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Military identities in the situated accounts of British military personnel.

Abstract

This paper examines individual military identities as articulated by serving and former British military personnel. Following a review of approaches to military identities in both traditional military sociology and more contemporary sociologies of military personnel informed by post-structuralist theories, the paper introduces a methodological approach to identities driven by respondents' perspectives generated during photo-elicitation interviews. These constructions of military identities rest on: assertions and demonstrations of professional skill, competence and expertise of the trained military operative; the significance of fictive kinship and camaraderie amongst soldiers; and the place of personal participation in events of national or global significance in identity work. Military identity, we argue, is a locally emergent phenomenon, constituted by members' concepts of their own identity. These findings complement and develop existing sociological conceptualisations of military identities.

The significance of military identities

'Who do you want to be?', asks a recent British Army recruitment brochure picturing thirteen smiling young men and women wearing a variety of military head-dress. The text and images suggest the availability of a variety of occupations and activities in the British Army, for a diverse potential recruitment pool. But, tellingly, they point to the possibility of military identity as a matter of individual determination. The idea embedded in the strapline is illustrative of what Lawler and others recognise as a tradition in liberal-humanist or Enlightenment thinking on identity, 'a notion that to be a person is to be in charge of one's life and one's actions, to be unique, to be the author of one's life and circumstances, to choose' (Lawler, 2008: 144). In this hierarchical institution, more commonly understood for its very functioning on the subordination of individuality and self-determination, we see recognition of the appeals to and of agency in the definition of military identities, in this instance, for recruitment purposes. In this paper, we ask what individual military identities look like if we prioritize these ideas of individual agency and determination when asking military personnel about what it means to be a soldier.

The research underpinning this paper examined how individual military identities are constructed, articulated, negotiated and expressed.[1] From this study, we present here an argument for an understanding of individual military identities as constructed through the deeds and activities of soldiering, and we note some themes around which these identities are negotiated at the individual or micro-sociological level. We suggest that much research on military identities, which has been framed around and focused on key sociological concepts such as race, class and gender, may have skewed the prevalence of these concepts in sociological understanding of individual military identities. This paper suggests that when researching military identity without a deliberate focus on these concepts, they do not emerge as substantial topics or elements in the self-presentation of a military identity. Instead, when serving and former personnel were asked to lead discussions about identity through auto-driven photo-elicitation, other constituents of identity and a very different conceptual emphasis emerged. We explore this idea of individual military identities as locally emergent phenomena, and suggest ways in which a micro-sociological exploration informed by methodologies of co-inquiry can complement and extend existing conceptual approaches to this issue.

We begin this paper with a review of existing literatures on military identities, noting the limited conceptualisation of individual identity within much traditional military sociology before considering the wealth of explorations of military identities in literatures which draw extensively on contemporary social theories of identity construction. We then introduce the photo-elicitation methodology we used for the construction of our empirical data. We argue that this method allowed for the exploration of the complexities and specificities of the individual situation and context, and facilitated a conceptualisation of identity through the

interaction of respondent and researcher in the co-construction of theory. We show how our interviewees conceptualised their military identities in ways that emphasised the performative components of military activity, rather than with reference to externally or pre-determined analytic categories, externally-determined attributes significant in the popular imagination, or the pre-existing properties of the subject. Our analysis draws out three themes from our data most significant in these articulations of military identities.   The first coheres around assertions and demonstrations of professional skill, competence and expertise as a trained military operative. The second theme concerns the significance of fictive kinship and camaraderie amongst soldiers. The third is articulated around personal participation in events of national or global significance. In conclusion, we consider the potential of interactional methods for the study of individual military identities, which we suggest can usefully be conceptualised around what soldiers do, rather than around what they might be conceptualised as being.

Sociology and the study of military identities

The trajectories of scholarship on military identities reflect two rather different intellectual traditions in the sociology of the military, following respectively either 'engineering' or 'enlightenment' models of sociological inquiry (Higate and Cameron, 2006).

