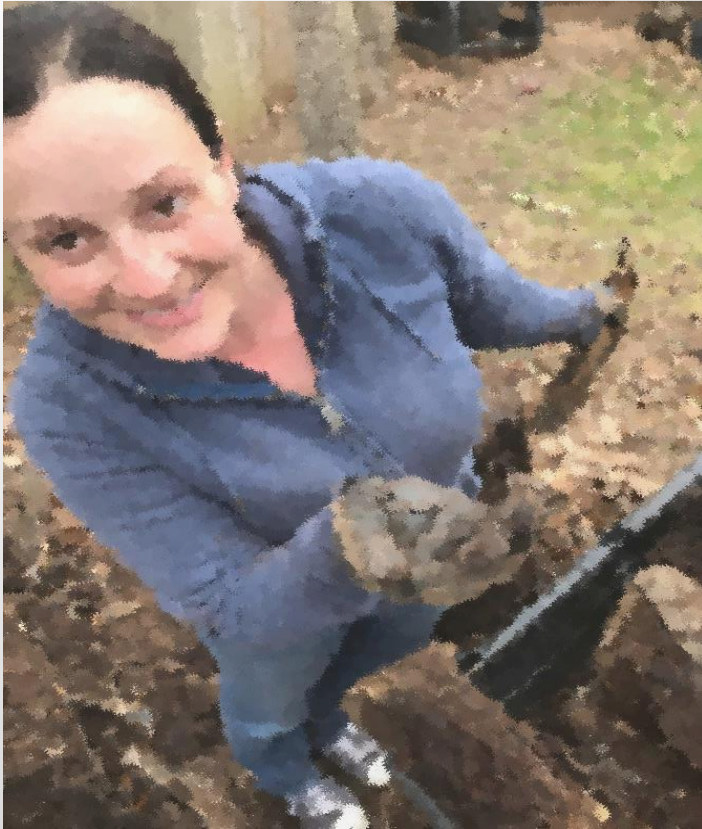
“... here we are on this adventure, on this odyssey that we're starting up on our own. We're getting educated. I mean I love it... and to live this next chapter of my life here, the way I want to live it... This has been like a blessing, it's like a present” (George, OVFP participant)

Agricultural Identity Formation



“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.” (Jade, OVFP participant)

Agricultural Identity Formation



“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.” (Jade, OVFP participant)

Adult Agricultural Education Program for Military Veterans

Created Social Mobility and Identity

New
Habitus
Formed

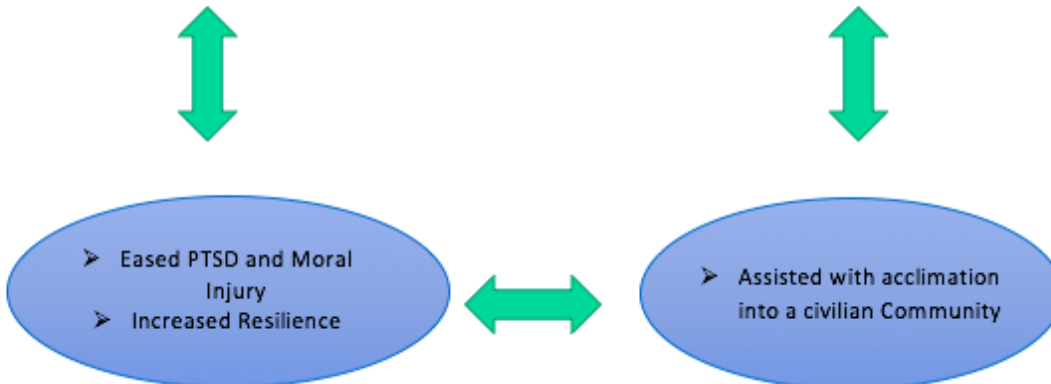
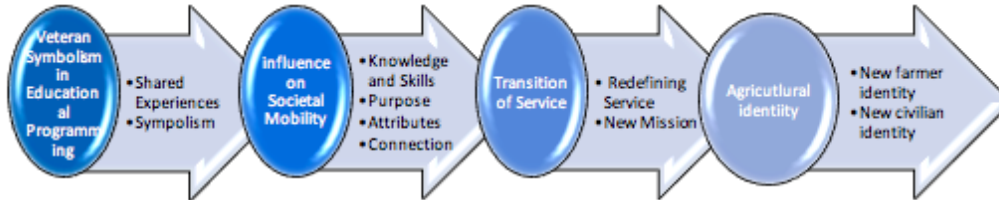
New
Cultural
Capital
Formed

A New
Field
created

Q1

Q2

Q3



Conclusions



Summary

- This program provided shared experiences and understanding that is often absent from clinical services (Albertson, Irving, & Best, 2015).
- Participants indicated that the use of familiar military symbolism allowed them to connect and participate in this program.
- Interactions increased between veteran and nonveterans as the program progressed.
- The program provided patriotic symbolic purpose.
- The use of such symbolism is in turn, being used to create non-military cultural capital and identity.

