

Identity

Session #1 within “Self-in-Context” Unit



VETERANS

ONWARD

Training Materials:

- Whiteboard and pens or flipchart and pens.
- Paper and pen for all participants.
- Selection of images of famous celebrities taken from magazine cuttings.
- Print outs from Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) which can be accessed at <https://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/aiq.pdf>
- Print outs of Hero's Journey diagram.

Learning Objectives:

1. Consider own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are.
2. Name and describe some identity theories and explain how identity is formed.
3. Consider the challenges of, and theoretical approaches to explain, moving from a military-centric identity to a civilian one.

Training Script:

Hello everyone, how are you today? My name is _____. I am going to be your tutor today for this training module on Identity.

This module will take between 90 and 120 minutes to complete.

You will need a pen and paper to jot down your own ideas and thoughts in response to some of the tasks.

Before we look at the learning objectives for today, I want us to start on a task, straight away. I am going to give each of you a photo of a celebrity. Look at the photo, but please don't show it to anyone else. I will then be asking you to describe this person to the group.

[if working online – simply provide a box for participants to type their description of a given celebrity].

[If working face to face, invite a selection of participants to describe their celebrity to the group – the others try to guess who they are from the description. Repeat this 2 or 3 times.]

We have been describing aspects of a person's identity. We have focused on features and characteristics relating to appearance and also job roles. These are some of the factors that shape or form our sense of who we are, our identity. In today's module, we are going to be learning about theories relating to identity and how we form our identity, as well as considering what can help us move from a transitioning from a military identity to a civilian one.

Let's look at today's learning outcomes. By the end of this session, I hope that you will be able to:

4. Consider our own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are.
5. Name and describe some identity theories and explain how identity is formed.
6. Consider the challenges of, and theoretical approaches to explain, moving from a military-centric identity to a civilian one.

Let's make a start on learning objective

1: Consider your own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are.

I'd like you take a couple of minutes to jot down words that you would use to describe yourself to others. As you do this, think about factors such as your gender, age, relationships, social class, education background, occupation and work history, political views, hobbies and interests.

[Allow 3 -5 mins for participants to complete].

So – you already have a sense of the things that define who you are. Our lists will all be slightly different, as we all have unique identities. There is also likely to be similarities as, with a military background, we share some common aspects that may well form part of our identity, part of our sense of self.

There is a questionnaire that psychologists devised to help people be clearer on their own identity, by asking them to rank how much importance they place on various identity attributes or characteristics when thinking about themselves. I'd like us all to have a go at this questionnaire. It's called the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire.

Provide print outs of the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV). This can be accessed at <https://www.midss.org/sites/default/files/aiq.pdf> [As this is a brief overview course, it is not necessary to score the responses. Simply completing the questionnaire can facilitate increased self-awareness around identity and self-perception).

[Allow participants 5-10 minutes to complete].

So, this questionnaire helps to identify the things we consider most and least important to our sense of who we are. I'd like to invite us to share with the group anything you found surprising, or anything you learnt about yourself from filling that out.

[Allow 5 – 10 minutes for participants to discuss and share].

Having considered our own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are, we are going to move onto work on learning objective

2: Name and describe some identity theories and explain how identity is formed.

The dictionary tells us that the word *identity* means “who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group that make them different from others”.

Sometimes people dress a certain way to convey their identity, or they may behave in certain ways to communicate their identity to others. It is possible for our identity, our sense of self and which group(s) we feel we identify with, to change over time. For example, a young person may identify as a rebel and a revolutionary. Later in life, they may identify as a peacekeeper and someone who wants to fit in with mainstream society. It's also possible to feel confused about our identity, our sense of who we really are: particularly if we have pressure from people around us to conform to a particular identity.

Over the years, psychologists have developed theories and frameworks to help explain how a person's identity is formed and maintained, and how and why people may change or transition between different identities. Today we will study 4 of these theories. We will be taking a brief look at each theory to learn the basic concepts of the theory.

Theory 1: Social Identity Theory

This theory was developed in the 1970s and the 1980s by psychologists Henri Tajfel and John Turner.