The first is a classic tradition of military sociology, North American in origin but with a significant European presence, which identifies its disciplinary purpose as applied and problem-solving, contributing towards the effective management of military forces and facilitating understanding of the relationships between civil society and armed forces (see Boëne, 2000; Caforio, 2003). Within this 'engineering' or functionalist approach, individual identities are engaged with as something to be managed in the pursuit of military objectives. The key features of the sub-discipline during the post-war period and into the 21st century are summarised elsewhere (see Kümmel and Prüfert, 2000; Moskos et al, 2000; Caforio, 2003, 2007). Characterised by epistemological and ontological approaches that are largely positivist, hypothetico-deductive, normative and functionalist in outlook, the analysis of individual subjectivities is understood as a managerial issue.   Key texts, which continue to frame the sub-discipline, address subjectivities only as variables likely to shape the effectiveness of a conscript army (Stouffer, 1949), the shaping of the relationship between the officer corps and the state (Huntington, 1957), the professionalization of the officer class (Janowitz, 1960) and the question of convergence or divergence between national militaries and their civil societies (Moskos, 1977). Despite the appropriation of the terminology of post-modernism (Moskos et al, 2000), the model of the post-modern military is unconcerned with the politics of individuality and experience within the military as suggested by a wider body of post-structuralist theory.

The functionalist approach evident in much traditional military sociology continues to shape the trajectory of this sub-discipline. As a consequence military identities are, in the main, approached through epistemologies which focus on individual subjectivities in terms of variables amenable to isolation and quantification. Military sociology recognises issues of culture and identity, but as something to be mapped, described and measured (Winslow, 2007), as a precursor to explanatory models. See, for example, Rosman-Stollman (2008) on the articulation and accommodation of religious belief in military cultures, Zirker *et al*'s (2008) examination of the dynamics of ethnic identities within military establishments and cultures of nationhood, or Griffith's (2009) conceptualisation of personal and social identities as predictive variables for reserve forces participation and retention.   As Haltiner and Kümmel (2009) note, it is still rare for attention to be paid to the soldier at the micro or individual level of the soldierly subject, despite the need for such levels of organizational analysis in a contemporary period of social individualisation and military role changes.

That micro or individual level, that soldierly subject, is important for understanding military forces and their personnel. We concur with Ouellet's proposition here, that the focus for sociologies of the military should be the conditions that make the existence of military institutions possible in the first place (Ouellet, 2005).   Following Ouellet, we would argue that this should include the exploration of subjectivities, the personal military identities which are worked through on a daily basis by those participating in the deployment of armed force. Outwith the sub-discipline of military sociology, there is a literature which engages more directly with the analytic task of understanding the subjectivities and identities of military personnel, and it is to this literature that we now turn.

This literature could broadly be categorised as following 'enlightenment' or interpretive approaches to sociological inquiry, given its orientation towards the abstraction of meaning and explanation from the inductive, hermeneutic investigation of experience.   This literature is characterised as having a shared substantive interest in military subjectivities, and disparate motivations for the investigation of military identities reflecting varied conceptual priorities. Informed by post-structuralist and feminist theory, this literature is also characterised by a constructionist approach to identity (for a more detailed exploration of the constructionist approach, see Castells, 1997; Brekhus, 2008; Lawler, 2008).

Analyses of military identities have been dominated, unquestionably, by approaches orientated towards the understanding of those identities as gendered. In this work, the abstraction of meaning is configured around pre-existing analytic categories which prioritise the conceptualisation of military identities around gender issues. Such studies include the unpacking of the nature and relationality of military masculinities (Barrett, 1996; Higate 2003a; Hockey, 2003; Woodward and Winter, 2007; Hale, 2008); the politics of female military identity formation (Herbert, 1998; Agostino, 1998; Basham, 2006; Silva, 2008); the challenges