Recommendations for Practice

A need for educational programs to incorporate:

- The creation of a veteran specific agricultural education community
- Use of familiar military symbols and language in an agricultural education context
- Use of symbolic military educational practices
- Facilitate connections with civilians

References

- Alberson, K., Irving, J., & Best, D. (2015). A social capital approach to assisting veterans through recovery and desistance transitions in civilian life. *The Howard Journal of Criminal Justice*, 54(4), 384-396. doi:10.1111/hojo.12138
- Agaibi, C. E., & Wilson, J. P. (2005). *Trauma, PTSD, and resilience: A review of the literature*. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse, 6(3), 195-216.
- Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). *The force of law: Toward a sociology of the juridical field*. *Hastings LJ*, 38, 805.
- Brock, R. N., & Lettini, G. (2012). *Soul repair: Recovering from moral injury after war*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social Research Methods*. 3rd Ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cockerham, W. C. (1978). Self-selection and career orientation among enlisted U. S. army paratroopers. *JPMs: Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, 6(2), 249.
- Creswell, J.W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*, 2.
- Ewalt, J., & Ohl, J. (2013). 'We are still in the desert': Diaspora and the (de)territorialization of identity in discursive representations of the US soldier. *Culture and Organization*, 19(3), 209-226. doi:10.1080/14759551.2013.802167
- Fereday, J., and E. Muir-Cochrane. 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5:1-11.
- Fontana, A., & Rosenheck, R. (2005). The role of war-zone trauma and PTSD in the etiology on antisocial behavior. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 193(3), 203-209. doi:10.1097/01.nmd.0000154835.92962.e5
- Frey, L., Botan, C., & Kreps, G. (1999). *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. (2nd ed.) Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. Sage.
- Green, G. P., & Haines, A. (2012). *Asset building & community development*. Sage publications.
- Guba, E.G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *Educational Communication and Technology*, 29(2), 75-91.
- Hoge, C. W., Castro, C. A., Messer, S. C., McGurk, D., Cotting, D. I., & Koffman, R. L. (2004) Combat duty in Iraq and Afghanistan, mental health problems, and barriers to care. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 351(1), 13-22.
- Lamont, M., & Lareau, A. (1988). Cultural capital: allusions, gaps and glissandos in recent theoretical developments. *Sociological Theory*, 6(2), 153-168.
- Leventman S. (1978). Epilogue: Social and historical perspectives on the Vietnam veteran. In CR Figley (Ed), *Stress Disorders Among Vietnam Veterans* (pp 291-295). New York: Brunner/Mazel.
- Lincoln, Y. S., Lynham, S. A., & Guba, E. G. (2011). *Pragmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences*. The Sage handbook of qualitative research (4th edition). (1-20). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications Ltd.
- Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L. & Lofland, L.H. (2006) *Analyzing Social Settings; A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson.
- Meltzer, B. N., Petras, J. W., & Reynolds, L. T. (1975). *Symbolic interactionism: Genesis, varieties and criticism*. Boston; London; Routledge & K. Paul.
- Navarro, Z. (2006). In search of a cultural interpretation of power: The contribution of Pierre Bourdieu. *IDS bulletin*, 37(6), 11-22.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating*
- Prus, R. C. (1996). *Symbolic interaction and ethnographic research: Intersubjectivity and the study of human lived experience*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Resnik, L. J., & Allen, S. M. (2007). Using international classification of functioning, disability and health to understand challenges in community reintegration of injured veterans. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development*, 44(7), 991.
- Strauss, A. (1987). *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientist*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Strauss, D., & Ikeda, M. (1990). Pseudolikelihood estimation for social networks. *Journal of the American Statistical Association*, 85(409), 204-212.
- Tanielian, T., Jaycox, L. H., Schell, T. L., Marshall, G. N., Burnam, M. A., Eibner, C., & Vaiana M. E. (2008). Invisible wounds: Mental health and cognitive care needs of America's returning veterans. *Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation: <http://veterans.rand.org>*.
- Waller W (1944). *The Veteran Comes Back*. New York: Dryden Press.
- Wecter D (1944). *When johnny comes marching home*. Cambridge (MA): Houghton-Mifflin.
- Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford Publications.



THANK YOU!
Any Questions?

Dr. Crystal Anne Kyle
cakyle@ncat.edu