Social identity theory states that some of our sense of self-identity, who we see ourselves to be, comes from being part of a social group. If we belong to a certain group, and want to stay a member of this group, then that desire can cause us to act or identify in certain ways. Think of Hell's Angels Bikers – they dress a certain way to indicate their membership. Think also of members of a strict religious group, who may avoid certain behaviours, perform actions and also dress a given way in order to identify with the group. Therefore, belonging to a group can shape our self-identity.

Task:

- Write down any social groups you belong to, and want to remain part of. For each, consider how that shapes your identity.
- Consider how belonging to the military has influenced you acting and identifying a certain way. Why did you want to act and identify in this way?

[Allow 10 minutes for this task. You may like to invite the group to share their responses with other participants].

Theory 2: Pierre Bourdieu's framework

Pierre Bourdieu was a French 20th Century philosopher who studied society. In his writings, he identified some important concepts that are helpful in thinking about identity and how and why people act as they do in various social and cultural settings.

Bourdieu described the three concepts of *habitus*, *field*, and *capital*. These are all interlinked.

Habitus means the socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions we have. The things we do automatically and without thinking as a result of being in a certain social situation or group. We can think of them as habits we develop that are common to that group. For example, some veterans who no longer are within the military still find they continue the habits common to their military training and experience.

Field describes the social spaces that people inhabit. There are macro fields which are vast in nature and encompass lots of people. For example, the military as an institution is a macro-field. There are also micro-fields: the smaller subfields within a macro-field. For example, a particular squadron is a micro field within the macro field of the military. Fields usually have their own rules, regulations, systems of authority and expectations that influence people within the field. Different fields have different rules and expectations. For example, the field of the military may have an unwritten expectation that personnel do not express vulnerability and weakness. In some fields within civilian life: some jobs, some relationships and friendship groups, showing appropriate vulnerability may be valued. Thus, moving from one field to another can be confusing as we have to learn the new rules and expectations that shape people's identity within this field.

Capital is the status a person gains within a given field: the respect and power that people may develop as they participate and compete within that field. Honour or prestige are other words that help to explain what Bourdieu meant by capital. Displaying the habitus common to a particular field is an important way that people develop capital. For example, in some fields, demonstrating drinking ability and sexual prowess might earn other's respect in a certain field, earning them capital. In other fields, such behaviour is not considered as a habitus encouraged or valued by that field, which might damage a person's capital within that field.

Therefore, **habitus**, **field**, and **capital** help to explain what factors shape and maintain a person's identity. In order to gain capital within a field, people are often motivated to adopt an identity which includes the habitus that is valued within this field. This can cause problems when people occupy more than one field, or move between fields.

Task:

Think about your experience in the military.

1. What are the ***habitus*** (socially ingrained habits, skills and dispositions) that you have developed as a result of your military experience?
2. Describe the rules, expectations and regulations within your micro ***field*** within the military. These may be written or unwritten rules and expectations.
3. What have you done (or not done) to gain ***capital*** in your time in the military?
4. How do you anticipate moving into civilian life will be impacted by the changes in ***habitus, field and capital***?

[Allow 10 minutes for this task. You may like to invite the group to share their responses with other participants].

Let's move onto the 3rd of the theories we are going to use to explain the idea of identity. This concept is a little easier to grasp than Bourdieu's ideas, as you will have come across it many, many times when you have heard myths and legends, watched films or read novels.

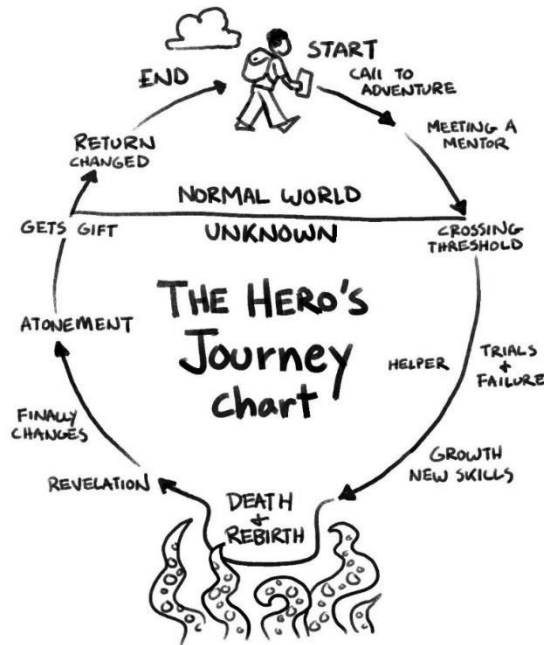
This theory is called:

Theory 3: Monomyth (Hero's Journey)

This theory is associated with Joseph Campbell, a 20th Century American professor of literature who was interested in myths. He proposed that there was really ever only one basic plot line to myths – which he termed a “monomyth”. Another term for this myth idea is the “Hero's Journey”.