and changes for male and female military identities brought by the integration of women personnel within traditionally masculinist military domains (Neville, 2003; Agostino, 1997; van Wijk and Finchilescu, 2008; Barrett, 2002); the influence of gendered identities on sexual behaviours and their expression through sexualities (Shefer and Mankayi, 2007; Mankayi, 2008); and the spatialities inherent to the constitution and expression of gendered military identities (Woodward, 1998; Higate and Henry, 2009; Atherton, 2009). The intersection of gender with other analytic categories is seen, for example, in explorations of nationhood, citizenship and military participation (Gill, 1997; Klein, 1999; Sasson-Levy, 2003a, 2003b, 2008). Whilst all the above examples focus on contemporary military identities, the wealth of analyses through different historical periods should be noted (see chapters in Higate 2003; Noakes, 2006; Levsen, 2008). The conceptual priorities of many researchers of military identities, then, has been the extrapolation of meanings from the behaviours and experiences of individuals, as a consequence of their positioning in relation to gendered systems of power and privilege.

There is a relative absence in constructionist studies of military identities of a focus on other identity markers such as class, 'race' and ethnicity, and the power relations through which they are constituted and expressed. Some research has extended understandings of citizenship and national identification amongst military personnel (Gibson and Abell, 2004; Cowan, 2005, 2008; Woodward, 2008; chapters in Cowan and Gilbert 2008; Gibson and Condor, 2009), but it is the more traditional military sociology outlined above which has attended more directly to diversity issues other than gender.

From this interpretavist approach, we see identities and military identities as socially constituted and expressed, always in the process of becoming, shaped by time and space, and positioned within networks of differential power relations. Whilst recognising the contingency of identity, much work starts from a focus on pre-existing core sociological categories, and works within a standpoint theoretical tradition (Brekhus, 2008). The research task, therefore, is the ascription or allocation of attitudes, explanations and behaviours to analytic categories pre-determined by the researcher, with the ultimate purpose of understanding identities within the context of various configurations and relations of power.

We have followed this path ourselves in previous studies, yet were uneasy about framing the research reported here so directly around such categories. The research was conceived as a study of the dialogue and differences between military identities as understood through the lived experiences of personnel, and mediated public accounts (primarily from print media) of military identities where categories of race, class, gender and nationhood structure quite distinctly the discourse on what it means to be a British soldier (see Jenkings et al., 2007). We were interested in working up from interactional situated accounts of identity, from the

terms through which individuals provided analytic categories and explanations of their own identities as experienced subjectivities.

Some existing studies of military identities, which focus on its experiential constitution, indicate the utility of the focus on lived experience. Such studies include assessments of the corporeal, embodied and affective dimension of military identities (Hockey, 2002, 2009; Higate, 1998; Lande, 2007; Sasson-Levy, 2008), the constitution of those identities through the disciplining practices of military life (Hockey, 1986; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009), the inculcation of ways of doing things in the practices of training (King, 2006, 2007) and the experiential dimension of the transition from military to civilian life (Karner, 1998; Higate, 2001; Walker, forthcoming). Our research, therefore, was informed both by standpoint approaches and experiential explorations. What we hadn't anticipated at the start, however, was the extent to which the interactional, situated accounts of identity which emerged pointed so clearly to an understanding of individual military identities as rooted in 'doing' rather than any essential categories of 'being'.

A method for the exploration of military identities

Our research set out to explore individual military identities using auto-driven photo-elicitation interviews with serving and former soldiers about their military lives and experiences. Photo-elicitation is a technique developed originally within anthropology as a means of facilitating communication and sharing understanding between researcher and respondent by using photographic stills (Collier and Collier, 1986; Harper 1986, 2002; Clark-Ibañez, 2004). Photo-elicitation can be used in different ways to generate visual materials by research respondents (Hurworth et al, 2005). In our case, the photo-elicitation was auto-driven (see Heisley and Levy, 1991; Noland, 2006), with images being pre-selected for discussion by our interviewees. In contrast to more conventional interview formats structured around the exploration of predetermined identity categories and concepts, photo-elicitation can rely more directly on the respondents' shaping of the interview around their pre-selected images. (For an expanded discussion of this method, see Jenkings et al., 2008).

Through these interviews, our interviewees related that which constituted their reality of military participation and identity. For those who were no longer serving in the forces, this data provided retrospective accounts of past military identities. However, within the interview these individuals constructed accounts of themselves as having military identities in the present. In this way, their military identities were locally situated, emergent in the interaction of the interview. There are parallels here with Garfinkel's study of Agnes, an 'intersexed' female, a significant case study for its focus on the ways that identities are displayed and the methods used to display them (Benson and Hughes, 1983: 10). Garfinkel concluded that identity work was done in the interviews with Agnes, and argued for these as sites for the type

of work required by Agnes for her activities in invoking and maintaining her identity as female (Garfinkel, 1967). In our own interviews, the transcripts revealed the detailed work of invoking and maintaining a military identity for our interviewees, even for those who were no longer employed in the armed forces. Furthermore, ethnomethodological investigations of the use of identity in everyday interaction and ordinary talk see identity not as an explanatory resource, but rather a topic where 'the interest for the analyst is to see which of those identifications folk actually use, what features those identifications seem to carry, and to what end they are put' (Antaki and Widdicombe, 1998: 2). For Schegloff (1992: 109-110), identities are topics for analysis only when they have a consequence for the interaction engaged in; the issue at stake is not the ascription of identities onto explanatory categories but rather the explanatory work and the details of the talk or other conduct through which identities are brought into being in the moment. Following this, our focus in the interviews was on the interactional and situated work through which individual military identities were produced in the context of the photo-elicitation interview.

The photo-elicitation method, and the understandings informing our interviewing practice which saw identity as situated and interactional, shaped our critique that many conceptual approaches towards military identities informed by the standpoint theoretical tradition work through, or are framed around, an idea of pre-existing properties of the subject. The photo-elicitation method encouraged the co-construction of theories and conceptual categories to explain what military identities might constitute, with interviewer and interviewee working together towards an abstract or conceptual explanation of actions that were depicted in photographs (and we note some of these instances in the discussion of our empirical data below). Photo-elicitation foregrounded, made explicit, the sharing of meanings. Ultimately, by following the meanings co-constructed in the situated interaction of the interview, we arrived at a point where the anticipated categories which we had expected to find meaningful - sociological categories defined around the pre-existing properties of the subject such as gender, class, ethnicity and occupation - seemed far less significant to describing and explaining military identities than ideas about the actions and performances of soldiering.

Following pilot interviews, we refined a research method which involved one-to-one depth interviews in which up to ten of the respondent's own photographs or other images were used as a basis for the discussion about military experience and identity. A call for research participants was made through a press release circulated to local newspapers in North East England (where we are based), through postings on two web-based military discussion boards, and through personal contacts. We conducted sixteen depth interviews with respondents drawn from the British Army and the Royal Marines, fourteen men and two women, from private to captain in rank, and both regulars and reservists. Our call for participants indicated that we were interested in talking to both serving and former military personnel; in fact, the majority of interviewees had left the armed forces by the time of the

interview. The interviews lasted from between fifty minutes to over two hours, generated 155 photographs (copies were taken) and around twenty-three hours of taped and transcribed material. The interview transcripts were coded by the research team. From the codes which spoke to issues of identity (others spoke to topics such as photographic practices, personal biographies, political views and the practices of memory work), three dominant themes emerged through which military identities were given meaning. We consider each of these in turn.

Conceptualising military identity through professional expertise

The military, according to the classic (Weberian) definition, is the state-sanctioned body with the authority to use lethal force. The exercise of lethal force defines military personnel as such. Our interviewees fleshed out that idea by talking about the constitution and expression of their military identities with reference to the specificities of their professional skills. For some, these skills were clearly identifiable as military tasks: accuracy in marksmanship, for example, or surveillance and observation skills, or the deployment of technical knowledge in the act of patrolling hostile urban areas. The possession of professional skills and expertise as a marker of military identity was referred to by almost all our interviewees, either as a direct statement of fact or as an idea that emerged in discussions about the contents of particular photographs. For one interviewee, his signals company photograph prompted assertions of a professional identity performed through a demanding role,

> We had a bit of a reputation, but we worked very, very hard, and we played hard as
> well. I mean, locations, we were always the first ones in, putting downs the coms,
> heavy duty cables, and always the last ones out.