This basic plot includes a central character who faces an adventure into a strange unknown world, endures trials and failures, develops new skills, experiences a revelation, changes, atones for mistakes

and then returns home as a changed person. It has been expressed in diagram form using the following image [in a classroom-based setting, it would be helpful to have a copy of this diagram for each participant to see].



You may recognise elements of this in films and novels such as the Star Wars series, or Lord of the Rings. It is similar to the 12-steps model of recovery that you may be familiar with?

In terms of identity, consider how this model can help to describe your experience of basic military training when you first joined. As you entered military life from civilian life, it may have initially felt that you were crossing a threshold into an unknown world. Eventually, as you rose to the various challenges and trials, you developed and changed. Eventually you returned to your barracks as a somewhat changed person: with the identity of soldier rather than civilian.

Task:

Think about your transition into civilian life in the future.

- To what extent might this model of the Hero's journey describe your journey back into civilian life?

[Allow 10 minutes for this task. You may like to invite the group to share their responses with other participants].

So – the final of our 4 theories that help to explain the development of identity:

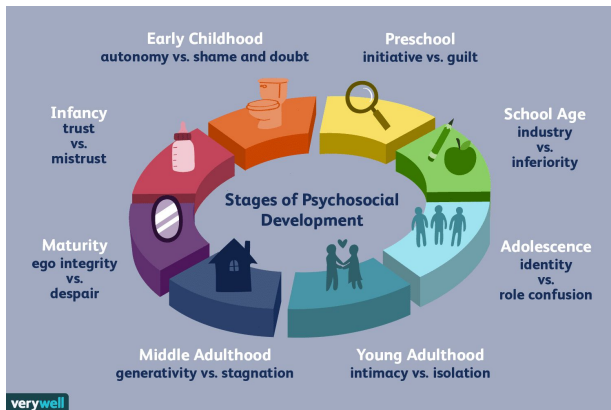
Theory 4: Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development:

Erik Erikson was a 20th Century German-American developmental psychologist and psychoanalyst. His most influential idea was his theory about how our personality and sense of identity develops as we grow, develop and mature through the life span from babies to being elderly.

He believed that there are 8 stages that are important for people to pass through as part of human development. Each one of these stages involves tension or difficulty, with their struggle between our own needs and the needs of society. How we manage that struggle will shape our personality and identity.

For example, a small child faces the struggle between their own need for independence and autonomy with that of others doubts about their ability. Think of the toddler who says: "I want to do it myself!" as they struggle with a zip or fastening on their coat and the parent or kindergarten teacher who has the social need for the child to get dressed quickly, and doubts whether they can do the zip themselves. Erikson described this stage as the conflict between "initiative and guilt".

Let's look at a couple of diagrams which show the stages Erikson identified. All involve a conflict or struggle between two forces.



So, from Erikson's theory, we learn that forming identity often comes about as we face the struggle between our own needs and the needs of society. Learning how to balance and accommodate both needs is the mark of someone who has managed to navigate this conflict successfully. The toddler who can recognise when it's a good idea to get help with the zip, and when they can manage it themselves has managed to navigate this stage and is ready to move onto a new stage of development.

Task:

1. As you think about your future move into civilian life, what do you anticipate your own needs will be?
2. What do you anticipate the needs of society will be (society could refer to your family, friends, neighbours, work colleagues etc).
3. How can you balance these needs?

[Allow 10 minutes for this task. You may like to invite the group to share their responses with other participants].

So far, then, we have covered a lot of ground. We have completed learning objective 1 which was:

1. Consider our own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are.

We thought about how we would describe our own identity and used the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire to help us get a better sense of our own identity.

We have also covered learning objective 2:

2. Name and describe some identity theories and explain how identity is formed.

To do this, we looked at the four theories of Social Identity Theory, Pierre Bourdieu's framework, Campbell's Monomyth or Hero's Journey and Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development model. For each one of these, we've spent time considering how our own identity can be understood using each theory. We used lots of examples from our own military experience to help with that and begun to consider how the theory might help us to understand the transition into civilian life.