Another interviewee confirmed her skill as a military musician by referring to her abilities to perform the complex manoeuvres required by marching bands at ceremonial events, one of which was photographed.   In another example, the interviewee used a photograph of himself being kissed on the cheek by a senior Marine (who was performing for the camera) as indicative of both his ability and his acceptance within a shooting team. The possession and performance of military skills was fundamental to claims of a military identity. This included skills of survival and endurance - many photographs showed interviewees exhausted and dirty after an exercise. For one interviewee, his photo showed '...a smart young man, absolutely paggered after tramping around the ouloo three times'. Such photographs, taken at the time as proof of the completion of an activity that confirmed their skills and endurance capabilities, were brought to the interview (sometimes years later) to make the same point.

Where individuals' military skills were potentially comparable to a civilian equivalent, their military attributes were emphasised. An illustration of this comes from an interview with a soldier with over twenty years' service in engineering roles. Looking at a photograph showing several military vehicles and a couple of people, in the middle of a Bosnian blizzard, he talked

about the specificity of the engine colours of the armoured personnel carriers being repaired, and of the specific technical knowledge that military engineers required in order to fix them. He emphasised the onerous conditions in which they worked, conditions that would prevent such work in a civilian situation under health and safety regulations. He then talked around another Bosnia photograph showing a tank being reversed onto a low-loader lorry. The skills of vehicle repair and rescue could be seen as similar to those required in civilian mechanic occupations. What was significant to this interviewee was the possession of not just technical skills but also an aptitude and willingness, specific to the military, to use such skills in extreme and hostile environments, for the sake of a wider military objective. So even when individual skills may be generic, and held by civilians, their application is not.

The possession of military skills is partly about the skilled use of specialist equipment. One engineer mentioned how camouflage netting would be wrapped in a specific way to prevent it tearing during transit. Another, talking through his photographs of a 2003 tour of Iraq pointed to features of a maintenance facility such as barbed wire dannet coil and specialist harnesses in order to underscore his professional expertise as a user of such equipment. A soldier from an armoured regiment provided a reading of tanks and their location on the basis of the specificity of their camouflage paint, a feature barely discernible to the untrained eye. A Royal Marine recalling a 1980s tour of Northern Ireland talked through a photograph showing artefacts in a gloomy interior to make a point about the technical specificities and endurance demands of surveillance duties in an observation tower. Another Marine talked about his webbing:

> I: That doesn't go anywhere without you attached to it, 'cause that has got everything you need to survive in, and it becomes part of your body.
>
> KNJ: Part of your identity?
>
> I: It is, yeah, almost such… […] that is my flat there really, that is my personal belongings that are important to me at the time.

Military identities, then, have a materiality to them in that they are constituted and expressed through the use of equipment. This of course extended to weapons; what was interesting here was how interviewees reflected on photographs of themselves and others carrying weapons. But military identities were not confirmed through just carrying weapons, but rather through the trained ability to correctly handle and use them. Posing deliberately with a weapon was a right earned by trained military operatives.

Identities as trained military personnel were also expressed in discussions about expertise in the care of the self and the body. One interviewee who had participated in the 1982 Falklands campaign drew comparisons between trained, skilled British personnel who had the requisite knowledge to deal with the terrain of the islands, and the untrained Argentinean conscripts who did not, thereby questioning the military identities of the Argentinean soldiers. Another interviewee talked of 'one guy […] out in the middle of nowhere, he was cooking little

fairy cakes and things, 'cause he knew how to improvise stoves.' A photograph of cramped conditions on a ship's mess deck was used by a Royal Marine to make a point about learning to live with a lack of space and privacy, as part of his professional training.

As our analysis so far suggests, the skills which contribute to an individual military identity are ones that are learned. The process of training, though, is not only about skills development but is also a transformative act. Most interviewees shared at least one photograph of themselves as youngsters pictured at a key moment in that transformative journey. Those transformations take place, literally; they happen in liminal spaces beyond the immediate vicinity of the barracks and camps of training regiments, and some showed photographs of that individual's first night patrolling and sleeping outdoors. Five of the six Royal Marines in our sample all shared photographs of themselves in the test of either passing through a water tunnel and emerging the other side, or pulling themselves out of a hole cut into the ice of a frozen lake. These tests need to be passed in order to complete, respectively, the Commando or the Mountain and Arctic Warfare training courses. The photographs were presented and discussed as proof of the interviewees' military identities, individualised through it having been a lived experience, and symbolic of a transformatory ritual.

There are echoes here, in these ideas of professional skill, of long-standing observations about professionalism and expertise within military occupations (Huntington, 1957; Kasurak, 2009). What our analysis emphasises is the micro-sociology of these ideas of professional expertise as constitutive acts through which military identities are invoked. Furthermore, our analysis resonates with observations about identities in other contexts, as performative, the effects of citational practices. Kuus (2007), for example, discussing national identities, argues for a conceptualisation of identity based in activity, the deed, rather than in the potentially essentialist and ontologically empty capacities of the individual 'doer'. Rather than finding ready references to military identities in terms of the pre-existing or conceptually-determined core sociological categories that we anticipated, we found instead situated knowledge which emphasised the centrality of military acts to the articulation of individual military identities. King, seemingly exasperated with a scholarly focus on masculinities as an explanatory framework for military performance, makes the point that 'if the social sciences wish to provide convincing explanations of the military, they must focus above all else on what soldiers distinctively do' (King, 2006: 510). What soldiers distinctively do is execute acts using skills and competencies in which they have been trained, and these are formative of individual military identities.

Military identities and fictive kinship
The second key theme which emerged within the topic of identity in the interview narratives was fictive kinship. We use this term to denote the idea of strong emotional bonds between

individuals and across groups which were portrayed and discussed using a terminology of kinship, however fictitious that kinship might be under a strict definition of the term. Professional expertise and skill, as we have argued, were significant for the continued performance and construction of ideas of what it meant to be a soldier. The enactment of professional skill as a soldier was a practice understood as essentially collective, a group endeavour. It was rare for the deeds of soldiering to be understood as individual activities, the exception being basic training and certain other courses. Individual activities only make sense in the context of other similar individuals undertaking the same acts. A prime example came from a former Royal Marine, who used a photograph of himself and three others dressed up as babies to make this point about collectivity. The interviewer suggested that this photograph might depict a carnivalesque inversion of identity through the infantilisation of elite commandos, but the interviewee resisted that idea. For him, the image expressed collective enterprise and reflected the cohesion of a group able to go out in public, drinking, dressed in that way.

This idea of strong bonds forged through collective endeavour was anticipated (see Woodward, 2008). We should be cautious, however, about seeing these bonds as either inevitable or universally positive. One of our interviewees, sharing a photograph of four young men sat on a barracks-room bed playing cards for money, observed 'there was ten of us in that room, and if we didn't get on, which often we didn't, there was trouble. You got these little cliques forming up'. But what was striking was the variety of ways in which this idea of the bonded group was expressed, and its significance for our interviewees. Rancour and personal or group antagonism were downplayed, although factions, cliques and fights were commonplace.

Over half of the photographs that were shared showed images of other people, usually people significant to the interviewee. One interviewee had packed away all his photographs of a life in the Royal Marines, with the exception of an informal group snapshot of himself with men he had worked with within a particular company, kept out on display in his home. Another interviewee, a musician with a Guards regiment, shared a newspaper photograph of a group of red-jacketed men, minus bearskins, milling about without seeming purpose. One individual is shown face-on but his mind appears to be elsewhere as he holds his conductor's baton aloft. This photograph, kept in a private journal, was treasured because it captured for our interviewee something of the character of the individual holding the baton, a friend. One interviewee was particularly striking in this regard, because the majority of the photographs he shared with the interviewer were essentially about the fictive kinship relations inculcated through military service. 'These were like my family', he said, looking at a photograph from his early days in a signals unit. 'They *were* my family. Sergeant [name], he was like my father'.