Which means, we have already begun to work on completing our final learning outcome which is:

- 3. Consider the challenges of, and theoretical approaches to explain, moving from a military-centric identity to a civilian one.**

Other than the theories we have already covered, we are going to spend some time thinking of the challenges of transitioning to civilian life. The term we are going to use is Military to Civilian Transition – or MCT.

By thinking about Social Identity Theory, we have learnt that spending time in the military can result in us forming an identity to fit in. With MCT, this can mean a change of identity is called for if we want to fit into a different social setting.

By thinking about Pierre Bourdieu's framework, we have learnt that habitus, field and capital can shape military personnel to behave in ways that earn capital within the military field. With MCT, a new field involves different ways to earn capital. Military habits may need to be unlearned, and new habits developed if we are to feel "at home" in the new field.

By thinking about Campbell's Hero's Journey, we have learnt that a move into a new world or sphere can involve change and challenge. MCT can feel like a monomyth journey as people face what seems a new world, a new social setting.

By thinking about Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development model, we've considered the way our own needs can conflict with society's needs. With MCT, we will have many personal needs which may conflict with the needs of the society we now find ourselves in.

All of these point to the challenges involved in MCT. So much so, that some writers speak of "reverse culture shock"¹ of MCT. Returning to civilian life can feel like entering a totally new culture and feel like a shock. When we factor in that MCT is not always a personal choice, it may be as a result of injury, for example, we can gain a better sense of the challenge and difficulty in MCT. The good news is, in recent years, there has been increasing focus on schemes and provision to support military personnel and veterans through MCT. Attending this course is one example of that!

So – let's try to name some of the potential specific challenges that we anticipate about MCT.

Task:

Jot down a bullet point list of things you anticipate will be challenging about MCT for yourself.

[Allow 5 mins, then encourage the group to share ideas and create a collaborative list on the whiteboard].

Let's see how your lists compare with the challenges identified in 2016 research paper produced by Anglia Ruskin University, UK²:

- Loss of military community and friendships,
- Having to forfeit previous role or status
- Adjusting to new routines of family or home life
- Challenges of securing employment in the civilian workplace

¹ Bergman, B., Burdett, H., Greenberg, N. (2014). Service life and beyond—Institution or culture? The RUSI Journal, 159, 60–68.

² Cooper, L., Caddick, N., Godier, L., Cooper, A., & Fossey, M. (2018). Transition From the Military Into Civilian Life: An Exploration of Cultural Competence. *Armed Forces & Society*, 44(1), 156–177.

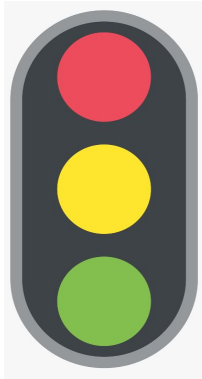
- Transition in one's identity
- Emotional shift from being an integral part of the military to an individual in civilian society.

Whilst it can feel negative to focus on the challenges of MCT, it can also be helpful to recognise and predict what some of the challenges may be, rather than to deny their existence or remain ignorant. Being aware of potential challenges means we are then in a position to adapt, respond and engage with relevant support.

Task:

Take 5 mins to reflect upon your learning today. As you think about MCT, what are the challenges that you anticipate you will benefit from support and input with?

So, finally, using a simple traffic light system, I'd like you to evaluate your own learning today. For each objective, you are going to decide whether you feel you are:



| | |
|-------------------|--|
| RED / STOP | You have made no progress in learning this and are still at a "standstill." |
| AMBER | You have some understanding but aren't quite ready to apply it yet. |
| GREEN / GO | You have a good grasp of this objective and are ready to go and apply this learning in the real world. |

1. Consider own personal identity and the factors that make us who we are.

RED **AMBER** **GREEN**

2. Name and describe some identity theories and explain how identity is formed.

RED **AMBER** **GREEN**

3. Consider the challenges of, and theoretical approaches to explain, moving from a military-centric identity to a civilian one.

RED **AMBER** **GREEN**

What do you want to do as a result of your learning today?

Thank you to everyone for your engagement and participation in the session. I hope you have learnt some useful ideas that can be applied in your daily life.