An interesting dynamic was evident in the ways that interviewees talked of the strength of these fictive kinship relationships and the relationships between the armed forces and their own families. Some interviewees included in their chosen photographs images of their families. In one example, an interviewee showed a photograph taken at a reunion of his wife laughing and hugging another man, to illustrate something, he said, about the closeness of the military and kinship families. He explained that the man pictured had IRA kills to his name, and asserted during the interview his perception of civilian unease at that knowledge contrasting with military group acceptance, proven through the depiction of his wife hugging this man. A former Royal Marine shared a photograph of himself in full dress uniform on the morning of his wedding. He talked of the impossibility (the thought would be inconceivable) of getting married in anything other than his Marines dress uniform. In getting married, he was bringing his future wife into a fictive military kinship group that he saw as family, just as surely as he was bringing his military family into what he termed his 'private' or 'personal' family.

The significance of the bonded group for both individual and social identities is not in itself remarkable (Wetherell, 1996; Cerulo, 1997; Jenkins, 2004; Brekhus, 2008; Lawler, 2008). What our research illuminated was the work of time and memory in the maintenance of these fictive kinship relations. We mentioned above that a large proportion of our interviewees had left the armed forces by the time we interviewed them. Military identities for some, then, were effectively in the past. Yet these people had mechanisms for maintaining those military identities through memory work (the practice in the present of creating an idea of past events and circumstances; see Woodward et al, 2011). Within the interviews, memory work was particularly evident in discussions of fictive kinship. The interview process itself was an exercise in keeping those relationships alive, even if that relationship had finished through death or a loss of communication. We conclude that military identities are worked at over time; they do not disappear on discharge but are maintained in ways that reflect the present context of the memory work that is undertaken. Military identities are constituted through acts and deeds. Memory work shows the endless citational practices that bring those identities into being, and the interview event provided yet another situation for our interviewees in which their military identities could be worked on and secured.

Military identities and participation in the military event
A third theme was the idea of individual participation in the military event. Military personnel perform military acts, and participation in military events wherever they occur confirms a military identity. Within our sample, interviewees discussed military events in the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland, in West Germany and West Berlin, in France, Norway, Cyprus, Bosnia, Albania, Italy, the Falkland Islands, Canada, Singapore, Belize, Brunei, Libya, Kuwait and Iraq. Their personal photographs offered a record of these travels, confirming participation and locations in space and time. Photographs become 'certificates of

presence' which confirm military identities and the spatialities of the activities that constitute them. Our interviews confirmed that as well as there being a significant temporal dimension to the constitution of identity (seen in the memory work around fictive kinship relations) there is a spatiality to individual military identities that refers not just to the physical point location, the being-in-place of the individual, but also to the ways such identities are both geographically constituted and expressed. For example, photographs from interviewees on the Falkland Islands confirmed their identities as not just military veterans but as Falklands veterans, enabling other aspects of their identities to be invoked.

Participation in more dramatic military events - armed conflict, primarily - would be an obvious context to which we could look for examples (see examples in Woodward et al., 2010). But these ideas about the spatial constitution of identity through the event are evident too in non-conflict scenarios (state funerals, royal visits) and other ceremonial occasions such as passing-out parades and unit visits. A photograph of a group of Royal Marines to the Spean Bridge Commando Memorial in Scotland illustrates this, showing the visitors around the base of the memorial plinth which is topped by the monumental figures of the memorial:

> KNJ: When I look at the photograph, it is almost like 'they are us and we are them'. You know, the figures on the monument.
>
> I: I mean, anyone could have their photograph taken there, but I think because, as you say, 'we are them and they are us', it is […] quite important. I think the whole identity thing within the Marines […] there was a very strong sense of history and sort of belonging, you know.

Within the personal narratives of individuals around their photographic images, individuals inscribed personal meanings and interpretations onto major political or global geopolitical events. That practice, again, is one through which individual military identities are constituted. This is a nuanced, individual, subtle and often deeply personal process. One of our interviewees had deployed to Iraq in 2003 as a Territorial Army officer, and had been involved in early reconstruction work in Basrah. Her photographs and interview narrative convey a sense of her trying, three years after the event, still to make sense of an experience that in her (repeated) term was 'surreal'. An interviewee with Falklands experience, tasked with the repatriation of Argentinean prisoners of war, emphasised this as a positive (and widely unrecognised) aspect of his military Falklands experience which touched him deeply. Another interviewee, involved in the patrolling of Kurdish safe havens in northern Iraq in 1991, talked of his own sense of identification with a member of the local militia with whom he had developed a friendship. 'We were the same age, looked a bit alike', he said. He looked regularly at the photograph he produced, showing the two men together, as part of his own strategy for making sense of Iraq experience which has precipitated a trauma-induced breakdown.

In making personal meaning out of greater international events, some interviewees had developed strategies to accommodate experiences of trauma, danger and violence. A couple chose to tell stories of their military lives by deliberately excluding direct discussion of certain tours of duty. One said that he had seen active service in both Northern Ireland and Iraq, but had chosen not to discuss these tours at the interview because he did not want to remember them. Another, deployed to the 1991 Gulf War, kept his memories of that time and place safely boxed up and out of sight, and was explicit in the interview about his logic for doing this as an act of containment (see also Woodward et al., 2011). Personal meaning is inscribed through absence as well as presence, and memory work and the invocation of identities as military are affected by demands to forget activities in places, as well as to remember them.

Conclusion

We turn now to discuss the implications of our analysis for studies of military identities. Our interviews about identity were structured around a selection of personal photographs in order to facilitate conversations driven by the respondents. From these encounters, we have pointed to conceptualisations of individual military identities which cohere around ideas about professional skill and expertise, fictive kinship, and participation in the military event. Where the respondent is free (or more enabled than through standard semi-structured research interviews) to promote the concept of identity that they, rather than the researcher, wish to engage with, we find ideas often at variance with the more dominant sociological concepts through which military identities have hitherto been examined. The interpretation that we offer here, drawing on an interactional investigation, points to identity enacted around the performance, citation and reiteration of specific activities and ideas. Our microsociological analysis suggests that individual military identities are about practices, rather than about attributes to be mapped on to pre-determined analytic categories.

This is not to say that those more dominant sociological approaches to military identity, as socially constructed with reference to one or more of a range of pre-identified categories or markers of identity, are either misguided or now irrelevant. The theorisation of military identities as gendered, for example, has prompted a range of illuminating studies informed by a standpoint theoretical tradition which have worked to extend social and policy understanding of gender relations within armed forces across a wide range of national contexts. As other studies have shown, military personnel can and do talk about their identities in these terms when asked; see, for example, the work of Hale (2008) on masculinities amongst Royal Marines, or Sasson-Levy (2003a, 2003b, 2008) on gender identities and men and women serving in the Israeli Defence Forces.

We should be alert, though, to the possibility that our conceptual categories can be resisted through being antithetical to the understandings that military personal have of themselves

(see Gibson and Abell 2004; Gibson and Condor, 2009, for example, on ideas of nationhood). We should also be alert to the idea that military identities can be conceptualized with reference to categories emergent within the lived experience of soldiering and the subsequent reiteration of these experiences in situated talk. We have illustrated in this paper the potential of photo-elicitation as a methodology for doing this. What we have avoided here are claims to definitive insight, to any understanding of underlying 'truths' about identities on the basis of what these individuals say. We are indifferent to that particular idea of truth, and are interested instead in the performance of identity both as it is reported and as it is produced. What interactional research enables, and what this method has allowed, is an understanding that draws on the analytic or 'membership' categories of interviewees themselves. What we conclude is that 'doing' rather than 'being' is the key to understanding individual military identities.

This conclusion chimes with Brekhus' observation (2008: 1072) about the recent post-modern and mobility turns in identity studies privileging the performative over 'being'. We see identity as a shifting and mobile form of meaning-making (and not always visibly so to the researcher: the controlled absence of memories and thus identity concerns by interviewees was a stark reminder here about the limits to such investigations). Most significantly, the emphasis on the performative opens up the field of identity without dictating which kinds of possibilities should be realized (Kuus, 2007). For soldiers, continually identified through stereotypes, this is potentially quite significant.

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